TRANSFORMING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

A PEACEBUILDER'S GUIDE

Search for
Common Ground

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Acknowledgements

This guide is the fruit of collaboration by Search for Common Ground colleagues past and present from around the world. Through an appreciative inquiry process, we asked ourselves what we have learned from our years of work in transforming violent conflict and responding to violent extremism. This guide captures those insights and offers guiding principles for peacebuilders and on-the-ground practitioners as they navigate this important yet high-risk area of work around violent extremism.

Lastly, Search for Common Ground has enriched its perspective and practice thanks to the thoughtful and rigorous publications and gatherings of numerous organizations doing impactful work in this area. These include: Alliance for Peacebuilding, the United States Institute for Peace, Hedayah, the Global Center for Cooperative Security, the International Center for Counter-Terrorism, Mercy Corps, the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office, the Club of Madrid, WORDE (World Organization for Resource Development and Education), and the Center for Strategic and International Studies, in particular, the 'On Violent Extremism' Podcast series which has captured practitioner perspectives through the skilled conversations with CSIS' Shannon Green. These organizations' resources are linked throughout this document precisely because they offer value to peacebuilders as they design and implement these programs

Introduction

Search for Common Ground defines violent extremism as the choice individuals make to use or support violence to advance a cause based on exclusionary group identities. The particular identity of the perpetrator of violence does not determine what constitutes violent extremism, nor does the nature of the ideology, even if that ideology may be considered radical by many. Rather, violent extremism relates to an individual or group's violent advancement of an exclusionary ideology, which seeks to eliminate the 'other' group, culture, or identity.

Over the last 15-20 years, we have seen many predominantly-military approaches used to address symptoms, rather than the drivers, of violent extremism. In many cases, these actions have aggravated tensions and triggered more support for violent extremism, such as when they led to human rights abuses or stigmatizing an entire identity group based on the actions of a small fraction of their members. These actions can further augment the appeal of violent extremist movements by justifying their own narrative of grievances and power relations.

There is an opportunity to reframe the challenge of countering violent extremism (CVE). Drawing from the tools and tactics from peacebuilding, state and non-state actors can be equipped to (1) understand the dynamics which foment violent extremism, (2) identify a set of tools and approaches that prevent those dynamics from giving rise to violent extremism; and (3) ensure that responses do not aggravate and radicalize affected communities even further.

Transforming **violent extremism** recognizes that while violent extremism exists, the reasons and motivators leading to an individual being drawn to violent extremist movements can be transformed into a different type of agency or engagement. This is distinct from *countering* violent extremism which is reactive to extremist violence rather than aimed at altering the dynamics that motivate it.

In developing this guide, Search for Common Ground has drawn on three decades of experience in transforming violent conflict in communities plagued by many of the same dynamics underlying violent extremism: frustration with weak, corrupt, or illegitimate governance, marginalization, fractured relationships, lack of voice and opportunity, and struggles with diversity. This experience gives us tangible insight into building communities that are resilient to the pull of violent extremist groups. They also aid in early detection, thus helping to prevent violent extremism *before* it happens. Our goal is to offer questions, insights, and general guidance to peacebuilders and policy-makers who are stepping into this nuanced space while highlighting the value of peacebuilding practices in what has become an overly security-driven and militarized field.

We recognize that the political and operational space around work labeled as CVE is fraught with complexity and, at times, dangerous. As peacebuilders, we also possess a unique set of values, best practices, and analytical tools that are uniquely useful in preventing and unraveling violent extremist activity. By drawing on this skillset, we have the potential to empower states, civil society, and vulnerable groups to peacefully and proactively respond to the challenge of violent extremism, while also enabling individuals with whom we engage directly in choosing constructive, non-violent alternatives in conflict settings.

Since 1982, Search for Common Ground has been transforming the way the world deals with conflict, moving away from adversarial approaches and toward cooperative solutions. With programs in 35 countries across Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, we collaborate with governments, civil society, media, and the private sector to strengthen the capacity of communities to build lasting peace. With 80% of our global staff of 600 hailing from the countries in which they work, we adapt and localize our approaches according to the needs of each country or region.

We view conflict as a natural and normal part of our lives, with the potential to catalyze peace, prosperity, and justice. When we transform conflict, we enable parties in conflict to identify shared interests and work together towards collaborative, win-win solutions.

Five core values form the bedrock of how we seek to transform violent extremism.

First, through **impartiality,** we engage all sides of a given conflict in the communities in which we work, enabling us to build trust and communication between stakeholders, each with differing sets of lived experiences, prejudices, narratives, and institutional practices.

Secondly, by maintaining **respect for all people**, our initiatives can create an environment where trust and empathy grow, opening up new insights and understandings of the dynamics at play in and around violent extremist movements.

Thirdly, believing in our **shared humanity** means that we see everyone involved as part of the solution. The processes that we initiate seek to enable everyone, no matter what role they have played in conflict to-date, to regain their sense of interconnectedness on a fundamental human level.

Fourthly, we strive for **inclusivity**, so that aggrieved or marginalized groups are given equal voice and groups that are usually segregated from one another can learn to engage in a productive dialogue while working cooperatively together.

Finally, our firm belief, grounded in practical experience over 35 years, that **transformation is always possible** allows us to bring both hope and proactive solutions to even the most protracted and intense conflict settings. It also reminds us that while people may choose violent extremism at one point in their lives, they can make new choices later on, transforming themselves and their relationships as a result.

By drawing on these values, peacebuilders can be effective in bringing about enduring change when encountering violent extremism, and avoid the panicked, fear-based reaction that often arises instinctively when we feel threatened or confused. Our efforts are adaptive, locally grounded, and perpetually seeking to offer new skills, relationships, and perspectives that stakeholders can use in shaping their own futures.

Our focus is on directing our resources and organizational authority to programs that provide positive alternatives to violence, emotionally engage extremists and their potential recruits and highlight diverse, pluralistic voices in divided settings. Through this effort, we can help shift the tide in CVE away from hardline, short-term approaches towards those that build resilient communities for years to come.

OTHER RESOURCES

- "Countering Violent Extremism: A Peacebuilding Perspective" by Georgia Holmer (USIP)
- "Developing a Community-Led Approach to Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)" by WORDE

Drivers

Understanding the root causes behind the support of violent extremist movements is critical to designing responses. Much like a peacebuilder's need for a conflict analysis, it is important to understand what tools and frameworks are most relevant to understanding the drivers and root causes of violent extremism. In some cases, these frameworks are very similar to the tools that peacebuilders have used to understand dividers and connectors, social cohesion, or resilience. And similar to peacebuilding, the factors contributing to an individual or a group deciding to join or support a violent extremist movement are firstly local, making the profiling of potential recruits nearly impossible from one context to the next.

Indeed, the strongest overarching lesson across CVE research is this: there is no "one-size-fits-all" theory or profile to anticipate the circumstances in which violent extremism will arise or who is at risk of radicalization. It is imperative to not make assumptions about a given group or individual in the context of CVE, and instead to let local insight and analysis inform decisions.

