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FOREWORD



The number of acronyms and metaphors to reflect the uncertainty of our times is growing every day - “VUCA” (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous), ‘post-normal’, ‘black swans’ – are just some of them. We live in the world of less ‘control and management’ and of more humility and acceptance of our ignorance and wider range of risks, in times of evaporated ‘normalcy’. Working on the UN’s 5-year Cooperation Framework in the country we are asking ourselves, how decisions about priorities can be made in these ambiguous times, how we can navigate through so many global, regional, national, and sub-national risk drivers and actors.

We decided to delve into foresighting to gain more understanding of what is going around us so that we can plan much better the UN’s response and contribution to Kyrgyzstan’s development. Through a three-day scenario analysis and planning workshop, we came to understand foresight better – it is not a forecast, nor a prediction, and certainly not a plan. Foresighting is about building a story of plausible futures, and a deep understanding of forces and drivers behind these futures. The foresight workshop for the UNCT in the Kyrgyz Republic was primarily a learning experience, that brought the UN and external experts together, to think different, collectively, and beyond individual agency mandates. The results were surprising, seemingly ‘crazy’ and ‘fantastic’, and the process was painful. However, if you feel too comfortable during a scenario analysis and planning exercise, you are probably doing it wrong. The scenarios exercise aimed to undermine the perceptions of ourselves and of others, to discover the most important drivers and uncertainties out of the

hundreds of factors that impact our work in the country. Scenarios if used consistently become a toolkit for thinking and planning, to strategize and be open and reflexive of the changing context.

We used the scenario analysis and planning exercise, together with the evaluation report of our UN Development Assistance Framework (which is in its penultimate year of implementation) and the report of our Common Country Analysis as foundational instruments to inform our strategic thinking and planning, as we begin discussions with the government and other national stakeholders towards framing our next UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) for 2023-2027.

We hope our experience and this report will help other UN offices to apply the methodology and to advance strategic thinking in the organization. Foresight is becoming an especially important tool in the context of the UN reform, when agencies, funds and programmes need to work in a more integrated, coherent and coordinated manner to deliver better and sustainably for the host governments and peoples.

Happy reading,

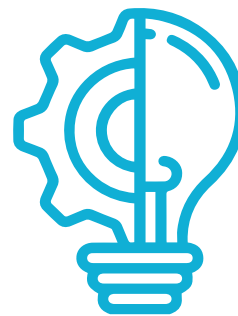
Ozonnia Ojielo, PhD
UN Resident Coordinator
in the Kyrgyz Republic

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



- The report presents the results of the scenarios exercise held by the UN Country Team in Kyrgyzstan. It describes the rationale for conducting the scenario planning exercise, summarizes the key activities and outputs, and discusses the lessons learned for scenario planning work in the future.
- The UN Resident Coordinator's Office in the Kyrgyz Republic initiated the scenarios exercise in the context of a) important political changes in the aftermath of the October 2020 parliamentary elections and b) the launch of consultations on the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2023-2027. The primary goal of the Kyrgyzstan Scenarios Exercise (KSE) was for the UN Country Team to appraise the current trends and dynamics in the country and develop a shared vision on the future of the United Nations role in Kyrgyzstan.
- The Kyrgyzstan Scenarios Exercise was held in September-October 2021, with preparatory work having started in June 2021. The KSE included two key activities. First, the UNCT members completed an online survey focusing on the most critical risk drivers, trends and development opportunities in the country. Second, a three-day workshop was organized for the UNCT to jointly discuss the key development trends, challenges and opportunities in Kyrgyzstan, and develop a range of future scenarios.
- A wide range of actors provided inputs to organizing the KSE. The Peace and Development Advisor coordinated the group's work that included heads and programme managers at UN agencies, the DPPA Innovation Cell and the Office of the UN Resident Coordinator. An external consultant was invited to facilitate the scenarios exercise, and a national expert was involved in preparing and analysing the online survey. The workshop also benefited from the participation of several external experts, including a former president of the country.
- The KSE adopted foresight, a specific futures thinking technique, to frame the discussion of the UN Country Team. The approach tells stories of possible futures based on critical uncertainties, i.e., unpredictable factors that are central to shaping the direction of the possible futures.
- The workshop concluded with four scenarios that built on different interplay between two critical uncertainties for Kyrgyzstan: a) economic growth and social polarization, b) economic growth and social cohesion, c) economic decline and social cohesion, and d) economic decline and social polarization. The scenarios developed by the KSE were later utilized to frame the discussion at the Strategic Planning Retreat (SPR) aimed at generating the Outcome Statements for the UNSDCF.

INTRODUCTION



2020 brought multiple challenges to Kyrgyzstan. The COVID-19 pandemic proved to be not only a health threat but also a severe stress test to political, economic, and social institutions, both locally and globally. Less developed countries emerged particularly vulnerable due to external economic dependencies, limited fiscal space, and underfunded healthcare systems. In Kyrgyzstan, the pandemic-fueled crisis was further compounded by political turbulence. In October 2020, following parliamentary elections, mass protests erupted in the capital city of Bishkek that eventually resulted in then president Jeenbekov's resignation. The country's new leadership oversaw the rewriting of the constitution, switching the form of government from semi-presidential to presidential. Dramatic political changes overlapped with unprecedentedly violent border clashes with Tajikistan from April to May 2021 that left 39 (primarily civilians) dead, hundreds of homes burnt to the ground, and relations with the bordering nation shattered. Additionally, sweeping changes in Afghanistan and the deteriorating economic situation across the region have only added to the growing volatility felt by many, if not most, within Kyrgyzstan.

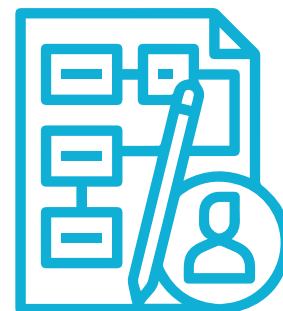
Taking a proactive approach to learning and reflecting on the current dynamics, and enhancing its preparedness for future developments, the UNCT launched the Kyrgyzstan Scenarios

Exercise (KSE). Drawing on decades of scenarios and scenario planning process and practice, the UNCT devised a custom approach aimed at producing shared learning to enable enhanced insights as part of the 2023-2027 UNSDCF development process.

This report summarizes the exercise scenario analysis and planning exercise and reflects on its results. Specifically, the report aims at

- a) documenting the key stages in planning and implementing the scenario analysis and planning,
- b) outlining the distinct nature of the 'foresight' as an approach to thinking and planning for the future, and
- c) discussing the lessons learned to help similar activities in the future.

RATIONALE: WHY SCENARIOS?



The KSE was initiated in two important contexts: the increasing volatility of the socio-political situation in Kyrgyzstan and the start of programming work for UNSDCF 2023-2027.

In October 2020, Kyrgyzstan experienced its third instance of irregular power succession since 2005. This time, the trigger was the parliamentary elections held on 4 October, 2020. The early results indicated a landslide victory of three parties associated with the ruling group. Mass protests erupted as opposition leaders claimed the elections were rigged due to massive vote-buying and intimidation. As the law-enforcement forces kept a low profile, the protesters occupied government buildings and released several high-profile opposition figures, including former president Almazbek Atambaev and former parliament member Sadyr Japarov. The latter quickly grew to prominence as the parliament members voted to appoint him an acting prime minister. Following a few days of tense political turmoil, President Sooronbay Jeenbekov resigned, paving the way for new presidential elections. In the following weeks, Sadyr Japarov initiated constitutional changes aimed at establishing a presidential form of government. The January 2021 vote endorsed Japarov as the country's new president and later the presidentialism as its form of government.

The high level of corruption in the country, the government's inept handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and unprecedented vote-buying prior

to elections were some of the factors that led to the events. Their implications for the future of the country remain an open question, however. In particular, there are three areas in which the events of 2020-2021 added greater uncertainty.

First, the events upended the major political achievement of the country after 2020, which was a semi-presidential form of government. Often referred to as «parliamentarism», the previous constitution granted an important role for the parliament in shaping the executive. When adopted in June 2010, it was hailed as a significant achievement given that the previous strong presidential system resulted in two regime changes, in March 2005 and April 2010. For reasons beyond this report's scope, the 2010 constitution failed to garner sufficient public support, leading to a robust endorsement of the new constitution in January 2021.

