Helpdesk Research Report

Targeting groups at risk of extremism through security and justice programming

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Question

What evidence is there that security and justice programming (by DFID or other donors) targets specific groups (populations and victims) at risk of extremism and how has the impact been measured?

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1. Overview

Since 11 September 2001, and the attacks on key locations in the US, the understanding of, and focus on, 'violent extremism' (VE) has changed significantly. While definitions and type of policy approaches vary according to donors, these initiatives are broadly understood within an emerging literature base of 'countering violent extremism' (CVE), defined as aiming 'to prevent radicalization and recruitment to terrorism by strengthening the resilience of individuals and communities against the appeal of violent extremism'.[1] Such approaches can also be called counter-radicalisation, de-radicalisation, or counter-terrorism.

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[1] See - http://www.globalcenter.org/publications/evaluating-counterterrorism-and-countering-violent-extremism-programming/

This rapid literature review focusses on CVE initiatives that form part of donors' security and justice programming in developing countries, according to DFID's definition of security and justice.[2] It collates evidence about whether donors are identifying specific groups at risk to target these CVE initiatives, or whether donors are providing CVE initiatives more broadly. It also collates evidence on how to measure the impact of these programmes.

To a certain extent, all development programming identifies target groups according to the problem being addressed, and the objectives of the programming and the donor. However, identifying groups at risk of VE is particularly challenging, and has largely changed since 2001. Policy and programming have broadened from being predominantly defensive, to also being pre-emptive. Therefore, rather than programming reacting defensively to groups that have already demonstrated VE. CVE programming now must pre-emptively identify groups that could be at risk, and engage with them.

There is **growing body of experience and literature** in this area – with useful synthesis work from the Global Center on Cooperative Security and RUSI.[3] However, there are no single sources that collate and evaluate CVE programmes (expert comment). Due to sensitivities around CVE, some grey literature is confidential and unpublished. Much of the literature lacks empirical research (Aldrich, 2014).

Key findings include:

- Several governments and NGO are engaged in domestic and foreign CVE programming in the security and justice fields. USAID and the Danish government have been particularly active in this area.

- CVE activities are often divided into: hard power approaches (military, legislative, policing, infrastructure protection, crisis planning, border security, etc) and soft power approaches (ideological, communicative, political, and social) (Nasser-Eddine, et al., 2011).

- Identifying populations at risk is a key challenge. Much CVE programming is based on theories of change of how a person moves from non-violence to violent extremism, and vice versa. However, this is limited by a lack of evidence and consensus on understanding motivational and structural factors of these processes (Lindekilde, 2012).

- Groups that are frequently identified for programming tend to be: living in areas which have previously experienced violent extremism; predominantly male; predominantly young, and/or living in socio-economically disadvantaged areas.

- Many governments have employed soft approaches to target 'moderate' and 'progressive' leaders, intellectuals and organisations as mediums to influence those at risk of radicalisation.

- Political approaches like conflict resolution processes may target disenfranchised leaders or communities and seek to address underlying political, social or economic grievances.

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[2] Definitions vary between donors, this query uses the definition provided by DFID (2007 in Bakrania, 2014), that security and justice 'refer to values and goals (e.g. freedom, fairness, personal safety) as well as to the various institutions established to deliver them (e.g. defence forces, police, courts)'. Safety, security and justice are linked as part of the rule of law, which may be seen as an overarching principle to guide security and justice programming (van Veen & Derks, 2012, in Bakrania).

[3] The US-based Global Center on Cooperative Security focusses on CVE as one of its four thematic areas, and has recently extended its work on CVE evaluation. Information on their general work on CVE is here – http://www.globalcenter.org/topics/countering-violent-extremism/ And information on their CVE evaluation project is here - http://www.globalcenter.org/publications/evaluating-counterterrorism-and-countering-violent-extremism-programming/

- Programme evaluation is a central challenge in CVE programming for a number of reasons including: There is little consensus on what the key drivers of extremism and radicalisation are; it is difficult to attribute change in such a complex process; de-radicalisation programmes often need the programme to maintain close contact with the person over time – requiring significant resources; and it is difficult to create indicators to monitor success.