This guide is not intended to be an exhaustive list of factors that influence violent extremism; instead, we offer a set of questions and frameworks that may be useful in understanding extremism. By unpacking the drivers of violent extremism, we have the opportunity to enable those who are moving into violent extremism to be pulled back into safety, dignity, and respect within their communities.

Frameworks that can help to understand the drivers:

1. PUSH AND PULL FACTORS

Push and pull factors are featured heavily in literature on violent extremism. Generally speaking, **push factors** are any condition or grievance that creates a sense of frustration, marginalization, and disempowerment which encourage people to seek out remedies including, but not limited to, joining extremist groups. What incentivizes this particular engagement are **pull factors**, a term which describes forces that can be attractive to potential recruits and specifically draw them into radical organizations, such as a sense of kinship, heroism, adventure, economic gain or self-realization.

Establishing a working definition of push and pull factors can prove useful for understanding the myriad of influences acting on an individual considering joining violent extremism. It also aids in capturing the importance of socioeconomics and local politics, as well as compelling identity narratives, the role of the media, and recruitment tactics by violent extremist groups.

Yet this lens can also be problematic. First, there is substantial overlap between what can be considered a "push" or a "pull" factor, and attempts to separate the two can be an exercise in futility. Second, there is a tendency to consider any source of grievance or discontent in an extremist group as a "push" factor yet factors do not explain why some members of a demographic are recruited, and others are not.

This challenge has caused program funders to question the relevance of focusing on push factors in CVE work since they can be so broad, longstanding, and hard to measure. Such discomfort with "push" factors often leads to them being overlooked in favor of focusing solely on pull factors, which can, in turn, ignore the actual societal drivers that are unique causes of conflict. Finally, push and pull factors often minimize the importance of group dynamics, which can significantly influence the form and shape of grievances that play into push and pull factors.

Such dynamics may include how actors rationalize a conflict and formulate and justify their responses to it—including lashing out with violence and extreme rhetoric.

The importance of an analytical emphasis on group dynamics lies in the strategic advantage it provides to peacebuilders: while focusing on large-scale push factors has rarely led to significant results, a more directed programming focus on this level – i.e. transforming relationships between parties and their approach to the conflict itself – might yield more impact at less cost. As testified by Search's long experience, peacebuilding strategies can have significant effects on the communities they serve while transforming group dynamics away from violent extremism.

More information can be found in this 2011 USAID document, "The Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency."

More information on group dynamics and other social science theories used in understanding radicalization can be found in Randy Borum's "Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories."

2. RESILIENCE-VULNERABILITY SPECTRUM

Another lens through which the drivers behind violent extremism can be understood is by focusing on relationships within the family, schools, and communities. This is achieved by analyzing the social, emotional, and psychological well-being of individuals along the spectrum of vulnerability to resilience.

By placing an individual or small groups on a spectrum between resilience and vulnerability, we can examine a number of factors at once that also distinguishes who within a given subpopulation are most likely to self-radicalize or be targeted for recruitment. This lens also allows us to understand the preventative drivers as well as what factors enable groups and individuals to resist violent extremist messages, narratives, and recruitment.

Importantly, this lens can allow us to understand the motivations of individuals who have joined violent extremist movements, and also to better understand what motivates the majority who chose not to participate.

For example, a [MercyCorps study](#) of former Boko Haram combatants in Nigeria found that while societal-level pull factors related to poverty and endemic violence played a role in recruitment, individuals were recruited for a wide range of reasons. For women, many joined to follow their husbands or out of a desire to learn the Qur'an. For men, many hoped that joining would give them access to business credit or they joined out of fear for their own survival. By identifying a lack of education, a lack of access to business credit, and exposure to violence as risk factors, MercyCorps could identify vulnerable Nigerian communities and individuals who needed the most proactive outreach.

However, it must be understood that many individuals who experience the same risk factors do not follow the same pull factors. Similar to the previously discussed push-pull factor framework, this approach can be useful when also trying to understand the components of resiliency, rather than only vulnerability.

More information can be found in the NCTC's 2014 guide, ["Countering Violent Extremism: A Guide for Practitioners and Analysts."](#)

3. CONTEXT THEORIES VS. STAGE THEORIES

In *Countering Violent Extremism: A Guide for Practitioners and Analysts*, the US National Counterterrorism Center identifies "Context Theories" and "Stage Theories"' as two overarching theories of behavioral change that can frame our understanding of drivers, and therefore our program strategy. **Context theories** "look at the reciprocal interaction of social context and individual behavior." Most prevention efforts operate in this space, including community engagement, social development through sports and culture activities, and expanding access to jobs, education, and social services.

In contrast, **Stage theories** "focus on individual behavior and see change as a matter of working through various stages to break old patterns and adopt new ones." Disengagement efforts are more likely to fall into this category, including social support groups, work with existing or returning fight-

ers, and outreach to individuals identified as vulnerable to extremist recruitment.

The utility of these lenses is that, when combined with a conflict and context analysis, they can help peacebuilders determine which suite of CVE approaches is likely to be most helpful in a given context. They also encourage practitioners to reflect on both the societal and individual levels about the causes and functions of violent extremism, though as an analytical framework they can be quite broad.

More information can be found in the NCTC's 2014 guide, "Countering Violent Extremism: A Guide for Practitioners and Analysts."

4. RISK FACTORS

The World Organization for Resource Development and Education (WORDE) identifies five categories of "Potential Risk Factors of Radicalization" which are useful for understanding the drivers of violent extremism. These categories reject outdated notions of radicalization as a linear model with distinct phases and suggest instead that radicalization takes places along a set of non-linear and dynamic pathways that overlap in myriad ways.

a. **Ideology, Beliefs, & Values**, including "us vs. them" worldviews, justification of violence, and views of certain cultures or nation states as threatening.

b. **Psychological Factors**, such as a desire for purpose or adventure and concerns for individual or group security—which may be exacerbated by issues such as previous trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or mental illness.

c. **Political Grievances** related to human rights abuses, limited political and civil liberties, corruption, and foreign occupation.

d. **Economic Factors** like unemployment, relative poverty, and financial incentives from membership.

e. **Sociological Motivators** such as alienation, struggling cultural adaptation, marginalization, discrimination, and kinship ties.

Like other frameworks for understanding the drivers of violent extremism, WORDE's Risk Factors are helpful in identifying a set of categories to frame analysis at both the individual and structural levels. Helpfully, they go further by identifying specific challenges in each area that draw people to violent extremist organizations. Absent from this list, however, is an analysis of factors related to the communication and recruitment tactics of particular extremist groups that create a "pull" dynamic independent of community and individual challenges.

You can see more about WORDE's tools and approaches here: http://www.worde.org/category/publications/manuals/

5. BERGER'S MODELS FOR RADICALIZATION AND RECRUITMENT

J.M. Berger's models for radicalization and recruitment seeks to answer questions of *how* individuals are drawn into violent extremism rather than why and when. They are most helpful in assisting peacebuilders looking to design prevention and disengagement strategies rather than to understand long-term causes. He develops a simplified model of radicalization and the concurrent terrorist recruitment process, proposing particular themes for disruptive intervention and messaging.