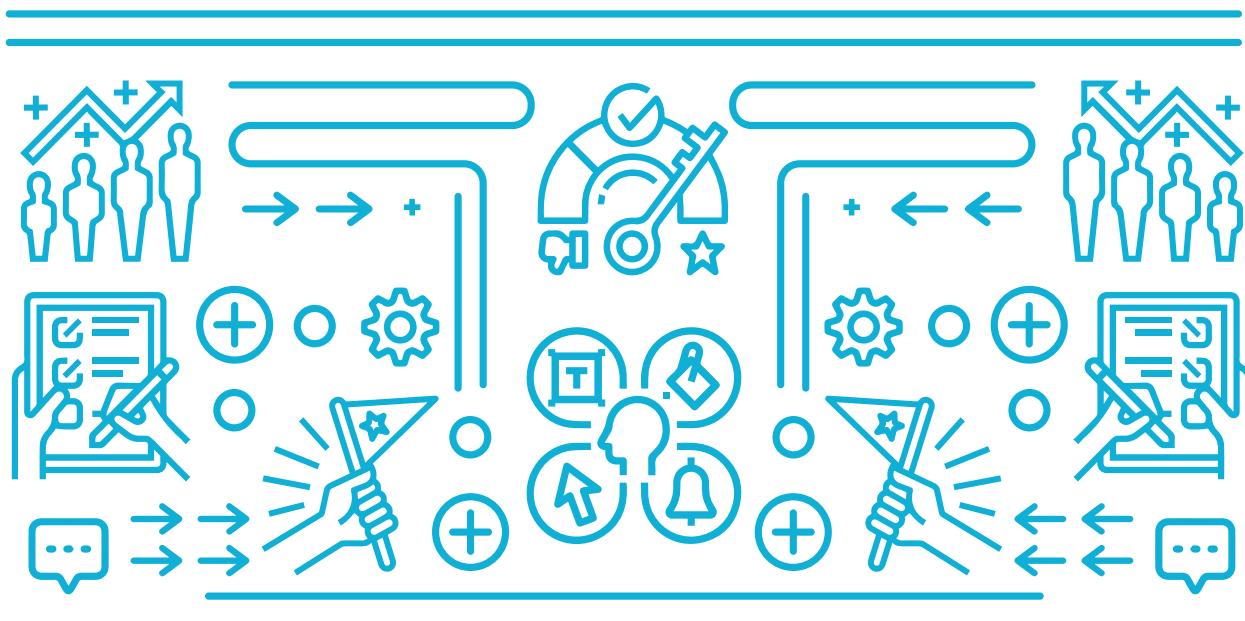
Second, the October 2020 events marked a dramatic rise of populist rhetoric in the country. The new leaders demonstrated little concern about the rule of law and due process as they launched yet another fight against corruption. Officials arrested for corruption were frequently released after paying certain amounts of money to the government. The public remained unaware of the process and procedure applied by courts and investigators in such cases. The government established full control over the Kumtor gold mine, prompting international arbitrage with the Canadian mining company, Centerra. The

above actions received considerable public support, indicating the growing polarization of values, particularly along the liberal-conservative cleavage in the country. Moreover, the populist rhetoric used to justify the above and related government policies currently poses high risks for the rule of law.

The political developments highlighted above have fuelled a growing sense of disillusionment among Kyrgyzstan's civil society, the UN agencies and the country's development partners. The latter had already felt 'stuck' with regards finding working solutions that would support the country's growth. There was a shared disappointment that long-term efforts to support the country did not bring sustainable results, as Kyrgyzstan continues to face instability, governance gaps and poverty. Slow progress on the government's SDG commitments was a known problem. However, another irregular power change and constitutional reversal meant the end of many promising initiatives to support

the strengthening of parliament. The rise of populist discourse, in turn, pointed to decreasing trust in public institutions, growing risks to civic space and a widening gap between liberal and conservative groups. As a result, the UN team realized there was an increasing need to look beyond the flow of daily news and jointly reflect on the UN's *raison d'être* in the country.

The launch of consultations on the UNSDCF 2023-2027 presented an important opportunity for the UNCT in the Kyrgyz Republic to embark upon a more profound and broader reflection exercise. Such exercise had to be **inclusive** of all UN agencies and other relevant actors, **informal**, to allow an open flow of ideas, and **innovative**, to challenge the team to move beyond known and conventional formats. Hence, the Office of the UN Resident Coordinator proposed to carry out Kyrgyzstan Scenarios Exercise.



THE APPROACH TO SCENARIOS EXERCISE

“The future cannot be predicted because
the future does not exist.”
- Jim Dator

How the Strategic Analysis and Planning Works



First, by transforming actors' understandings. The scenario stories articulate a collective synthesis of what is happening or would happen in and around the system of which the participants are a part – seeing the situation and their own roles in their situation with fresh eyes



Second, the actors transform their relationships. Through working together, they enlarge their empathy and trust in other actors on the team and across the system, and their ability and willingness to work together



Third, the actors transform their intentions. Their transformed understandings and relationships shift how they see what they can and must do to deal with what is happening in their system. They transform their fundamental will.



Fourth, the actors' transformation of their understandings, relationships, and intentions enable them to transform their actions and thereby to transform their situation. Requires ability to work with the tension and ambiguity of being both directed and open

Source: Adam Kahane. Transformative Scenario Planning, Berrett-Koehler Publishers. 2012

There are many approaches as to how one might undertake futures and foresight, including a diversity of ways to craft scenarios. From exploratory to normative and expert-driven to participatory, the range of approaches for «using the future» is as plural and infused with possibilities as the future itself. As Jim Dator's 2nd Law of the Future (quoted above) states, there

are, at any given moment, a range of possible futures, which necessitates using approaches that challenge our assumptions, illuminate our biases, and highlight blindspots. While some scenarios approaches are based on trends and existent data, others focus on critical uncertainties and emerging issues or weak signals.

Taking into consideration the specifics of the national context, the KSE core team decided to adopt a custom approach based on the Strathclyde University variation of the GBN scenario modelling method. In Annex 1, the final agenda for the three-day workshop is provided. In Annex 2, resources related to the scenarios approach as well as “futures thinking” are

provided. The goal of maximizing the quality of input and participation of key actors within the UN determined the type and format of specific activities. The following subsections elaborate on key distinctive elements of the approach.

Foresight, not forecasting

The KSE approach to thinking of future scenarios was that of foresight, which is different from more conventional forecasting. The latter is a technique of developing likely scenarios of the future based on ample information from the past. Forecasting relies on the assumption that future trends can be known based on data from present and past and requires the availability of such data.

In contrast, foresight is an approach that tells stories of possible futures based on critical uncertainties. Future(s), in other words, cannot be deduced solely from the analysis of the past or present. There is no fixed image or scenario of the future; the latter, instead, is a process shaped by the interplay of critical uncertainties and intervening actions. The scenario analysis, as a foresight technique, does not answer the question of “what will happen” or “what should happen”, but rather “what could happen, and what we wish would happen and should not happen.”

Proactive, not reactive

Another characteristic of scenario planning is its emphasis on the agency of participants. When a future scenario is developed based on past and present data and trends, there is little space for modification of the future. In reality, however, futures scenarios depend not only on presently visible trends but also on critical uncertainties, i.e., trends whose impact is not entirely evident.

Moreover, once known, critical uncertainties can be pushed or pulled towards a more desirable direction by deliberate decisions and efforts. In other words, scenario planning, the approach adopted in the KSE exercise, is not about getting the future right but about making better decisions today. Correspondingly, the participants are not mere observers who adjust to the most likely scenarios but are actors who co-shape the future.

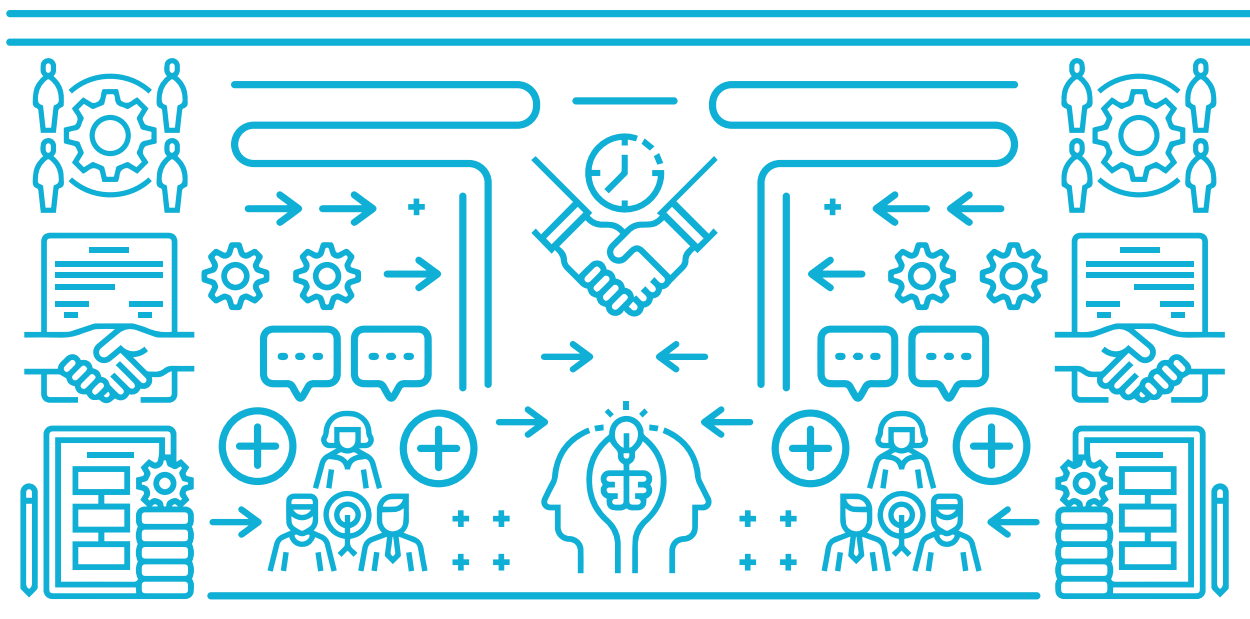
Process, not product

Relatedly, scenario planning in foresight views the future as a process, not a product. This directly stems from the above points on the role of critical uncertainties and the agency of participants. Too often, the scenarios are arrived at based on (seemingly) hard data and are treated as 'set-in-stone' images of the future. In foresight, the future is not predetermined by the hard data of today. Correspondingly, the scenarios of the future are not end-products of an exercise. Instead, they are a process that allows multiple entry points for actors' pushing and pulling. Foresight, in its essence, is the learning experience of a team, and this objective was formulated as such in the concept note and discussed with the UNCT. This understanding is critical for managing expectations of the UNCT since the members of the group may have different assumptions on the product of the scenarios exercise.