- Surveys have been identified as a useful evaluation technique.

- Five examples of CVE donor programmes are explored including: USAID in West Africa; Denmark's approach; USAID Office of Transition Initiatives' Kenya Transition Initiative; USAID youth empowerment programmes in Somalia and Kenya; and USAID and State Department radio programmes in Africa.

2. Countering violent extremism practitioners

Several governments and NGOs are engaged in domestic and foreign CVE programming in the security and justice fields. USAID and the Danish government have been particularly active in this area. These include: Cleen Foundation (Nigeria); Friedrich Naumann Foundation (South Asia); Exit Sweden; Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP); Violence Prevention Network (Germany); PAIMAN Alumni Trust; SaferWorld; Afghanistan Justice Organization; World Organization for Resource Development and Education (WORDE); USAID; and the UK Government (PREVENT, CONTEST) (expert comment). There are also many programmes which could be considered to address CVE, but which are not formally titled as CVE. Experts suggest that USAID is the most active development agency in this field, both in terms of branding its programs as CVE and in undertaking evaluations. Although, under the DFID definition, some USAID activities would not be considered as security and justice programming.

3. General approaches to countering violent extremism

CVE activities are often conceptualised as hard and soft power approaches. In a comprehensive literature review, Nasser-Eddine, Garnham, Agostino and Caluya (2011) identify that the literature generally argues for 'multifaceted approaches that combine hard and soft power strategies'.

Hard power approaches to CVE tend to be defensive and offensive, and include (Nasser-Eddine, et al., 2011):

- Military – traditional warfare and insurgency approach would not be considered as part of security and justice programming, however peace-keeping, or disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) activities are.

- Legislative – including criminalising certain groups and activities, extending powers of investigation, surveillance, detention, etc.

- Policing – traditional forms and 'new', 'softer' intelligence- or community-led policing are shaped by changing criminal justice frameworks, and crime prevention policies.

- Infrastructure protection – including policing, CCTV security checkpoints, traffic management, private security, alert systems and surveillance.

- Crisis planning – including developing strategies to contain the effects of potential attacks.
- Border security – including deterrence, detection and preventing entry.

Soft power approaches to CVE tend to be more pre-emptive and include (Nasser-Eddine, et al., 2011):

- Ideological – including (religious) dialogue, counselling, education and mentoring.
- Communicative – including a 'war of ideas', disruption, censorship and media monitoring, counter narrative approaches, language and rhetorical strategies.
- Political – including addressing grievances through political processes, state building, activism, political support for civil society groups, political support for 'moderate' and 'progressive' views.
- Social – including addressing social conditions that generate support for violent extremists, providing opportunities for disengagement from violent extremism, supporting alternative pathways to joining violent extremist groups, supporting civil society and approaches that foster social cohesion.

4. Targeting of groups at risk in countering violent extremism

Identifying populations at risk is a key challenge. Much of CVE programming is posited on (implicit or explicit) theories of change of how a person or group moves from non-violence to violent extremism, and vice versa. However, key challenges to CVE programing are: the lack of evidence and consensus on understanding the motivational and structural factors of these processes; differing understandings and definitions of the terms; and disagreement and confusion about the purposes of counter-radicalisation (Lindekilde, 2012).

Lindekilde (2012, p.277) identifies that 'thus far, all academic approaches and discussions reach the same conclusion: There is no such thing as a terrorist profile and a variety of social and demographic factors must be taken into consideration to prevent the process of violent radicalisation'. A European Commission Expert Group on European Violent Radicalisation (2008) found that profiling to identify possible VE is not productive, as no profiling measures fit all variables at work.