Berger argues that CVE work can realistically work towards disengagement, but not towards deradicalization, and offers recommendations for concrete actions to accomplish CVE goals by disrupting recruitment processes and deploying targeted messaging within the framework of the correlated models. Berger points out that radicalization is not inherently violent or harmful, but that it is still worth understanding as radicalization is usually a precursor to joining violent extremist groups.

For more on this perspective see ["Making CVE Work: A Focused Approach Based on Process Disruption" by J.M. Berger with ICCT.](#)

6. EXPOSURE - ENGAGEMENT - EMPOWERMENT

Another framework that Search for Common Ground has identified in designing prevention initiatives delineates a pathway of behavior commonly shown by potential adherents to violent extremism. The phases we have identified are Exposure, Engagement, and Empowerment. These highlight three distinct areas in which peacebuilders can interrupt the process of recruitment, or directed outreach, with positive alternatives.

Exposure: This relates to the stage when the individual is exposed to the proponents of the violent extremist group or perspective. They may have been attracted to and thus sought out the group, or they may have been approached or recruited by individuals or supporters of a violent extremist movement.

Engagement: This is the stage when there is engagement, either in person or online, as the individual learns about and finds resonance with the offerings and attractions of the violent extremist movement.

Empowerment: This is the stage when the person feels as though the choice to engage in or support the violent extremist movement is one which is empowering and emboldening because it furthers his or her personal ambitions, or responds to their specific physical, emotional, or spiritual needs.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

In addition to the frameworks listed above, there is a subset of sociological factors that are useful for understanding the drivers of violent extremism:

1. GENDER

Gender is a powerful lens for understanding the drivers behind violent extremism. Understanding the gender dynamics in the contexts in which we work is critical to understanding drivers and creating intervention strategies.

In many societies, men face immense pressures to be providers, strong leaders, and action-oriented in the face of hardship. This may originate from cultural norms that suppress men's expression of emotion in peaceful ways or that praise vigilantism and aggression over dialogue as a means of problem-solving. Men may also fall victim to economic systems that offer increasingly fewer legitimate means of employment or education that leave them feeling disaffected and emasculated. Additionally, at the individual level, they may face family, social, or personal pressures that play on encultured notions of dignity, masculinity, and empowerment in dangerous ways.

Exceedingly rigid gender roles in many global cultures can also encourage the adoption of extremist stances. Traditional gender norms often emphasize that men are natural-born enforcers and protectors of those around them, which encourages young men and boys to act out violently when they perceive that people or groups of people they care about are threatened or maligned. Men may also be more likely to adopt superhero complexes or vigilante identities in a belief that their radical actions will be revered or bring them notoriety. In the United States and elsewhere, the notion of "lone wolf" vigilantism or revenge attacks that is commonly associated with mass shootings is also closely tied to ideas of violent masculinity and makes others more accepting of violence if it reinforces deeply held beliefs.

Despite the fact that violent extremism as portrayed by the media focuses on male-led attacks, it is incorrect to assume that women cannot play a significant role. While they are commonly perceived to function primarily as victims or, alternatively, to be more inherently "peaceful" than men, this viewpoint often overlooks the different roles women play in violent extremism. Women in violent extremism contexts operate under their own agency and desires as well as through their roles as wives, mothers, sisters, community leaders, businesswomen, religious clergy, and other functions. In addition to their private and public roles, women are also active within violent extremism movements both as direct perpetrators of violence and supporters of the violence of men. Examples of this include, but are not limited to, acting as recruiters, financiers, and propagandists.

As primary caregivers, women are often well-positioned to detect early warning signs of radicalization and to intervene within the home, where they may carry the greatest social capital. There are a variety of appropriate ways to reach out to women and girls who may be less forthcoming about divulging their feelings and opinions about real or perceived grievances. Due diligence is required to understand these parts in each community with all the necessary care and attention around the

philosophy of *Do No Harm* and gender sensitivity. Finally, peacebuilders should strive to integrate gender-sensitive perspective into all facets of their CVE work as well as to analyze their program design and implementation within the broader lens of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda.

For more perspectives on the role of gender in the analysis of violent extremism see:

• "A Gendered Approach to Countering Violent Extremism" by Krista London Couture (Brookings Institute)

• "A Man's World? Exploring the Roles of Women in Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism," edited by Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Sara Zeiger, and Rafia Bhulai (Hedayah and Global Center on Cooperative Security)

• "People, Not Pawns: Women's Participation in Violent Extremism Across MENA" by Laura Sjoberg and Reed Wood (USAID)

• "Uncomfortable Truths, Unconventional Wisdoms: Women's Perspectives on Violent Extremism and Security Interventions" by Sanam Naraghi Anderlini et al. (Women's Alliance for Security Leadership)

• "Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism" by GCTF

• "Women and Violent Radicalization in Jordan" by Search for Common Ground and Al-Hayat Center for Civil Society Development (UN Women)

• On Violent Extremism Podcast: "Voice from the Women's Peacebuilding Movement – Sanam Naraghi-Anderlini"

• On Violent Extremism Podcast: "Voice for Sisters Against Violent Extremism"

2. RELIGION

Within the CVE space, it is a common misconception that greater religiosity is conflated with more radical or violent extremist tendencies. In our experience, we have observed that, in many cases, it is the more seasoned religious scholars and leaders who speak for the peaceful foundations of their religions. In some instances, the version of worship – whether Islam or otherwise – touted by extremist groups represents a narrow, uninformed, and intentionally manipulated religious viewpoint designed to serve political means. In other instances, violent extremist movements are built on a deep religious spirituality, matched with a particularly rigid worldview around the role of religion in governance and the nation-state.

Individuals may be drawn to violent extremist movements for a myriad of reasons. It may be related to their own spiritual search for purity, for discipline, or a desire to be part of something greater than themselves. This means that religious leaders from diverse perspectives can potentially be engaged in initiatives to prevent or transform violent extremism. Peacebuilders should be diligent in their engagement with donors, state governments, and stakeholders to decouple the negative and often misrepresented associations between religion and violent extremism.

A second misconception is that certain sects or schools within a religion are more moderate or conservative. For example, there is often a perception that Sufism is more moderate than Salafism or Wahhabism. Peacebuilders need to be cautious of generalizing and inadvertently demonizing certain religious schools as radical or even violent by nature.

Lastly, there is often a misperception of the role of women in recruitment and uptakes of violent extremism. This feeds into a myth that female religious leaders, Mourchidat in Morocco, or Buatin in Kyrgyzstan, cannot play a role in preventing or transforming violent extremism. In both countries, Search has engaged such female religious leaders in understanding violent extremism and wielding their influence within the community to encourage peaceful manners of addressing grievances. Peacebuilders should avoid overlooking the roles of women religious leaders in preventing or transforming violent extremism, and ought to look to expand their engagement and influence when possible.