Inclusive, not exclusive

The organizing team decided the three-day workshop would be inclusive, inductive and informal. First, the inclusive format meant all key constituents within the UN system were included as participants in the workshop. As such, all UN agencies in Kyrgyzstan were represented to ensure a balance between each UN agency's specific (specialized) knowledge and expertise and their shared commitment to «deliver as one». The workshop was also designed to be inclusive of local and international staff, women and men, and younger and more experienced colleagues.

The second feature of the workshop was its informal format. The workshop was deliberately planned as a UNCT retreat outside the capital city. The residential setting allowed for informal conversations, shared narratives, and frank and focused discussions. The informal, free-flowing nature of the sessions and discussions were meant to encourage the open and free sharing of opinions and honest perspectives on the situation in the country by participants.



PROCESS: KEY PRACTICES



External expertise

While the KSE was an exercise for the UN Country Team, the organizers decided to involve a number of external participants in the workshop. The purpose was to take advantage of the expertise of external participants in specific issue areas relevant to the UN's work and expose the workshop participants to views from outside of the UN.

Experts represented a diverse set of expertise, including macroeconomics, political science, and values polarization (religious/secular), and also included an entrepreneur/expert on innovative economy and even a former president of the Kyrgyz Republic, Roza Otunbaeva.

Activity: online survey

Several weeks before the scenario planning workshop, an online survey was organized among UNCT members. The survey, consisting of 13 questions (excluding several subquestions), aimed to understand better respondents' perceptions of key trends, drivers and risks in Kyrgyzstan. The questionnaire included a combination of open-ended and closed questions to ensure respondents could bring up issues beyond the options offered in closed questions.

The questionnaire included different sections, each dedicated to themes such as assessing the impact of global and regional trends on Kyrgyzstan, evaluating the likelihood and impact of key drivers of risk, sharing images of different "futures" of Kyrgyzstan and so on. In addition to the UN agencies, the survey was also shared among selected non-UN experts to check if the UN views differed significantly from those of the outside observers (mainly academics and experts).

Activity: the scenario planning workshop

The three-day scenario planning workshop was the central element of the entire exercise. It was held as a standalone part of the UN Country Team's annual retreat at Issyk-Kul Lake, 250km away from Bishkek. The workshop brought together over 35 participants, including the heads of UN agencies and selected programme managers and five external experts.

The format of the workshop was best suited to develop a common language and understanding before proceeding to the discussion of key trends, risks and opportunities. The sessions included various types of exercises, including role-playing games, debates and group discussions.

Preparatory work: inclusive and iterative

Last but not least, the approach to groundwork was inclusive and iterative. The core team held multiple rounds of feedback at each stage of the exercise, including conceptualization, online survey, workshop, etc.

The exercise was coordinated by the Peace and Development Adviser, under the leadership and guidance of the UN Resident Coordinator and contribution from UNRCO members. The first *sine qua non* was the engagement of the UNCT in the discussion. The concept of the scenario planning was prepared, shared and approved by the UNCT (The UNCT was updated on the scenario planning at least three times during the UNCT meetings, with one dedicated session). Each stage contained a written message (a concept note, presentation, or e-mail etc.) presented to the country team.

To support senior decisionmakers and make the work operational, the UN RC tasked the Programme Management Team to support the developing solutions. It was this group that suggested to de-link the scenario planning from the CCA (as was initially planned), but to use the KSE as a bridge between the CCA and UNSDCF, and embed the KSE into the strategic planning (not analytical) process. An even smaller group within the PMT was established to carry out short brainstorming sessions and exchange ideas. This group revised the online survey questionnaire and promoted stress testing of the UNSDCF outcomes against scenarios (held during the UNSDCF prioritization workshop in November 2021).

The UN Resident Coordinator and UNCT have considered multiple options of facilitation/organizing the exercise. Initially, several private companies were contacted and interviewed, and although some offered high-quality methodology, the financial ask was too high for the UN. The option of carrying out the event in-house by the PDA and RCO team was also on the table.

The team reached out to other UN entities to look for available resources. DPPA Innovation Cell reconfirmed their support, drawing on extensive experience in scenario planning. The DPPA IC was also engaged in discussing and clarifying the concept of scenario planning in Kyrgyzstan and contributing to the online survey concept and questionnaire.

The decision was eventually made to invite an external consultant with particular expertise in teaching and conducting scenario planning to facilitate the scenario planning workshop. A national expert was involved as an external resource to support the preparation and to analyse the online survey. This approach – of having an external facilitator – proved to be important in ensuring the neutrality of the discussions and coherence of the methodology of the scenario planning process.

Similarly, the online survey questionnaire drafts also reflected suggestions received from the Peace and Development Adviser, heads and programme managers at UN agencies, the DPPA IC, and the UN Resident Coordinator. The consultation was an iterative process, with each round of feedback followed by updates and changes before moving to the next round. To illustrate, the eighth version of the questionnaire became the final one.

The above describes the key elements of the approach that the UN team adopted for scenario planning exercise. The following two sections summarize the process and outcome of the online survey and the scenario planning workshop.

Knowledge-based

The scenarios still require a certain level of preparedness of the participants. The workshop was attended by UNCT members (Heads of Agencies) and leading programme staff with an in-depth understanding of the situation in the country. The decision to sequence the workshop after the CCA enabled the use of the CCA data as background analytical material for the discussions. Moreover, UNCT Kyrgyzstan had in its possession the Conflict and Peace Analysis, Socio-Economic Response Framework to COVID-19, and multiple other analyses and documents, which created a joint basis of knowledge among participants about key trends and factors in Kyrgyzstan.

Linked to strategic prioritization of UNSDCF

Although the scenario planning exercise represents a value in itself as a learning experience, and creating an understanding and common language among the UN Country Team, its value-added is further enhanced if it is linked with the strategic planning process. In Kyrgyzstan, the scenario planning was a link between the CCA and the UNSDCF and contributed to the definition of UNSDCF outcomes (which are stress tested against the scenarios).



INPUTS: ONLINE SURVEY



The online survey went live on 6 September, 2021. The team requested at least one response (or a maximum of two) from each UN agency. The invitation stated that the respondents would ideally include experienced national and/or international staff (preferably including the Head of Agency) with an understanding of the major issues and trends in the country and those who are closely engaged in analytical and programming work.

One of the most distinctive features and innovations of the team was sharing the survey also with a selected group of national experts. This approach gives a unique opportunity to compare the perceptions of UN staff with those of others not involved in the UN. However, one of the most interesting outcomes was that the greatest difference in answers was perceived not between UN and non-UN respondents but

between UN international and UN national staff members.

One of the lessons learnt from the exercise is that collecting data requires more time, and initial deadlines are rarely met (so organizers need to take this into consideration). The deadline for submissions was extended two times before it was closed.

An in-depth methodological discussion (with the engagement of the DPPA IC) preceded the questionnaire. Multiple solutions were adopted to ensure an adequate response rate and anonymity. For instance, the questionnaire did not include questions that could reveal the identity of a respondent. Broad demographic questions (gender, affiliation with the UN, and citizenship) were asked to help group and compare the responses.

Overview of the online survey for the Kyrgyzstan Scenario Exercise

A total of

28 responses

were received, with the breakdown of respondents as follows:

Gender



4 preferred not to say

UN affiliation

17 UN staff



11 not-UN respondents



Citizenship

22

citizens of Kyrgyzstan

6

internationals

The survey results were presented during the workshop as a separate session. Overall, the survey respondents revealed a pessimistic assessment of developments in the country in the past 10 years. To give a snapshot, political

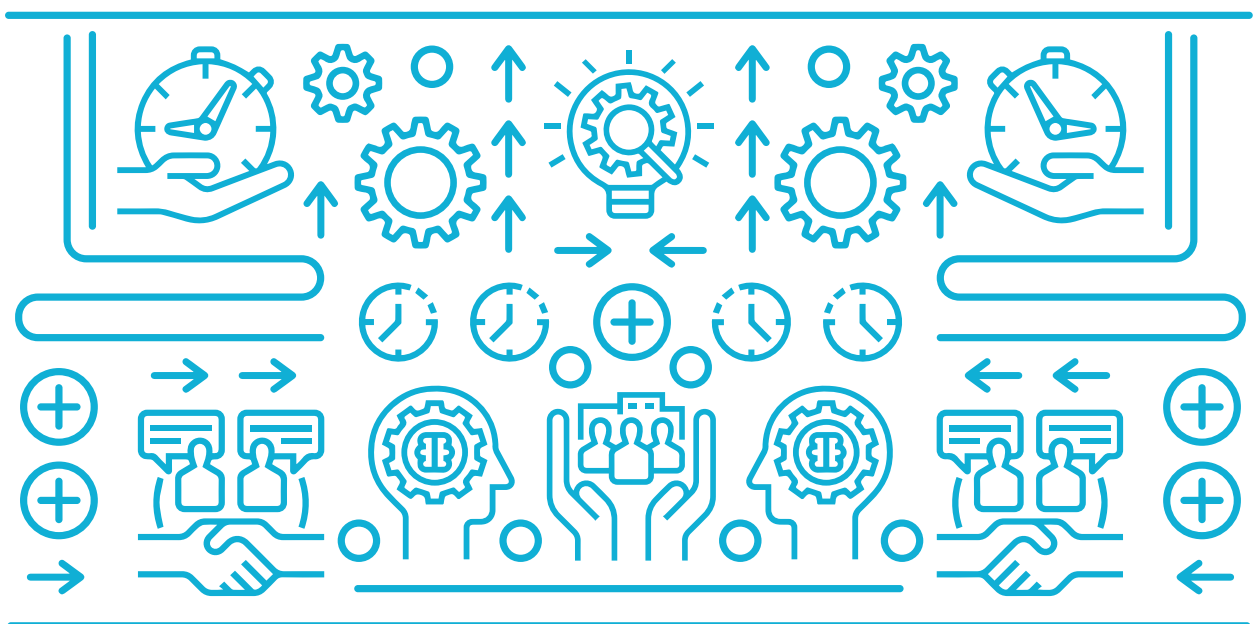
stability, quality of democracy, the rule of law, economic development and quality of governance were top issue areas in which the developments in the past 10 years received "poor" or "very poor" from more than 75% of the respondents.