In general, there is little detail in the literature specifying the methodological approach taken to identify the target populations for CVE programming activities, however, frequently the target populations of programming are named as: living in areas which have experienced violent extremism; predominantly (but not always) male, predominantly (but not always) young, and/or living in socio-economically disadvantaged areas. Nasser-Eddine, et al. (2011) identify that communications campaigns have been carried out in prisons, schools and mosques and on diverse media and internet platforms. More details are provided below where available. Some programmes are aimed at individuals (most evidence for this appears to be in Western countries), groups, and communities.

Notably there is a distinction between people directly targeted by the programmes – who may be people considered at risk from turning to violent extremism themselves, or may be targeted as they can play a role in influencing others' choices (e.g. imams). And people that are indirectly impacted by programmes – who are often the wider communities where the people engaged in the programmes live, people in neighbouring areas, or people at risk of violent extremist activities (in the country or abroad).

Violent extremists are often nationally or internationally networked, suggesting CVE target a broad range of populations. Integrating national and international responses to CVE is seen as increasingly important (Nasser-Eddine, et al., 2011). Some policies, like the UK's Prevent agenda, include both domestic and international CVE programming activities. Also important are 'collaborative and multi-disciplinary approaches through partnerships within national governments and between governments, non-government organisations, industry groups and civil society' and the private sector (Nasser-Eddine, et al., 2011). This collaboration is also needed across thematic areas such as military/security, development, humanitarian, etc.

Targeting in soft approaches

Support for 'moderate' and 'progressive' leaders. Many governments have employed soft approaches to target leaders, intellectuals and organisations as mediums to influence those at risk of radicalisation (Nasser-Eddine, et al., 2011). There is an extensive literature that critiques this approach, but isn't within the scope of this query to explore.

Ideological CVE approaches often target leaders, intellectuals and organisations within Islamic religious communities. They are encouraged to promote CVE messages and helped to build profiles on relevant media and internet platforms – such as newspapers, television, radio, online sites, in mosques, universities, and schools (Nasser-Eddine, et al., 2011).

Lindekilde (2012) explains that there is confusion about whether CVE activities should target the specific needs and experiences of individuals, as an individual's propensity to turn to violent extremism will have been shaped by different factors – e.g. some might be more influenced by theological arguments, others by political arguments, others by social networks or their peer group.

Communicative CVE approaches often use these leaders or broader communications of diplomacy channels to disrupt or change pro-VE narratives. In this area, pro-VE leaders or narratives are also challenged in an effort to de-legitimise these positions, and to suggest alternative pathways (Nasser-Eddine, et al., 2011). Counter-narratives are often considered more legitimate if made by religious or political leaders, local communities, social workers, young Muslims and their families, and former violent extremists (Kessels in Nasser-Eddine, et al., 2011).

Political CVE approaches like conflict resolution processes may target disenfranchised leaders or communities and seek to address underlying political, social or economic grievances that can foster VE (Nasser-Eddine, et al., 2011). Donors can be at risk of interfering in sensitive political dynamics by supporting one community, interest group, or NGO over another.

Social CVE approaches can directly target those at risk of becoming violent extremists by offering alternative pathways to VE, and can use close relatives or others in this process. If already engaged, social CVE activities can provide support to people to disengage from extremist organisations or activities (examples of disengagement programmes include: Indonesia's Disengagement Program, Yemen's Religious Dialogue Committee and Saudi Arabia's Counselling Programme (Horgan and Braddock, in Nasser-Eddine, et al., 2011). They can also target wider communities to provide services where the state doesn't and VE groups do.

Measuring impact[4]

Romaniuk & Chowdhury Fink (2012, p.12-14) identify three types of evaluations of CVE programming:

- Multidimensional evaluations – assess multiple levels of evaluation (E.g. if projects align with CVE programme outcomes and capabilities, meet stated objectives, contribute to programme outcomes, result in desired benefits, help achieve the overall vision.

- Vertical evaluations – assess programmes from inception to outcome (with analysis of objectives, costs, institutional capacities for implementation, and intended and unintended consequences).