For more on this, see Dr. Alex P. Schmid's ["Violent and Non-Violent Extremism: Two Sides of the Same Coin?"](#)

3. EMOTIONAL DYNAMICS

Vulnerabilities to violent extremism are often rooted in strong emotions. As human beings, it is part of our nature to use facts and figures to support our pre-existing worldviews, often framed with a complex set of emotions connected to family, community, identity, and value systems. Instead of looking to identify individuals at risk based on how they perceive the world, we could rather look for those who are experiencing frustration, anger, humiliation, and alienation that can fuel vulnerability.

This is particularly relevant when examining the narratives that violent extremist movements propagate. While they may seem to be strengthened by fact-based stories, their compelling draw may be much more about the overarching emotional attraction. Similarly, by understanding the emotional draw of violent extremist groups in any given context, we can identify the social patterns and challenges that are driving recruitment. This requires listening more than we speak and staying rooted in our relationships in the community.

4. STATE-DRIVEN VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND THE RADICALIZATION OF STATE ACTORS

While much of contemporary literature on CVE highlights non-state violent extremist groups, peacebuilders must recognize that violent extremism may exist amongst a variety of formal institutions, including security forces, militaries, and political parties. Indeed, neglecting the role of states in driving violent extremism is a common critique of the CVE field of practice. As a peacebuilding organization, Search understands the dangers of state institutions that frame violent extremism as an existential threat caused by a specific ethnic, religious, or racial group. Often, these groups are portrayed as unworthy of human rights protections, creating dangerous feedback loops where extremists and the state work in tandem to create more radical and extreme forms of violence – sometimes with mass public support. This can result in a spillover into the political and social spheres, resulting in shuttered NGOs, detained journalists, and the censorship of political movements.

States may even encourage or sponsor perpetrators of violence in order to further their interests, besides engaging in violent extremism themselves. Sometimes, governments will "subcontract" ex-

treme violence through intermediaries, such as how Rwandan soldiers partnered with Hutu militias during the genocide. Recognizing that ineffective state responses can prolong and worsen conflict and hinder a resolution to the threat of violent extremism, peacebuilders must recognize how these trends develop and incorporate a holistic approach to addressing the shifting landscape wrought by violent extremism on societies (for more on this subject, see "Enabling State Responses" below).

OTHER RESOURCES

- "Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism" by Guilain Denoeux and Lynn Carter (USAID)
- On Violent Extremism Podcast: "Voice of the Religious Community - Imam Mohamed Magid"
- On Violent Extremism Podcast: "Voice of a Frontline Researcher & Anthropologist – Scott Atran"
- On Violent Extremism Podcast: "Former Defense Secretary Leon Panetta on Violent Extremism"
- On Violent Extremism Podcast: "Gary Slutkin - Voice of an Infectious Disease Control Specialist"

Prevention

? What does "Prevention" mean as a way of responding to violent extremism?

As peacebuilders, our efforts to prevent violent extremism aim to tackle the contributing factors behind an individual's choice to engage in violent extremism. Prevention efforts should understand the environment which enables violent extremist groups to operate and recruit. They must also tackle the factors which make individuals and groups susceptible to enlisting in such organizations.

In the previous section, various frameworks were summarized which can be used to understand the dynamics of adhesion and support for violent extremism within a community. An important starting point in designing prevention work is to analyze the dividers and connectors in a society.

These dividing lines often reflect vulnerabilities born from exclusion, marginalization, or unhealthy relationships based on fear and prejudice. These vulnerabilities prevent people not only from co-existing in harmony, but in dealing with conflict collaboratively. . Analyzing these potential drivers of conflict is an important starting point in identifying how – from a peacebuilding perspective – we can address the real human needs which enable violent extremist groups to take root. Equally important is identifying the connectors as potential points of resilience which can be potentially activated and strengthened. In fact, just as peacebuilders have long sought to understand pillars or capacities of peace in the midst of violent conflict, we can also use appreciative inquiry approaches to understand why some communities have managed to resist the draw of violent extremist groups, while there has been uptake in support by other, similar communities.

What kinds of changes are possible through prevention work?

Here are four outcome indicators that are relevant to most prevention initiatives:

a) Real or perceived grievances are addressed through nonviolent channels

b) Marginalized groups participate equally in the community

c) Young people express agency and leadership through nonviolent means, and are seen as partners in prevention by adults

d) New relationships are built across dividing lines that debunk stereotypes.

Each of these areas brings an important focus to prevention work, but certain ones are emphasized, depending on the environment.

The opportunity of prevention efforts lies in applying peacebuilding tools to address the number of factors that lead to violent extremism. By creating opportunities for relationship-building, community dialogue, and public engagement, peacebuilders can give anyone living in communities threatened by violent extremism a transformative opportunity through non-violent approaches to addressing their grievances. At a societal level, we can empower key institutions with the skills, knowledge, and capacity to mediate grievances and conflict in a way that gives voice to the needs of all citizens while debunking pernicious myths that allow extremism to take root.

The risks are that a failure to effectively apply preventive peacebuilding strategies will allow violent extremist movements to continue to recruit and grow their influence within the community. When we are unable to tackle the conflicts without communities resorting to violence, it opens the door for violent extremist groups to rally support for their ideologies and tactics.

Through careful analysis of both the individual and societal drivers of violent extremism, inclusive engagement of a broad range of social actors, and by a thoughtful response to widespread grievances, peacebuilders can address the factors behind violent extremism before they take root.

How can practitioners draw on peacebuilding approaches to develop robust prevention programs?

Here are seven guiding principles:

1. DETERMINE WHAT ENABLES THIS ENVIRONMENT, USING BOTH ROOT CAUSE AND CONFLICT SCAN ANALYSIS.

Prevention analysis begins by first identifying the root causes that have allowed violent extremism to take root in a community. Speaking with returnees, fighters, and the families and friends of those who have been recruited helps to identify pathways of recruitment, build a psychosocial profile of someone who is potentially vulnerable to recruitment, and why they are drawn to it. By listening to vulnerable individuals who have not been recruited, we can also build a clearer picture of what drives individuals to feel isolated from their family or community, and thus more likely to be attracted to common recruitment tactics of violent extremist movements.

Second, peacebuilders can use conflict scan methods to understand the prevention landscape at a societal level. Fleshing out the role of state agencies, religious groups, community leaders, the media, civil society organizations (CSOs) including women and youth groups, and other influential institutions builds a more nuanced image of what factors shape the conflict environment. Looking at community level factors such as grievances, dividers and connectors, and social pressures also helps to define strategy and messaging in prevention programs.

While it can be extremely difficult to identify all causal factors and mechanisms, together, these two analytical approaches paint a more complete picture of the enabling factors for violent extremism at the micro and macro level. In Kyrgyzstan, Search used this combined analysis through key informant interviews, a literature review, and community assessments to identify Kyrgyz migrant workers who left to work in Russia as a high-risk group for recruitment to fight in the Middle East. This finding shifted previous assumptions that religiously conservative Uzbek groups were the most at-risk for recruitment by violent extremist organizations.