The survey results indicated the top-five risks (likelihood and impact combined) as follows:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| 1) high level of corruption | 4) decline in the quality of democracy and the rule of law |
| 2) political Instability | 5) polarization of values |
| 3) economic crisis/slowdown | |

Across the questions, there was no considerable difference between UN and non-UN respondents. The most significant discrepancy (though small in absolute terms) was between the local and international staff of the UN, with non-UN respondents mostly in between.

The presentation focused on the key results of the survey. The complete set of charts and tables was shared with all the participants of the workshop. The presentation of results is contained in a separate annex to this document (provided upon request from the UN RCO Kyrgyzstan).



REFLECTIONS: 3-DAY WORKSHOP OVERVIEW



The workshop on scenario planning was the main event that sought to discuss and confirm signals relevant to the future, achieve agreement on key drivers and uncertainties, and develop a set of plausible scenarios of the future.

The workshop was organized into three days, each consisting of several sessions (see Annex

1 for the full program). Overall, the programme was scheduled to maximize frank and extended discussions to develop a shared understanding of key themes (i.e., risks, trends, opportunities, whether at the national, regional or global level) and thus arrive at a set of plausible scenarios by the end of the workshop.

Day 1: Setting the scene

Revealing anticipatory assumptions: the Polak Game

The first set of sessions aimed at setting the scene. From the get-go, the very first exercise, the Polak Game, pushed workshop participants to reveal, discuss and appreciate the importance of anticipatory assumptions in future thinking. Four groups were assigned to defend one of the following statements:

- ◆ *"Things are good and getting better, and we cannot do anything about that."*
- ◆ *"Things are good and getting better, and it takes our effort to ensure that."*
- ◆ *"Things are bad and getting worse, but we can make an effort to change the course."*
- ◆ *"Things are bad and getting worse, and we cannot do anything about that."*

Participants were asked to discuss in groups arguments to support the assigned statement. The exercise was followed by physical activity, with all participants invited to occupy a spot along the x and y-axis, with x representing the continuum of optimism-pessimism (about the future) and the y-axis for the active-passive understanding of one's agency. While all corners were occupied, most participants were located

closer to the centre, slightly leaning towards the pessimism/active agency direction.

The game vividly demonstrated the importance of anticipatory assumptions that each person brings when thinking of the future. While the existence of assumptions may not be surprising, the exercise demonstrated the importance of revealing the direct influence assumptions have on how we think of the future.

Results of the online survey

The following session was dedicated to the presentation and discussion of the online survey results briefly discussed above. This part moved participants towards themes directly related to the most salient issues relevant to Kyrgyzstan. Several participants expressed concurrence of the survey results with findings from other studies, particularly on trends related to human rights or shrinking democratic space. The survey results also triggered discussions on limits of what the UN can do and the gap between those limits and expectations of the public. Overall, the survey results, while not surprising, have clearly resonated with the workshop participants, thus, connecting the conceptual dimension of «setting the scene» with an empirical one.

Developing a shared language

The session titled “Futures Thinking 101” concluded the initial part of the workshop by introducing and discussing the key terms in scenario planning. The purpose of this session was to develop a shared vocabulary and understanding of the concepts. Facilitator, John Sweeney, delivered a thorough review of the distinctive characteristics of scenario planning and foresight and their differences from other forms of future thinking, such as strategic planning or forecasting. Among others, the session covered the notion of “futures” as shifting and multiple images of the future, the contrast between “possible” and “plausible” scenarios, and the importance of “uncertainty”.

Special speaker: Roza Otunbaeva, former President of the Kyrgyz Republic

The afternoon session of the first day started with a keynote speech by former president of the Kyrgyz Republic, Roza Otunbaeva. The talk covered a wide range of issues pertaining to the risks and challenges that the country faces and important areas of work for Kyrgyzstan’s development partners. Ms Otunbaeva stressed Kyrgyzstan’s development has been hijacked by a protracted “VUCA” state, standing for “volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity”. The evolving situation in Afghanistan would likely add more challenges through switching funding from social welfare to security. Overall, the former president called on the UN to remain optimistic, focus on the strengths and advantages of Kyrgyzstan, and work more closely in rural areas and with groups that do not necessarily speak English or Russian (mainly Kyrgyz), and who are often unheard by the international community.

Drivers, trends and emerging issues

The day ended with a brief introduction to the notion of «postnormal» times, with reference to Sardar's article¹. The article makes the point that what was considered "normal" no more applies as the world has moved away from the "orthodoxies" of previous years. Complexity, chaos and contradictions define what he calls the "postnormal times". One key characteristic is the notion of uncertainty and ignorance, which render the notion of control irrelevant when looking into the future.

In line with these, the workshop participants were asked to think of drivers, trends and emerging issues that they find most relevant. Drivers were defined as "long-term forces of continuity and/or change, such as urbanization". Trends are locally, nationally, regionally, and/or globally-impactful phenomena or things evidenced by data, such as climate change. Emerging issues are "weak signals" that point toward emergent phenomena, which might become a trend. To help structure the process, the facilitator proposed using STIRDEEPER (an acronym for Society, Technology, Industry, Resources, Demographics, Economics, Environment, Politics, Energy, Religion) as a framework. Slides for each of the 10 areas were distributed electronically so that participants could fill in, as homework, the columns for drivers, trends and emerging issues.

Day 2: From drivers and trends to scenarios

Ice-breaker: The Three Horizons game

The second day of the workshop started with "The Three Horizons" game, which is based on the popular method of the same name. The purpose of the exercise was not only to socialize all participants into the overall theme of the workshop (national futures) but also to make all participants, including those from civil society, articulate, without prior preparation, key trends and drivers relevant to the extended present, disruptive future, and the transformational future.

This exercise involved volunteer participants occupying three chairs in the middle of the room and describing respective images of the future. One chair was designated for "no change" or "future as extended present". The second chair described "disruptive change" or the in-between space that bridges "now" and a "new paradigm." The third chair gave voice to the "transformational future," which was a space for radical change. Several rounds of short impromptu presentations covered the three horizons in different time scales, from short-term (4-5 years) to mid-term (10-15 years) to long-term (20-40 years).

Drivers, trends, and emerging issues - local perspectives

The main part of the day kicked off with brief interventions from four invited local experts. Religious affairs scholar, Indira Aslanova, argued that secularism has been under pressure in Kyrgyzstan. The state-endorsed promotion of the «halal» industry and displays of religiosity by public servants, especially in the judiciary and law enforcement,

¹ Ziauddin Sardar, "Welcome to Postnormal Times," *Futures* 42, no. 5 (June 2010): 435-44, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2009.11.028>.

were only some of the worrying signs of the threat to secularism in the country. The government's routine distinguishing between "traditional" and "non-traditional" religious groups was not only about discriminatory language but also implied the securitization of faith-related matters.

Shairbek Dzhuraev spoke of two broader trends of relevance to the workshop's topic. One was the increasingly evident crisis of liberal institutionalism as a post-WW2 order that gave rise to the United Nations and to multilateralism more generally. The relative economic slowdown in Western countries, combined with the rise of China, meant the preconditions required for the UN to work successfully, taken for granted in preceding decades, may not fully apply today, and even less so in the coming decades. The rise of populism in Kyrgyzstan, in this context, was a minor problem compared to similar trends in countries that directly influence international development and/or security architectures, such as the UN. But the trend of decreasing multilateralism was countered by increasing global interconnectedness at the sub-state or non-state level. The tension between the two trends would likely affect the emerging futures.

Roman Mogiveskiy drew attention to three trends relevant to the economic situation in the country. The first was the degree of uncertainty in the government on sectors of the economy that would drive economic growth. Whether the state focuses on IT or tourism, or agriculture would have profound implications for the future. Second, actors need to come to terms with resource scarcity that requires rethinking the efficiency of investments. As an example, the education sector accounts for about 6-7% of GDP with little indication of the efficiency of such investment. Third, the UN and other development partners will have to come to terms with the low capacity of the Kyrgyz government and prioritize issue areas upon which the latter is both willing and capable of acting.

Daniyar Amanaliev highlighted the social mobility of the local population, with particular regard for the high ability of business to "swim against the stream". This is evidenced by the existence of 10 startups with individual capital of over 1 million USD. He also noted that thousands of bright young professionals in the creative economy are flourishing despite the economic and political instability. This leads us to the prominent role that the creative economy has in Kyrgyzstan. The country is landlocked and is situated far from major trade routes. Hence, the production of physical goods is not profitable. In contrast, the country is well-positioned to produce virtual products that do not face similar hurdles as material goods. In this light, the development agencies, the private sector, and the government should invest more in programming. Daniyar also called on the UN to focus on supporting spaces for businesses where new ideas, services and products could be created.