- Horizontal evaluations – assess efforts by multiple agencies and entities to support a government strategy.

Programme evaluations are a central challenge in CVE programming for many reasons (Romaniuk & Chowdhury Fink, 2012). There is little consensus on what the key drivers of extremism and radicalisation are, and why some people move from 'peaceful' to 'violent' extremism. Therefore, there is no way of accurately assessing the probability of someone becoming a violent extremist, and there is little possibility to attribute change in such a complex process. For example, does the absence of a VE event indicate success if programming was in place? (Nasser-Eddine, et al., 2011). The growth of pre-emptive approaches, rather than just defensive approaches, has further complicated this.

The literature appears to have more examples of impact in Western countries, this could be as de-radicalisation programmes often need the programme to maintain close contact with the person over time – requiring significant resources and a stable environment (e.g. in prison) (Nasser-Eddine, et al., 2011).

A key question is whether results refer to inputs, outputs or outcomes (USAID, 2011). It is difficult to create indicators to monitor progress or success, and indicators in CVE programming are 'often unclear or unspecified' (Lindekilde, 2012). One consequence of this is that assessments of CVE programming effectiveness are often not produced or are methodologically weak (ibid). This undermines understanding of the impacts (Lindekilde, 2012). That said, CVE programming is still in fairly early stages as literature suggests that impact can only be evaluated seven to ten years after programming has started (USAID, 2013).

For example, a USAID (2011) document analyses the US' Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP) programming. It notes that the TSCTP's best impact indicators come from independently sourced survey data on general attitudes and support for violent extremist organisations (for the TSCTP's Peace through Development II Program (PDEV), see below). Most of the TSCTP indicators are based on inputs and outputs, with only a few measuring outcomes. The report explains 'this is understandable' as TSCTP programming (on counter-terrorism, democracy and governance, with some education and economic growth activities) are 'notoriously difficult to measure for impact without the use of survey data' (USAID, 2011). And it also identifies surveys as methodologically complex, costly, and infrequent (ibid).

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[4] For guidance on monitoring and evaluation in CVE, see the RUSI Handbook on this subject - https://www.rusi.org/downloads/assets/201406_Learning_and_Adapting.pdf

5. Examples of donor approaches

USAID in West Africa

USAID's 'Peace through Development II Program' (PDEV) operates in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, and Niger. It aims to target 'communities in their struggle against violent extremist organizations and ideology through activities that strengthen social cohesion, improve the outlook for youth, and promote moderate behavior' (USAID, 2014, p.1-2).

In terms of **targeting**, it is a community-led programme with a participatory approach, offering community grants (for activities in areas including: social cohesion and construction). It also funds vocational training for 'youth and other at-risk groups'.

PDEV's objectives are:
1. To 'empower youth' through: vocational and entrepreneurial skills, civic education, and leadership training.
2. To 'increase moderate Voices' through: radio programs, social media, civic education, and conflict resolution activities.
3. To 'increase civil society's capacity' to address and/or advocate for issues that, if unaddressed, may facilitate at-risk populations to take part in violent extremist activities.
4. To strengthen local government, especially activities that increase community and youth participation.

The USAID (2014) self-audit reports only the expected and completed outputs (called programme results – e.g. p.30), and does not include details about how the **impact** of these outputs would be measured.

Denmark's approach

Denmark has carried out CVE activities in the Horn of Africa for many years. In 2011 it initiated its Horn of Africa (HoA) programme which includes 'support to counterterrorism and anti-radicalisation efforts' in its objectives, to 'prevent early radicalisation of populations at risk' (Coffey, 2014, p.17).

The evaluation of DANIDA's broad Peace and Stabilisation Fund lacks specificity on the target groups of the anti-radicalisation programme, the impact methodology, and impact. However, it does allude to the programme leading to some success with 'increasing awareness of the risks of radicalisation in the prison service within Kenya and possible responses as well as the drafting of a Kenyan CVE strategy and institutional support to the National Counter Terrorism Centre' (Coffey, 2014, p.40). The paper highlights, however, that 'it remains to be seen how far these will translate into outcomes in terms of preventing radicalisation' (ibid).