Search staff also uncovered that the official claims that violent recruitment of Kyrgyz citizens had ended were inaccurate and that families were instead under-reporting the recruitment of individuals to avoid stigma and shame. Together, these efforts helped peacebuilders build and sustain more effective early detection and prevention programs.

2. SEEK TO UNDERSTAND NOT ONLY WHY PEOPLE *JOIN* VIOLENT EXTREMIST MOVEMENTS, BUT ALSO WHY THEY CHOOSE *NOT* TO.

As peacebuilders, we know from experience that the vast majority of citizens do not support or engage in violence. Even in communities plagued by violent extremism, this remains true. Only a small minority of people – many of whom feel strongly about the same real or perceived grievances – make the choice to engage in violent extremism.

Just as conflict analysts strive to understand not only the dividers but also the connectors in societies, peacebuilders seeking to understand the drivers and enablers of violent extremism can understand the factors of resilience by seeking to understand why communities resist or reject violent extremism. For example, after it was discovered from which neighborhoods in Brussels the violent extremists who had carried out attacks had been living, peacebuilders undertook research in that same neighborhoods. One of their methods was simply having conversations with people in the community to gain insight into why other second-generation immigrants, living in the same neighborhood, facing the same marginalization, had resisted the potential allure of extremism.

This approach aligns with several best practices of peacebuilding throughout the decades, where a "whole of society" approach to strengthening resilience, trust and inclusion can be reinforced to mitigate the risk of violence being seen as the only alternative.

3. UNDERSTAND THE CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION AND INFLUENCE IN THE COMMUNITY.

Mapping channels of communication and influence within communities can enable peacebuilders to understand both the reach and resonance of various narratives and perspectives. Channels of communication can range from social media and formal journalism to youth organizations, coffee shop chat, and social or religious centers. In volatile contexts, violent extremists will often leverage these channels to establish their presence, undermine the credibility of peaceful actors, and bring in new members. Through mapping these channels, peacebuilders can understand not only how violent extremist groups are communicating, but also how other communicators and advocates are reaching the same target groups. This opens up opportunities to celebrate communicators with spheres of influence in these communities and amplify the voices of those who are tackling similar grievances or speaking to similar needs through non-violent means.

In the eastern regions of Democratic Republic of Congo, as part of programming to address sexual and gender-based violence, Search noticed that a comprehensive radio campaign and outreach from human rights lawyers to address these issues had proven ineffective. The assumptions behind the campaigns did not resonate with the target audience. Search mapped out social norms and social roles to unpack the extremist belief that women are not equal to men and that abuse of women was acceptable. This led us to learn that local DJs, pastors, and traditional chiefs were key influencers who served as echo chambers to normalize violent behavior toward women. As a result, Search was able to design programs that engaged these influencers more effectively.

In Northern Morocco, research showed that mothers were amongst the most powerful forces in influencing whether their sons and husbands would leave the country to fight for violent extremist groups in the Middle East. Search therefore organized a series of women-led dialogue caravans to discuss the problem of violent extremism within their communities. Rather than direct messaging, the goal was for women to hold a convening space for dialogue among imams, youth, and men in the community. In this way, Search empowered women to use their familial roles to promote frank discussions about violent extremism and its effects on family and community.

4. COORDINATE AND SHARE INFORMATION WITH OTHER ACTORS WORKING IN PREVENTION.

Often, prevention groups work in silos and avoid information-sharing, negatively shaping their perspective about the causes and nature of violent extremism in their communities. This can be especially true for state agencies with narrow mandates which are specifically focused on security threats or criminal activity. These agencies often use tools which assess overt security threats but may overlook more long-standing causes and dynamics favoring violent extremism, such as a breakdown of social fabric, demographic shifts, or a lack of economic opportunity. Similarly, their responses to these threats often deploy the tools that are most familiar to them, such as surveillance, arrests, or other securitized responses. By working in tandem to share an analysis of the drivers behind violent extremism, and sharing this analysis with state security actors, peacebuilders can pave the way for a more holistic approach to prevention.

These shared perspectives can also inform other international actors, multilateral organizations, UN agencies, researchers, global forums, relevant think tanks, as well as other international organizations in the development and humanitarian space.

For example, in Nigeria, the Search team forged relationships of trust between security forces and civil society actors. This ensured that an ongoing dialogue would gradually build a shared understanding of the security threats posed by violent extremist groups. These conversations also enabled the state and non-state actors to understand each institution's role in both driving and preventing violent conflict.

In Kyrgyzstan, the Search team found that by engaging broadly with independent experts, global practitioners, and religious communities, they could bring together a wide range of actors in the prevention space to reach a shared understanding of the problem, while driving joint approaches for response.

5. SEEK TO UNDERSTAND DEEPER HUMAN NEEDS RELATED TO AGENCY, IDENTITY, AND CONNECTION.

Social marginalization, joblessness, and a lack of basic food, shelter, and security can drive support for extremist movements, particularly when the scarcity is, or is perceived, to be unjustly distributed. Recognizing these drivers should not override the need to satisfy many other less material needs. These include universal human desires, such as self-esteem, belonging, and a sense of empowerment through being part of something larger than oneself.

Even in the poorest communities, successful programs can enable agency amongst young people, while incentivizing institutions to mediate rather than ignore or aggravate conflict. In northern Nigeria, for example, Search's work of convening "peace architecture" meetings with diverse state and non-state stakeholders has reinvigorated people's sense of agency, countering the sense of powerlessness that many can feel in such resource-scarce environments.

6. SEE RELIGION AS PART OF THE SOLUTION, RATHER THAN THE PROBLEM.

Throughout history, insurgent, separatist, and liberation groups have sought to profit from weak governments and fragile environments by exploiting people's sense of grievance – real or perceived – to mobilize them toward violence. Targeted individuals see violent extremism as a means to better meet their needs based on their lived experiences. By applying a peacebuilding lens, we see that it is not ideology that makes individuals vulnerable to extremist recruitment, but a desire to meet deeper personal needs around visibility, empowerment, dignity and identity.

Peacebuilders also understand that it is not the content of religious teachings that radicalize people, but rather offering aggrieved individuals a religious framework through which to understand and redress their grievances. To prevent people from choosing violence, we work to understand how the strength and weaknesses of their relationships with others might cause them to search for identity, dignity, recognition, and heroism through violent activity.

In Diffa in the southeast of Niger bordering Nigeria, Search observed that young people rarely joined Boko Haram because of the religious ideology underpinning the movement. Rather, it was due to the longing for the material rewards and associated status, including cash and a motorcycle, that Boko Haram recruits were receiving. When Boko Haram fighters from Niger began to flee and return to Niger, local authorities sought to work with religious leaders so that the principles of Islam could help with their rehabilitation.

Similarly in northern Nigeria, Search has observed that often times those most vulnerable to recruitment to Boko Haram are young people who are in poorly-resourced religious boarding schools far from their families. They have viewed Boko Haram as better able to satisfy their livelihood and protection needs, while giving them a sense of strength and purpose.