Critical Uncertainties - Mapping Drivers, Trends & Emerging Issues

The second session launched an identification and mapping of drivers, trends and emerging issues to be later used for scenario building. Participants were asked to revisit the slides that they completed as part of a "homework" exercise to identify the most relevant trends, drivers and emerging issues. In particular, each issue (whether a trend, driver or issue) had to be placed in the 2x2 matrix depending on whether it was of high/low impact and high/low uncertainty (see table below).

High impact Low uncertainty	High impact High uncertainty
Low impact Low uncertainty	Low impact High uncertainty

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The Sarkar Game

The afternoon session started with the Sarkar Game, a role-play exercise to explore “archetypal” perspectives on the future. Participants were organized into four groups, each representing one of “workers”, “warriors”, “intellectuals” and “capitalists”. Each group received a short script describing the identity, needs and wants of the respective group. The crux of the game was the interaction developed between different groups in the course of the game. The kind of issues raised between them, the flow of discussion or conflict, and the emerging power dynamics were all part of the lessons to be learned. The game exposed differences between social groups in interpreting reality and power dynamics that often remain hidden in real situations.

2x2 Scenario Modelling - walking into the future(s)

The final session of the day focused on developing four scenarios based on two critical uncertainties. The latter were to be found from the upper right quadrant of the matrix of drivers, trends and emerging issues that the participants filled earlier in the day. The facilitator brought up two points that appeared most mentioned in that quadrant: increasing polarization of society and economic decline. Through stretching both trends into desirable and undesirable ends of a 2x2 matrix, four scenarios were formulated:

- A. Economic growth and social cohesion
- B. Economic decline and social cohesion
- C. Economic growth and social polarization
- D. Economic decline and social polarization

Participants were divided into four groups, with each assigned one of the scenarios. The task for the groups was to discuss and jointly produce a brief narrative describing how developments in Kyrgyzstan unfolded to lead the country to the stated scenario in 2030. Several questions were provided to help guide the narrative (e.g., “What other drivers, trends, and emerging issues fit into the “logic” of this scenario? Who speaks the loudest in this scenario? Who remains unheard? What is causing tension in this scenario? How do local, regional, and global dynamics shape this national scenario?).

Day 3: Finalizing the scenarios

Refining and switching the scenarios

The final day of the workshop focused on refining four scenarios developed the day earlier. In the morning session, the four groups continued working on their respective scenarios. The goal was for the groups to provide additional depth and complexity for each narrative using the template.

In the second phase, the facilitator asked the groups to switch scenarios. Each group was now tasked to read and add more details/refine the scenario of a different group. The exercise aimed to both a) add new insights into the narratives developed by the original groups and b) demonstrate how a mental switch to a different scenario leads to new ideas or, in other words, opens up new horizons of the future.

Finalizing the scenarios

The final phase of group activities centred on finalizing the scenarios using a set of questions to unpack implications. The session started with a brief introduction of the notion of cascading impacts, i.e., a series of effects triggered by a key change. The groups changed scenarios again, so each group was now working on the third scenario. The initial task for the groups was to identify a) the key change(s) that the given scenario would lead to, b) the second-order change, i.e., the direct effect of the key change, and c) the third-order change, i.e., the effect of the second-order change. The rationale for the exercise was to demonstrate the cascading nature of changes, which is critical for a comprehensive understanding of situations and making the best possible decision.

Further, the groups had to address a set of questions within the frame of their assigned scenario.

The questions now directly probed implications of the scenarios for the UN, and included:

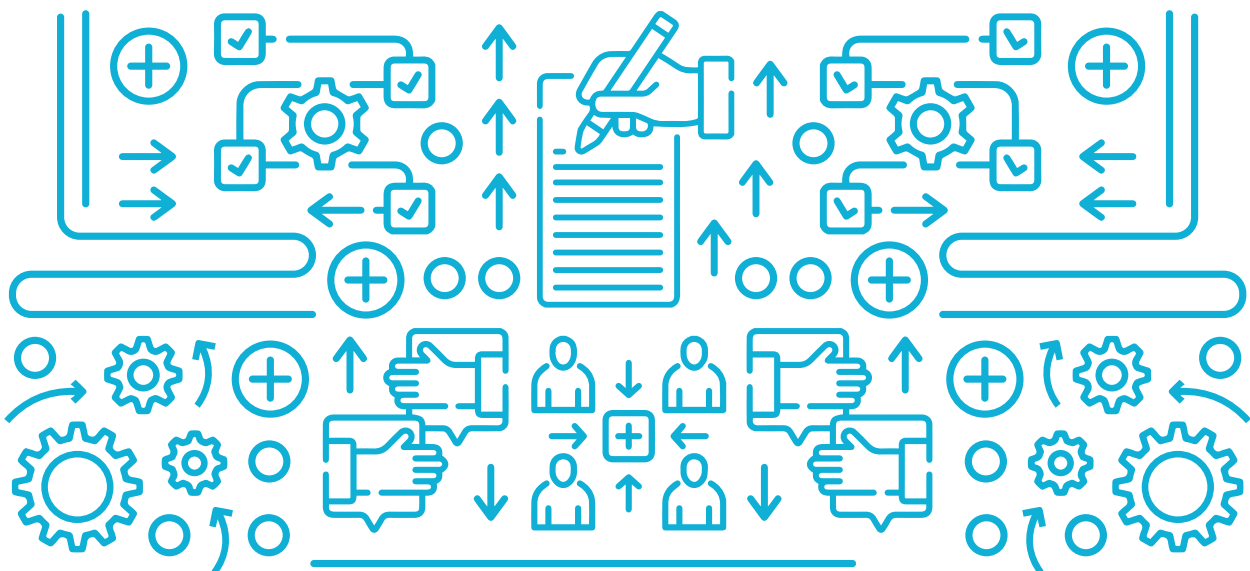
- ◆ *What existing programmes and/or projects are relevant in this scenario?*
- ◆ *What programmes and/or projects appear needed in this scenario?*
- ◆ *What possible progress is made and/or achievement in the SDGs takes place in this scenario?*
- ◆ *What “strategic entry points” create value in this scenario?*
- ◆ *What metaphor captures how the UNCT should operate in this scenario?*

The session concluded with each group briefly discussing the metaphor that best captured the UNCT’s role/image within the given scenario.

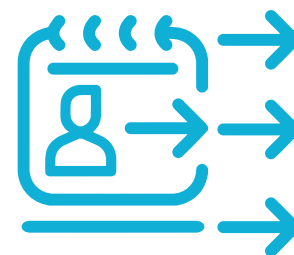
Conclusion: changes, certainties and contradictions?

The concluding session of the day and the entire workshop asked each participant to briefly reflect on what has changed in their mind during the course of the three days, what has remained the same, and what contradictions may have emerged. An intimate and informal environment was created by all participants sitting in a large circle. Three chairs labelled “certainty”, “change”, and “contradiction” were placed for an ordered sharing of impressions. Overall, all chairs ended up being used. Speakers spoke of certainty mainly as a confirmation of their knowledge of and trust in the wisdom and energy of the UN as a team. A colleague also said she was certain about the future being uncertain, and the workshop confirmed that. On change, participants spoke about how foresight exercises revealed new ways of thinking of the future when scenarios could be richer and nuanced than more conventional “best-case”, “worst-case”, and “more of the same” versions.

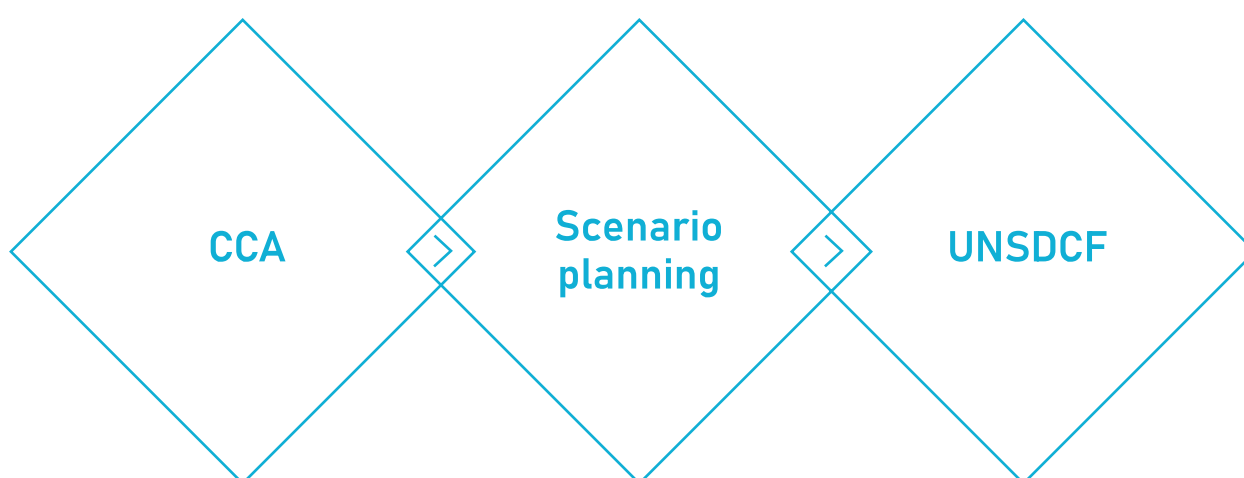
The responses on “contradictions” conveyed mainly two messages. One was a doubt about how the discrepancy between the daily routine back in the office and the new insights and energy generated during the workshop could be reconciled. There was a need to connect the two, but it remained unclear, for some participants, how that could and should be done. A related but different concern was whether the UN agencies could live up to the call for a “one UN”, which is particularly necessary for the successful integration of scenario building into UN programming work.