In a synthesis paper examining evaluation of CVE programming, Chowdhury Fink, et al. (2013) explore Denmark's approach to CVE in detail. The paper notes that Denmark particularly supports local governments and actors, and focusses 'on the early identification of risk behaviour and signs of concern' (ibid). The programming is 'based on a preventive social agenda' rather than a security agenda (ibid).

Denmark's approach **targets** three levels (Chowdhury Fink, et al., 2013):

1. General level – strengthening state resistance to extremist propaganda, (e.g. through campaigns and general education)
2. Group level – focussing on specific vulnerable groups (e.g. youths at risk of radicalisation through role model visits, parents' networks, educational theatre, and dialogue workshops).
3. Individual level – focussing on reversing radicalisation (e.g. through mentors, parent coaches, and prison mentors).

It is **evaluated** using the 'Kirkpatrick' four steps of learning this examines (Chowdhury Fink, et al., 2013):
1. The immediate reaction to an activity
2. Knowledge and attitude changes
3. Behaviour changes
4. Effects on others and surroundings

Additional evaluations used include the 'Outcomes Star model' for programming at the individual level and 'progression schemes' which measure behaviour, relations, and attitudes, and an individual's resilience and ability to change (Chowdhury Fink, et al., 2013).

USAID Office of Transition Initiatives' Kenya Transition Initiative

Between 2011 and 2014 the USAID Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI)'s Kenya Transition Initiative implemented a CVE pilot programme. The programme issued small grants for livelihood training, cultural events, community debates on sensitive topics, and counselling for post-traumatic stress disorder, etc. An independent evaluation by Khalil and Zeuthen (2014), based on a theory of change evaluation approach, highlights that in regards to targeting, programming decisions would have benefitted from:

- A more comprehensive understanding of VE in the local context. E.g. subsets of the population more narrowly 'at-risk' of being attracted to VE should have been identified and targeted (e.g. potentially teenagers, ex-convicts, members of specific clans, and so on), with a greater focus on understanding the relevance of material incentives (e.g. fear, status-seeking, adventure-seeking, and other such individual-level drivers).

- More top-level guidance from donors, on the extent to which efforts should have been targeted at those supportive of violence versus those directly involved in its creation'.

USAID youth empowerment programmes in Somalia and Kenya

A 2012 USAID evaluation examined three USAID-funded youth empowerment programmes targeted at ethnic Somali youth in Somalia and Kenya. The study evaluated the **impact** of the programme by triangulating survey results with focus groups. 1,500 people were surveyed on questions on five factors (drivers) that push or pull a person into violent extremism (USAID, 2012, p.11; Chowdhury Fink, et al., 2013):
- Level of civic engagement
- Level of efficacy
- Level of support and belief in the power of youth
- Level of individual's sense of identity
- Level of support for use of violence in the name of Islam
The focus groups explored the issue areas further with youth in the surveyed communities.

USAID and State Department radio programmes

Aldrich (2012) evaluates through quantitative survey analysis USAID and State Department radio programmes in a journal article. Radio has been the main delivery mechanism for many CVE programmes in Africa. He finds:

- ‘Individuals exposed to multi-level US programming were more likely to listen to peace and tolerance radio.
- Individuals who listened more regularly to such programs participated more frequently in civic activities and supported working with the West to combat terrorism.
- However, higher levels of radio listening had no measurable impact on opposition to the use of violence in the name of Islam or opposition to the imposition of Islamic law.
- Women and men responded differently to programming’.

Aldrich (2012) argues this builds on other ‘strong evidence from qualitative and quantitative studies in the developing world shows that media programming more generally and radio programming in specific can positively alter norms and behavior in listeners and their communities’.

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