In Kyrgyzstan, the psychosocial profiles of returned fighters showed that many of them were not initially religious, but became so when faced with socioeconomic or sociocultural vulnerabilities. The recruitment leaders who drew them into violent activities were not the leading muftis or *ulemas* in the community, but rather independent religious figures or extremist leaders who were not connected with the mainstream religious community.

7.

BE ATTENTIVE TO RADICALIZATION AND MOBILIZATION RISKS PRESENT IN REFUGEE COMMUNITIES.

Search's experience in war and post-war conflicts has shown us the potential for radicalization among some internally-displaced or refugee populations. This risk is heightened when they are forced to flee in ethnically or religiously homogenous groups, towards host communities that represent the "other."

Similarly, host communities are vulnerable to forming stereotypes and prejudices when faced with an influx of refugees, which can serve to radicalize viewpoints within the host community. When peacebuilders recognize this dynamic, initiatives can seek to strengthen open and transparent communication channels within and between these groups. These efforts can be focused on dispelling rumors, collaborative problem-solving, and encouraging them to recognize the humanity of the "other."

In Lebanon, Search has worked to bring together Syrian refugees and Lebanese host community members as a way of mitigating the sense of isolation, animosity, fear, and overstretch of public resources that has grown in recent years. Such polarization and radicalization can occur both within host and refugee communities, as both are vulnerable to manipulation through the propagation of rumors and stereotypes.

In the Central African Republic, Search faced an environment where violence and extremist recruitment was rampant. Through targeted programs, Search enabled people to move away from extreme viewpoints by finding moments of safety where they could bring Muslims and Christians together for conversations around their shared needs, allowing them to see one another as people. Staff also produced and screened a film about the power of forgiveness and dialogue that featured former fighters.

OTHER RESOURCES

- "UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism"

- "Thinking Outside the Box: Exploring the Critical Roles of Sports, Arts, and Culture in Preventing Violent Extremism" by Hedayah and the Global Center on Cooperative Security

- On Violent Extremism Podcast: "Voice of a Practitioner in Pakistan – Mossarat Qadeem"

Enabling State Responses

? **What does "enabling state responses" mean as a way of responding to violent extremism?**

Because violent extremists pose a security threat, it is naturally, yet not exclusively, the responsibility of the state to respond to ensure the safety of its citizens. This involves the mobilization of the security forces, intelligence agencies, prison, correctional services, and overall law enforcement organizations.

The opportunity is to enable state responses that tackle the root causes of violent extremism, to create societal buy-in across diverse stakeholders toward a common goal, and to demonstrate respect for both the rule of law and the equality of all citizens' in the process. State-led initiatives have the power to deploy a diversity of tactics, beyond the pure, hard-force security tactics of arrests, interrogation, and imprisonment to support healthy and resilient societies.

The risk is that state responses, when emphasizing hard-force approaches, can abuse human rights, inappropriately profile certain communities, and alienate those who otherwise could be allies to state-led efforts. This risk is often accentuated when human rights organizations do not collaborate well with security agencies and instead develop a competitive and adversarial relationship with these bodies.

By building a sense of shared interest, open dialogue, and a complementary approach among security agencies, civil society groups, the media, and the community at large, peacebuilders can empower CVE efforts to be holistic and effective. There are numerous examples of effective state response, including the Aarhus Model, named after an initiative in Denmark which is accredited for reducing the number of citizens of immigrant origin deciding to become foreign fighters with violent extremist groups.

This model involves both prevention and cure, working with an extensive network, including parents, social workers, teachers, youth club workers, outreach workers, and the police. Each member of the network may make it known if a young person is being radicalized. Individual counseling is provided for people who intend to travel to Syria and Iraq, and, in some cases, a mentor is assigned. Parents of these people also take part in self-help groups. These collaborative networks have proven effective in preventing some individuals from engaging in violent extremism and offer insights on a multi-faceted approach.

How can peacebuilders build effective collaboration between state and non-state actors?

Here are six guiding principles:

1. IDENTIFY, RESPECT, AND SPEAK TO THE NEED OF EACH STATE SECURITY AGENCY PARTNER.

Within prison services, legal offices, or counterterrorism units, the entry point for building collaborative relationships starts with recognizing the needs of each government partner. These agencies are accountable to ministries, parliaments, and the public, and also have both individual and institutional reputations at stake. When we enable them to feel more effective through improved tactics and dialogue with non-state actors, their openness to collaboration will grow. Remember that these agencies often face the brunt of adversarial media coverage or finger-pointing by human rights and other civil society organizations. The peacebuilders' approach to these agencies recognizes their needs and seeks to build a partnership towards serving those goals.

For example, in Indonesia, reintegrating offenders required collaboration between corrections officers, the National Bureau of Counterterrorism, the police task force, and CSO partners. Initially, Search for Common Ground found that state agencies at the national and local levels had very different ways of working, including local-level ministry officials. Search also had to learn better tactics for engaging national-level state actors in the process of empowering parole officers to coordinate reintegration. To build credibility and buy-in, Search Indonesia staff worked to clarify roles and expectations among stakeholders at the national and local levels. Over time, the groups worked together to determine the needs of prisoners at each stage of the rehabilitation process and what each group could bring in a complementary fashion.

2. IDENTIFY, RESPECT, AND SPEAK TO THE NEEDS OF THE VARIOUS NON-STATE ACTORS WHO ARE INVOLVED IN RESPONDING TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM.

Civil society organizations have often been highly critical of state-led responses to violent extremism. At times, they have mobilized to denounce human rights abuses or unfair profiling of certain ethnic or religious groups. These civil society groups have clear constituencies, and in seeking to facilitate a relationship between them and state-led agencies, it is essential to first recognize and respect the needs of these civil society actors. Only when they see that shifting their relationship with state agencies towards greater collaboration will be in their interest, will they agree to engage in the process.

In Indonesia, Search for Common Ground created and chaired a working group that brought together various stakeholders working in the broader CVE sphere. In creating this group, Search not only wanted to bring together legal, human rights, and secular-oriented groups, but also the broad network of tens of thousands of Islamic boarding schools that played an important role in the country.

3. BUILD TRUST GRADUALLY AMONG STAKEHOLDERS, USING BOTH INFORMAL AND FORMAL INITIATIVES.

As peacebuilders, we know that trust deficits between state and non-state stakeholders can create hesitation for formal and/or public engagement, particularly if they have an adversarial relationship. Stakeholders may also not see it as in their interest to publicly collaborate with other actors in the process, at least initially. Therefore, forcing a formal process too early can also harm the credibility of each actor among their constituents and within the community. Recognize that trust-building can additionally be achieved through informal channels. Remember that saving face is an important cultural consideration, both for high-profile civil society groups as well as those in the government who have a public image to manage.