POST-WORKSHOP: WHAT'S NEXT?



Results of the Scenario Planning workshop will feed the development of the key priorities and outcomes of the UNSDCF. Outcomes of the UNSCF will be stress tested against the scenarios developed.



The scenario planning workshop links the CCA and the UNSDCF by analysing the drivers/factors of the current (and past) situation and supporting the forward-looking analysis of the accelerators and entry points. As primarily a learning exercise, the scenario planning created a joint knowledge and understanding of factors and issues that will be addressed by the UNSDCF. The scenario planning workshop will serve to embed the scenario thinking into the operation of the UN Country Team in Kyrgyzstan.

On 4-5 November, 2021, the UN Country Team in Kyrgyzstan held a Strategic Planning Retreat (SPR) aimed at generating the Outcome Statements for the UNSDCF. As a critical step in the overall

UNSDCF development process, the scenarios were reintroduced on the first day and utilized to orient discussions with a forward-looking lens. As the SPR concluded with cross-sectoral draft Outcome Statements co-led by various agency heads and representatives, it is clear that the scenarios played a role in contributing to the overall success. Additionally, a custom Theory of Change template, which included a special section on Assumptions that links back to the scenarios, was created and shared with the Outcome Statement co-leads, which ensures that the previous work done to develop scenarios will remain relevant throughout the UNSDCF development process.

LEARNINGS: FOSTERING CREATIVE TENSIONS



The Kyrgyzstan Scenarios Exercise was conceived as an experiment to introduce a novel and nuanced approach for the UNCT's work in developing the UNSDCF. Such activity was deemed necessary and well-timed in the context of a growing sense of fatigue and disillusionment among many UN staff members. The latter was a direct result of political developments in Kyrgyzstan over the past two years, including irregular power changes, a rushed change to the country's constitution, and the growing prominence of populist rhetoric in the country. In such a context, it was critical for the UN to move mentally beyond the "headlines" and immerse itself in a new approach for thinking through and preparing for possibilities for the future.

The scenario planning exercise perfectly met the aforementioned need. It introduced foresight as a technique different from forecasting for accounting for and appreciating critical uncertainties and their relevance for different plausible scenarios of the future. Furthermore, as discussed earlier, this approach embodies a fundamental belief in the agency of actors. The

future scenario is not an image set in stone. Instead, in foresight, there is a range of different futures, and it is up to the actors to work towards more desirable ones. Such an approach to future(s) thinking represents a perfect match for the UN's ongoing preparation for the UNSDCF 2023-2030.

The exercise benefited immensely from the full commitment of the UNCT members. Committing to a three-day-long workshop, especially coming after an intensive two-day event on work matters, is a big challenge. The leadership and enthusiasm of the Resident Coordinator were essential. The participation of external experts, colleagues from UN headquarters and the regional office in Istanbul also contributed to both the diversity of views and motivation of the group.

Overall, the scenario planning exercise turned out to be one that is worth repeating and replicating at different levels. In this context, a few notes can be added in the form of "lessons learned" to benefit similar initiatives in the future.

◆ The tension between exercise and operation.

Where does the scenario planning exercise take the UNCT? As one participation mentioned, the follow-up is now entirely up to the UN. There are significant and familiar hurdles such as the pressure of daily urgent work, and the established organizational culture and challenges of effective coordination across different UN agencies. The scenarios, as developed in the workshop, present a good starting point. However, the ways in which the scenarios may feed the UN's programming depends on how the team would continue the work, moving scenarios from "exercise mode" to "operational mode". One may say the question of "what comes next" after an excellent workshop was the biggest concern among the workshop participants.

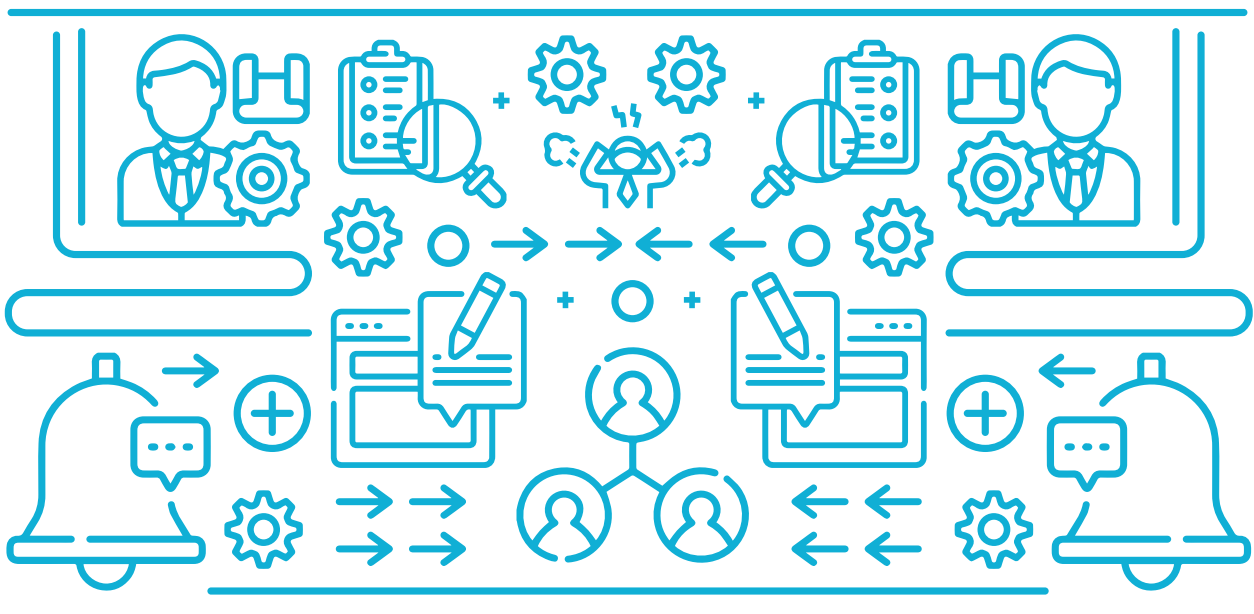
◆ The tension between exercise and substance.

A related but different challenge in similar exercises is to strike a balance between «what» and «how». In an ideal world, workshops such as this would involve both a) learning how to approach scenario building and b) developing substantively rich and thoroughly elaborated scenarios. As the exercise demonstrated, doing both is hardly possible. The workshop participants gained knowledge and skills on foresight as a way of scenario building. However, the extent to which the resulting four scenarios represent solid intellectual products is a different matter. These were prepared in the context of a group exercise. One way to proceed in the future, therefore, may be to employ the same technique to develop new scenarios (or continue with these), but with the focus squarely on operationalizing concepts, debating the themes, and connecting and enriching the narratives with real-life data

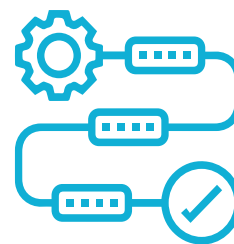
◆ The tension between programme and life.

There is always a tension between how an event is planned and how it proceeds. Organizers have a choice between enforcing a strict following of the schedule and allowing greater flexibility, and adjusting to emerging trends and patterns. While the workshop programme largely remained balanced, the organizers allowed greater flexibility, in line with the goal to provide an environment for open and frank discussions. One inevitable cost of such an approach is that some sessions enjoyed more time at the expense of others. Due to this flexible approach, one important session (connective scenarios with entry points/accelerators identified in the CCA) was not held. Thus, an extra session or two might allow fuller work on all four scenarios, including the connection of the narratives with the needs and wants of the UN.

The above remarks are described as tensions precisely because they are not instances of mistakes or problems. Instead, they point to difficult but necessary choices that have to be made for any exercise. Such tensions do not pose issues as long as the participants are aware of them, and thus, their expectations are managed. Instead, these points may prove relevant for different forms of follow-up activities on scenarios and development in the future.



INSIGHTS: PRACTICE AND PROCESS



- Ensure strong political buy-in by the UNCT; leadership of the UN RC is critical for success;
- Prepare a concept and written outputs for every stage to ensure consensus and shared understanding (it is easy for such an exercise to lead to misunderstandings);
- Look for internal UN resources to challenge assumptions and gain advice (DPPA, UNESCO, DCO); colleagues are really helpful;
- Engage the UNCT at an early stage, and ensure a participatory and inclusive approach. Be iterative in moving forward and listen to criticism;
- Establish a core technical team, the option used in Kyrgyzstan – engage the PMT to discuss solutions (e.g., sequencing scenario analysis after the CCA to bridge the UNSDCF);
- Engage external resources for the workshop and surveys – they bring fresh insights, with a greater understanding of the context, while challenging UN perspectives;
- Apply innovative tools: online questionnaire to summarize the drivers (saves time during the workshop and can provide greater alignment prior to the event);
- Ensure senior management attendance at the workshop; otherwise, the link between the UNSDCF and the scenario planning may get lost, and senior managers may undermine the results of the scenario planning;
- Good planning – everything takes time. Responses to the questionnaire take a lot of time. The workshop should be confirmed at least one month before the event, considering the participation of senior management. The whole exercise took six months in Kyrgyzstan;
- Secure ample time for the workshop. A minimum of three days is advised. Some scenarios exercises may take several weeks or months; more days is advisable but may not be feasible considering the workload of Heads of Agencies;
- Apply interactive and innovative tools of group engagement –gaming and simulations can help to change the thinking of people about futures; different groups sequentially work on one scenario;
- Manage expectations. Even with the intricate preparatory work and explaining the objectives several times, some participants may still feel confused. For some workshop participants, the scenarios were ‘unrealistic’ and ‘not applicable’. Again, scenarios are tools for learning, so the focus should be on implications and responses that can lead to impact;
- Consider engaging the government in a scenarios exercise. UNCT Kyrgyzstan did not engage the government in this exercise to ensure there was a safe space for an open discussion, and it was agreed upon that the scenarios would not be shown to the government;
- Decide between keeping up with the agenda and ensuring flexibility and space for discussion; the UNCT Kyrgyzstan team decided to enable people to express themselves and engage with the exercise, which meant that many sessions ran over time, leading to necessary shifts in the program;
- Professional external facilitation is advisable (if the UNCT has resources for it).