In Indonesia, Search led an initiative to build collaboration between the country's leading counter-terror force, Densus 88, and the most prominent human rights groups. This collaboration benefited from an extended period of informal engagement. The purpose of the collaboration was to create a dialogue around how counterterrorism operations could be done in a way that respects human rights and avoids triggering further support for violent extremist movements. In facilitating this process, it was important that Search avoided making either Densus 88 or the civil society partners that had been brought in feel exposed. Each group needed to feel in control and in agreement throughout the process so that they could frame their engagement appropriately for both their own constituents and the general public. To support such a process, Search undertook a number of informal, backchannel discussions to ensure that each side understood why they were being encouraged to meet with one another—entities they had previously viewed with trepidation and suspicion. This reduced the stakes for each side while allowing trust to grow and the identification potential avenues for collaboration to occur.

4. ENGAGE A WIDE SPECTRUM OF GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS, INCLUDING RELIGIOUS GROUPS.

The durability of a peacebuilding process depends on ownership and buy-in of all who have a stake in the problem and its eventual solution. While some CSOs may have taken a strong (and sometimes public) stance, it is valuable to expand the civil society stakeholders beyond the most well-known to include diverse perspectives. By enabling civil society actors to discover shared interests amongst themselves, across dividing lines such as secular-religious, or across ethnic or geographic lines, this can strengthen the potential for collaboration with state actors.

In Morocco, Search collaborated with the Rabita, a group of Islamic scholars with a mandate from His Majesty the King of Morocco to articulate and translate the work of senior Islamic scholars down to the tens of thousands of imams operating mosques at the community level. This collaboration brought imams into ongoing programs working on the disengagement of violent extremists in prisons. The Rabita also became a core part of an initiative that works with youth councils and organizations to shift the narrative around religion and violent extremism.

5. REMAIN IMPARTIAL AND INCLUSIVE THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS.

As a peacebuilder, you must recognize inherent biases within yourself or your organization that may appear partial. Think through what risks there might be in sharing or gathering sensitive information. Remember that your actions may be ill-perceived or misunderstood and that the perception of impartiality by all stakeholders will be a critical key to your ability to strengthen collaborative relationships.

In Kyrgyzstan, Search created the first ever multi-stakeholder platform for countering violent extremism in the country. Peacebuilding staff brought together high-level actors from several government ministries, security and intelligence agencies, religious institutions, academia, and civil society to work to create trust at each step in the process. It was especially important for each actor to feel that Search understood their unique concerns and ideas to keep them on board. Finally, Search had to delicately balance these individual relationships with an awareness that once all groups were brought together, they would realize that Search had been cultivating similarly close relationships with everyone else. In this case, maintaining impartiality meant focusing on how to structure and guide the process (setting the agenda, ensuring all parties are heard, and creating transparency throughout) but also maintaining caution about how developed relationships with each actor would affect overall perceptions of impartiality.

6. CONTRARY TO OTHER PEACEBUILDING ACTIVITIES, VISIBILITY AND PUBLICITY MUST BE TAILORED TO AVOID RISKS TO THE STAKEHOLDERS.

It is common for peacebuilders to communicate publicly when they reach important milestones. Engaging state actors requires a more sensitive approach. In some instances, it best serves our goal to enable parties to work discreetly together and to contribute to a joint policy, program, or initiative without publicity. Be sensitive to security agencies' need for ownership over the process, their public reputation, and lines of accountability. Similarly, some CSOs may face resistance from their constituencies if they are perceived as working too closely with certain security agencies. It behooves peacebuilders to consult with them about how and when to use publicity. Collaboration with the media also needs to be grounded in a shared interest with journalists about how CVE efforts are portrayed, as coverage can both help and hinder efforts.

Handling publicity delicately also builds trust in the collaboration process. In Northeastern Nigeria, Search trained and brought together various community leaders to serve as focal points in a violence early warning program. The purpose was for participants to collect and share information that would eventually reach security forces who could respond in the interest of public safety. Search staff understood that this type of program requires sensitivity to ensure that focal points would not become targets for retaliation. As a result, they were mindful in mitigating the risks of danger, both physical and reputational, in how and whether they announced their activities. Search avoided radio announcements, a public launch, and other common peacebuilding outreach tactics. They also sought to clarify to stakeholders that the platform they had created was to remain confidential, and successful prevention efforts would remain private unless deemed appropriate to share publically.

UN Photo - Amanda Voisard

OTHER RESOURCES

- "Guidelines and Good Practices for Developing National CVE Strategies" by Hedayah

- "Countering Violent Extremism and Development Assistance: Identifying Synergies, Obstacles, and Opportunities" by Eelco Kessels and Christina Nemr (Global Center on Cooperative Security)

- "Preventing and Responding to Violent Extremism in Africa: A Developmental Approach" by UNDP

- "Preventing Violent Extremism through Promoting Inclusive Development, Tolerance and Respect for Diversity" by UNDP

- "Building Inclusive Societies and Sustaining Peace through Democratic Governance and Conflict Prevention" by UNDP

- "Preventing Violent Extremism through Inclusive Development and the Promotion of Tolerance and Respect for Diversity" by UNDP

- On Violent Extremism Podcast: "Voice of a Practitioner – Rashad Ali"

- On Violent Extremism Podcast: "Voice of an Advocate – Rabia Chaudry"

Narratives

? What are narratives in the context of CVE?

Narratives are a set of ideas, facts, perspectives, and experiences that inform the way an individual or group perceives their place in the world around them. They often blend elements of historical truth with constructed storylines and can resonate deeply with people's sense of self and how they make sense of events in their own lives. As peacebuilders, we understand narratives can be positive or negative and function as a natural part of the human experience.

Within a society, it is common for different social groups to have dissonant narratives. For example, one group's national liberator may be perceived as an oppressor by another. Grievances, both real and perceived, often play a major role. Given their dependence on perception, information, and new experiences, they are constantly shifting how they are constructed and used. Rather than the specific context of a narrative, it is the way that narratives are constructed that mobilizes people to create real or imagined communities.

? How do narratives function in the space of CVE?

People use narratives to identify friends and enemies and to establish their alignment across divisive issues and social conflicts. In this way, narratives are often used by extremist groups to seed resentment, disconnection, and violence in order to gain sympathy and draw in new members. Narratives are used to dehumanize opponents and justify brutality against them. Extremist groups also rely on propaganda and visceral images of their activities to wield influence in both their target community and around the world. Examining these narratives is therefore an essential component of CVE efforts.

The media plays an especially important role in constructing popular narratives. Stories, photographs, and headlines shape what people believe and therefore, what ideas they buy into and whom or what they support. They can also be exceedingly influential in how the public views different sides of conflict.

How can peacebuilders work within the narrative space to prevent or transform violent extremism?

Our work seeks not to deconstruct the facts, values, and storylines perpetuated by violent extremist groups, but instead to create new perspectives and possibilities around acting on those beliefs that instead favor dialogue and acceptance. These initiatives can enable people to feel empowered and dignified in responding to their grievances through non-violent means.

In exploring narratives, **the opportunity** lies in amplifying credible voices in a community that reinforce inclusive values and highlight peaceful avenues for change. By drawing from the innovative use of media, peer-to-peer outreach, and personal interaction, we can build increasingly resilient and pluralistic societies that reject violence.