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1. WORKSHOP AGENDA

Day 1, October 6

Breakfast reading:

COVID-19 both is and is not a Black Swan (and that's ok)

Time	Agenda item
9.30-10.15	<p>Icebreaker: The Polak Game</p> <p>An exercise that creates a space to explore our “anticipatory assumptions” both individually and collectively, which starts the process of “futures thinking” over the next three days.</p>
10:15-10:30	<p>Rules of Engagement</p> <p>A brief overview of the “terms and conditions” that will apply over the next three days.</p>
10:30-11:00	<p>Survey Results</p> <p>Presentation of survey results with plenary discussion.</p>
11:00-11:30	<p>Break</p>
11:30-12:00	<p>Futures Thinking 101 & Agenda Overview</p> <p>Brief presentation to create a shared language around key concepts and terms that will be used over the next three days.</p>
12:00-13:00	<p>Looking In with The Strategic Landscape Framework</p> <p>In pairs, participants discuss and complete the strategic landscape framework, which will be displayed “gallery style.”</p>
13.00-14.15	<p>Lunch</p>
14.15-14.30	<p>The Strategic Landscape Framework Gallery</p> <p>Take a stroll to see what your colleagues created.</p>
14.30-16.00	<p>Shared Reflections on the development of Kyrgyzstan by Ms. Roza Otunbaeva, former President of the Kyrgyz Republic</p> <p>Followed by a plenary discussion</p>
16.00-16.30	<p>Break</p>

16.30–17.30	<p>Drivers, Trends, and Emerging Issues - Session #1</p> <p>Drivers are long-term forces of continuity and/or change, such as urbanization. Trends are locally, nationally, regionally, and/or globally-impactful phenomena or things evidenced by data, such as climate change. Emerging issues are “weak signals” that point toward emergent phenomena, which might become a trend. In this session, participants create a categorized (three types and across various sectors) pool of drivers, trends, and emerging issues relevant to the context.</p> <p>Outcome: Pool of drivers, trends, and emerging issues</p>
17.30	<p>Closing and “Homework”</p> <p><i>Day 2 pre-reading: Welcome to Postnormal Times!</i></p> <p><i>After reading this piece, please come prepared with a key takeaway: what idea, concept, or provocation in this piece speaks to you? Why?</i></p>

Day 2, October 7

Time	Agenda item
9.30–10.00	<p>Icebreaker: The Three Horizons Game</p> <p>An exercise that gives voice to 1) the extended present; 2) the disruptive future; and 3) the transformational future.</p>
10:00–11:30	<p>Drivers, Trends & Emerging Issues - Local Perspectives</p>
11:30–12:00	<p>Break</p>
12:00–13:00	<p>Critical Uncertainties - Mapping Drivers, Trends & Emerging Issues</p> <p>Second session to identify the two “critical uncertainties” that will be used to generate the scenario logic.</p>
13:00–14:30	<p>Lunch</p>
14:30–15:15	<p>The Sarkar Game</p> <p>An exercise that creates a space to explore “archetypal” perspectives on the future through role-play. This session encourages us to consider the different ways that social groups confront challenges (past, present, and, of course, futures) and envision and act upon opportunities.</p>
15.15–17.00	<p>2X2 Scenario Modelling - Walking into the Future(s)</p> <p>Participants will be put into four groups (one for each scenario) and asked to take a walk into the future to identify the relevant: predetermined elements, driving forces, trends, and emerging issues to be added to their respective scenarios.</p>

Day 3, October 8

Time	Agenda item
9.30–10.15	<p>Refining Scenarios</p> <p>Participants work in their original scenarios group to refine and provide additional depth and complexity for each narrative using the template.</p>
10:15–11:00	<p>Scenario Switch</p>
11:00–11:30	<p>Break</p>
11:30–13:00	<p>Key Change, Cascading Impacts & Implications</p> <p>Participants work on a new scenario and identify 1-3 key changes as well as some cascading effects (1st, 2nd, and 3rd order) for each. Additionally, participants will answer the following questions:</p> <p>A brief overview of the “terms and conditions” that will apply over the next three days.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + What existing programmes and/or projects are relevant in this scenario? + What programmes and/or projects appear needed in this scenario? + What possible progress is made and/or achievement in the SDGs takes place in this scenario? + What “strategic entry points” create value in this scenario? + What metaphor captures how the UNCT should operate in this scenario?
13:00–14:15	<p>Lunch & Bringing a Message Back from the Future(s)</p> <p>Brief presentation to create a shared language around key concepts and terms that will be used over the next three days.</p>
14.15–15.00	<p>Sharing the Scenarios & Key Insights</p> <p>In pairs, participants discuss and complete the strategic landscape framework, which will be displayed “gallery style.”</p>
15.00–16.00	<p>Certainties, Changes, & Contradictions</p> <p>Using a “fishbowl” approach, participants are asked to reflect on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Certainties: things you knew coming into the day, which were affirmed + Change: things you shifted your perspective upon as the day unfolded + Contradictions: things that remain unsettled, in conflict, or create tension
16.00	<p>Closing session</p>

ANNEX 2. RESOURCES

What Futures Studies Is and Is Not

Dator provides a clear and concise overview of the principles of the academic field of futures studies and his widely cited "Laws of the Future" that frame the basis for futures thinking, including his infamous 2nd Law of the Future that states: "Any useful idea about the future should appear to be ridiculous."

Six pillars: futures thinking for transforming

Inayatullah's highly-regarded article explains the ways in which people view the futures and how question-based foresight can help people feel empowered to create their preferred futures through actionable steps.

COVID-19 both "is & is not" a Black Swan

In this short reflection during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, Sweeney offers an overview of reasonable, rigorous, and responsible foresight, specifically how to approach horizon scanning as well as to ensure that complexity remains at the forefront of one's approach to futures and foresight.

Scenario Building: The 2X2 Matrix Technique

An overview of the matrix-based approach to modelling scenarios formalized by GBN. Additionally, this quick-guide provides references to other scenario modelling methods as well as cases and examples.

Welcome to Postnormal Times

Sardar's 2010 piece has been heralded for its forward-looking insights and approach to thinking about the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. This piece introduces the concept of "Postnormal Times."

Crazy Futures: Why Plausibility is Maladaptive

Schultz provides an overview of how the term and framing of "plausibility" can be problematic as a key metric and measure when creating scenarios.

ANNEX 3. SCENARIOS: NARRATIVE FRAMINGS

Scenarios are stories about the future designed to challenge our thinking and help us learn. While there are many ways to model scenarios, creating narratives that link present to future is a powerful way to help others (as well as ourselves) explore changes and create causal linkages between drivers, trends, and emerging issues. Each of the four groups worked to create a narrative that linked present to future, and as the groups switched during the exercise, a participatory approach to narrative generation was utilized. One question that often arises when modelling

scenarios, as well as reading scenarios created by others, centres on plausibility: are these scenarios plausible and/or relevant?

While there are many answers that may (or may not) seem convincing, the problem lies with the question itself. Plausible for whom? Plausible within which contexts? What might be considered «plausible» for some could be seen as literally «crazy» by others, which is to say that there is a sliding scale for what can and might pass as plausible. As Wendy Schultz has observed:

[...] A focus on 'crazy futures' may be the most adaptive strategy we can encourage people to adopt, and a focus on 'plausibility' the most maladaptive. Is your future crazy enough to help you, your organization, your community evolve? Better that we rehearse the full range of surprises that may await us across our futures, than be ill-prepared and unable to adapt. Emergence and evolution are preferable to equilibrium (p. 9).

In line with Schultz's arguments, the scenarios invoke a range of events, drivers, trends, and emerging issues that, when merged into a narrative linking present to future, can and might seem *crazy,* if not implausible. This is a feature, not a bug, as the saying goes. The participants were encouraged to explore "possible" futures rather than using the lenses of probable and/or

plausible. With that said, the participants were also encouraged to create causal linkages, so the scenarios *are* plausible with regard to how they make clear connections from present to future. In this context, it is important to emphasize and clarify, that scenarios do not represent views or expectations of the United Nations, in its assessment of the situation in the Kyrgyz Republic.

Scenario A: Polarization & Economic Growth

In 2030, Kyrgyzstan continues to be highly polarized, and economic growth has brought both challenges and opportunities. It all started back in 2022. Coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, Kyrgyzstan felt the effects of its over-reliance on remittances, weak regional ties, and vulnerability to systemic shocks, such as climate change and regional conflicts. A strong sense of being "landlocked" created a turn inward that pitted the "old guard" political system against a younger and digitally-savvy political movement seeking to use the pandemic to create change.

By 2023, the government was feeling pressure to act, so it initiated a series of policies aimed at further regional connectivity through trade agreements, which favoured large corporates over local SMEs leading to further social tension. While the country's «brown economy» was

widely seen as a relic of the past, a reliance on Soviet-era and state-led planning and regulatory processes and practices gave many the impression that the government was still “behind the curve.” The government introduces 2-3 major economic reforms and national projects to boost the economy in a short period of time, including on digitalization, and further regional connectivity through trade agreements. The reforms have allowed the country to create a very strong economic basis and a steady year-by-year economic growth by 7%.

By 2025, it has become clear that civil society simply has had enough and needs to take things into its own hands, but a lack of access to capital means that opportunities still favour existing elites. The overall distribution of wealth in Kyrgyzstan remains unequal accelerating the phenomenon of brain drain, which spurs a new generation of “Urban Guerrillas” to appear on the scene. The consolidation of the power by the president continues.

Beginning from 2027, modest reforms in the economy and energy sector enabled an emerging group of young and innovative entrepreneurs, including returnee migrants, to expand the opportunities provided by innovation and digitalization to establish many new start-ups, leverage capital from regional investors and institutions to increase investment in the green and creative economies leading to a rising middle class still excluded from political processes and a national society increasingly challenged by the impact of climate change, increasing inequality, intergroup and intercommunal competition and violence over natural resources and polarization over the presence and participation of citizens of other countries in the economy.

In 2029, Kyrgyzstan has graduated into an upper-middle-income economy country, and while the president rules the country, the country now has a solid economic foundation despite this contributing to greater polarization.

Scenario B: Cohesion & Economic Growth

“It has to get much worse, before it comes much better,” or “The sun always rises after the darkest hour.”

In 2030, Kyrgyzstan is a peaceful country, but this was not always the case. In 2023, it began to feel the effects of centralization of power and the strong-man rule, which tried to limit the power with simultaneous attempts to improve the economy and ensure ‘mechanical’ social cohesion by suppressing dissent and ignoring boiling grievances among key groups. The mounting pressure on civil society and exclusion (arrests) of political opposition lead to a conflict in 2024 after the elections and abominable violation of human rights.

To strengthen his legitimacy, the strong-man leader incites a small external conflict. The conflict engages domestic radicals (religious and ethnic-nationalists), who make an attempt to take power, but this leads to mobilization and solidarity of Kyrgyzstanis, who unite against the common enemy. The small external conflict ends with a loss – of people’s lives and territory – and humiliation.

The conflict and internal developments expose how low Kyrgyzstan has fallen, and there is public demand and strive for real change. The lost territory serves as a reminder of the need for unity. People understand that exclusion costs and the nation have to be redefined. People are sick and tired of the strong-man rule and chaos. Major national security, military and political groups cannot come to an agreement about the new leader, and by 2025 a woman – a uniting leader - emerges, as a symbol of change, the “mother of the nation”. The public acceptance was possible due to her non-affiliation with any of the previously corrupt political circles, and her strong academic background and shares liberal values.

She redesigns the country to become inclusive, tolerant and progressive. Critical and bold reforms are carried out quickly; democracy and the rule of law are reestablished. The expanding fiscal space enables a sustained reform in the environmental and social sectors. This leads to a record increase in the Pisa scores and a significant improvement in the health indicators, including a significant reduction in maternal and infant mortality. The changes bring confidence of international partners, investments flow in, and human rights indexes and the doing business environment improve – all leading to substantive economic growth. The international community wants to showcase Kyrgyzstan as a success and the model for the rest of Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan is among the top performers in rankings concerning corruption, business competitiveness, rule of law, and fundamental freedoms: freedom of expression, assembly, association and freedom of religion and belief. Migrants, and the most successful Kyrgyzstanis are coming back and investing in the country.

E-governance is introduced, and the country's digital services catch up, reaching the level of developed nations. Kyrgyzstan is becoming a haven for digital nomads. Kyrgyzstan leads the world for circular economy, and is one of the cleanest countries in the world and a major destination of eco-tourism, a leading exporter of organic products and a hub for creative IT start-ups. Following the dramatic economic growth and the improved rule of law, fair administration of justice, compliance with the principles of equality and non-discrimination in law and practice, transparency, participation and accountability in governance are ensured, and public trust in the government and state increase. All peoples of Kyrgyzstan (including refugees that are well integrated into society), regardless of ethnic, religious, educational background and social status are inspired by and believe in the sustainable development of Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyz Jarany has become the genuine and uniting concept consolidating the whole nation.

Bishkek Manas Airport has become an international hub connecting major crossroads of the Silk Road. New role models, including idols in sports, art, science, business, and IT technology, are well known all over the world and become strong drivers uniting the nation.

Scenario C: Cohesion & Economic Decline

In 2030, Kyrgyzstan is a truly cohesive society built on trust between people but with widespread poverty, insecurity and crime as a result of economic crisis and failure.

In 2023, less than a year into the implementation of the new UNSCDF, in the north of the country, a major earthquake hits, with aftershocks affecting several locations, including Bishkek and Kumtor. Approximately 10,000 people die and many lose their homes and livelihoods.

This was a major shock for the entire economy and a huge national tragedy. Many essential pieces of infrastructure were destroyed, and this all happened in the context of a new global economic crisis as a result of which there was little international support provided after the shock.

By 2027, poor implementation of policies and reforms and continuing nationalization of assets of foreign investors led to a lack of confidence and investment in the economy, resulting in capital flight. Citizens preferred to invest in the economies of neighbouring countries, and poverty levels became widespread. The economic decline led to increased political visibility of criminal groups and a rentier economy. Millions left the cities to return to their home communities so that poverty and insecurity could be addressed through investing in their small family agricultural holdings.

By 2028, effective implementation of the Kyrgyz Jarany concept increased public and community appreciation of mutual social capital and the values of intergroup and inter-ethnic harmony, cohesion and diversity. Widening poverty also increased the resort to community and group self-help efforts, irrespective of ethnic affiliation.

Significant failure of government to address the economic situation led to stronger investments in self-help efforts and increased recognition of the importance of local governance and economic activities resulting in the recreation of local economies and the strengthening of local governance institutions. Many migrants returned to help rebuild their communities contributing to widening social investments in health, education and services at the community level.

Increased recognition of diversity and inter-ethnic harmony contributed to a stronger appreciation of the role of women in society, leading to the emergence of new female leaders and politicians and new social dialogues about the importance and role of women in society. A new political movement arose pushing for women to take over the political leadership as a way of addressing the economic decline.

Scenario D: Polarization & Economic Decline

In 2023, nationalized Kumtor is mismanaged and comes to a full standstill, leading to lost confidence of investors and further capital flight. It also triggers considerable environmental disaster. China is offering a takeover package to Kumtor in order to cover debts.

An economic crisis in Russia significantly impacts the economy. President Navalny introduces a new visa regime. The majority of migrants return and face difficulties in integrating back into local communities and the labour market. As a result, there is a drastic reduction in remittances. Meanwhile, food insecurity increases.

More pressure is put on the labour market due to the returned migrants and a higher number of young people seeking jobs. The lack of jobs leads to discontent among young people and radicalization.

In 2024, the unemployment rate is at 28%. The unemployment rate among young people is at 37%. There is considerable brain drain: the young, progressive and creative business community and academia move out of the country. For instance, Ololo relocates to Vietnam.

The pandemic lingers on. Persistently low vaccination rates unable to abate new waves leads to a collapse of the health system which puts further pressure on economic growth.

The Taliban in Afghanistan inspires radically-oriented extremists groups in the Ferghana Valley, feeding polarization. Kazakhstan closes their borders, leading to a rise in consumer prices and scarcity of key commodities. China grows increasingly concerned about debt repayments and demands land in return. It also provides digital technologies to install surveillance equipment; and a social credit system is introduced.

In 2027, radical forces of Tajikistan take advantage of the instability and claim 30% of Batken, including key water source points.

Climate change leads to droughts and crop failures and aggravates water scarcity and land degradation. Agricultural yields decrease, leading to food insecurity. Progressive civil society including ethnic communities are increasingly oppressed by restrictive laws and persecution. Pro-government ethno-nationalistic groups dominate the agenda. They succeed in scrapping the Kyrgyz Jarany concept and fully marginalizing ethnic and religious minorities. State language policy aggressively sidelines minorities and polarization is observed even within Kyrgyz ethnic group. Islamic groups radicalize and plan to introduce Sharia law.

Groups such as marginalized youth, PwD, rural women, women-headed households, single mothers, women from ethnic minorities, women in care economy, LGBTI, and ethnic minorities are experiencing multi-dimensional discrimination and are denied access to justice.

Academic and artistic freedoms, space, and funding are curtailed. The destruction of cultural heritage takes place. Academic and artistic freedoms, space, and funding are also curtailed. The destruction of cultural heritage is also seen. There is further increase of crime rates and GBV. Due to the undermined system of checks and balances in the new constitution, the rule of law is eroded. Law enforcement bodies fail to respond to human rights violations. The government continues to use extra-judiciary powers to extract money from opposition and oligarchs. Kyrgyzstan loses 30% of its territory in Batken (Tajikistan), Chui (Kazakhstan), Naryn (China), Jalal-Abad (Uzbekistan). Conflict. Fragile state.

A major leakage is noted when uranium tailings contaminate underground waters and rivers. A health crisis results from the contamination of food. Prices of imported food further spike. The weak government tries to squeeze everything possible from the on-going mines. Meanwhile, corruption rages; people can't find jobs or place their children in schools without bribes.

The situation is catastrophic when an army of criminals carry out a coup. The country is fragmented, and people are disoriented. The Kyrgyz som is 5000 to the dollar, and inflation increases daily. State governance has failed.