The risk is potentially seeding disconnect and mistrust in our relationship with vulnerable communities by targeting their deeply held beliefs and values through counter-messaging. Our selection of voices and role models to empower must remain ideologically neutral and grounded in providing positive means to redress grievances, or we may unintentionally exacerbate conflict, lose credibility, or be dismissed as mere propaganda.

Here are four guiding principles for engaging with narratives:

1. AMPLIFY NARRATIVES THAT REINFORCE THE POWER OF EMOTION AND HUMAN CONNECTION.

As peacebuilders, we have learned that counter-messaging can be ineffective challenging long-standing and sincere beliefs about history, relationships, and personal identity. Furthermore, extremist narratives are often based on feelings of marginalization or exploitation born of very real and very upsetting human experiences.

Instead of trying to change minds through new information, our goal is to rejuvenate an individual's sense of emotional engagement and self-worth that allows participants to empathize and identify with their broader society over isolated extremists. First, we can elevate the voices of regular citizens looking to address grievances through peaceful and constructive means. We can also highlight social role models that debunk stereotypes and constructively drain grievances of their narrative pull. Finally, we can use our work with the media to promote popular dialogue that encourages collaboration and empathy.

In Morocco, for example, Search observed three stages of narrative-based recruitment specifically targeted at youth. In the initial stage, extremist groups generate narratives that are similar to peacebuilding narratives and focus on ideas of friendship, brotherhood, and family within their ranks. Once youth have achieved some level of buy-in, recruiters employ a second stage focusing on philosophical discussions about the relative value of reason and emotion that is intended to elevate the power of reasoning and create distance between a recruit and their emotional bonds with family and community. Finally, once youth accept new narratives and identities grounded in extremist rationalism, they become emboldened to undertake gruesome acts that highlight their rejection

of emotion using narratives of persecution and the meting out of punishment to remedy injustice.

From a peacebuilding perspective, the time between the first and second stages of recruitment can be the most useful entry point. We can amplify messages imbued with emotions, which highlight the value and potential of individuals, rather than framing targets of radicalization as marginalized or victims. These complimentary narratives can also provide people with dreams that they see as achievable for themselves and their own future. Within our own communication as peacebuilding organizations, it is also important to refer to vulnerable groups using language that highlight their value and importance rather than framing these groups as hapless targets or beneficiaries of programming.

Above all, face-to-face, personal interaction is key to countering recruitment or pulling people back from extremist groups. Evidence has shown that for groups like Al Qaeda and ISIS/ISIL, members do not join merely because of videos and online propaganda, but because of inter-personal connections built with recruiters over time. Peacebuilders can rely on their deep community relationships and embedded local presence to reach vulnerable individuals in a personalized manner that builds trust and shows individuals that they are valued, included, and have a rightful place at home. By creating a sense of fellowship, family, and respect at the community level, we can weaken the appeal of joining a violent extremist movement.

2. FOCUS ON HOW NARRATIVES ARE CONSTRUCTED AND SHARED RATHER THAN THEIR CONTENT.

Peacebuilders should also think carefully about their use of media outlets, message frequency, and the messenger they choose to deploy. In our increasingly pluralistic world, violent extremists, civil society, and governments alike use social media, SMS, radio, television, and other methods to spread both a greater number and diversity of voices related to conflict. As peacebuilders, we can use these same channels to identify credible voices at the community level who can reach out to vulnerable individuals being drawn or recruited into extremism.

In Myanmar, for example, Search for Common Ground conducted a recent study on the triggers of violence in Buddhist extremism. Their approach focused on understanding the flow of information and key influencers within two specific communities rather than the specific messages of anti-Muslim bigotry. This allowed peacebuilders to understand the source of prejudices and stereotypes that were emerging and confirmed that when individuals had a personal encounter with someone they believed was the enemy, it was effective at shifting their perspective. These insights helped influence the design of peacebuilding efforts bringing Buddhist and Muslim communities together.

While discussions around narratives often refer to media and communication technology, peacebuilders understand that all areas of our work are an opportunity to work on narratives. Face-to-face conversations can be a particularly powerful channel for engagement, as they reinforce relationships, draw on emotion, and personalize new experiences. For example, peacebuilders can engage community leaders and role models to draw potential recruits away from the social media and online messaging preferred by extremist groups and into tangible, in-person relationships. By

thoughtfully and intentionally crafting a narrative space around dividing lines and social connectors, peacebuilders can speak to the needs of vulnerable groups and offer tangible, credible alternatives to violence.

In Burundi, Search often organized solidarity events between Hutus and Tutsis. The purpose was to counteract the common media discourse that mutually demonized each group, who lived largely in separate ethnic enclaves. This approach complemented existing radio deradicalization programs by giving people the opportunity to know one another face-to-face. In this way, Search took narratives out of an exclusively media-oriented space and gave community members the opportunity to shape their own views and experiences in engaging with the opposite group.

Similarly, in northern Kyrgyzstan, Search organized a community fair for *boorsok*, a local fried food dish used to decorate tables. They invited local youth, journalists, *atyncha* (religious women), imams, and police officers to participate. At the event, groups that often struggled to interact peacefully shared a day of fun and socializing while tasting and judging each submission.

3. CHOOSE CREDIBLE, RESONANT MESSENGERS.

Choosing credible messengers is perhaps the most crucial strategy in the narrative space. We understand that as peacebuilders, our role is to listen to local communities and find opportunities to reinforce healthy relationships and non-violent avenues for change. Given the daily bombardment of messages that citizens receive through peer-to-peer interaction and media (including social media) channels on a daily basis, breaking through the noise requires a careful selection of voices that will be perceived as compelling in all areas of our programming. Careful selection of messengers also ensures that our work is emotionally engaging and deeply rooted in on-the-ground work with the communities we are hoping to engage with.

In Indonesia, Search's worked with ten Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) in areas of the country where there had been attacks or suspected activity of violent extremist groups. The *pesantren* were popularly perceived as harboring terrorists and being behind intolerant forms of Islam as guilty for the attacks. To address this, Search undertook several levels of programming that enabled the young *pesantren* students to explore themes of identity, tolerance, and diversity. These included a curriculum-driven comic book series, founding community radio stations within the schools and training students to be broadcast journalists, and teaching students documentary filmmaking. Not only did this directly engage with these youth, but such programming challenged outside perceptions regarding these young *pesantren* students.

The films were particularly powerful. Students explored intimate topics around their identity, such as how to be a punk rocker and a Qur'anic student at the same time, or a Balinese dancer while still a Muslim. They ventured out of their comfort zones with the aid of the camera, learning about other religions and opening up with sensitive conversations around the perceptions of terrorism and their schools. The films were screened and discussed at both the community and national level, allowing the *pesantren* students themselves to be the voice of tolerance and dialogue.

When choosing role models and community leaders to highlight through our programs, it is also important that we give visibility to a diverse range of ideological viewpoints. This approach not only builds a culture of tolerance and dialogue but highlights that both hardline and moderate individuals can benefit from engaging each other peacefully. Finally, amplifying diverse perspectives preserves our credibility as impartial peacebuilders and allows us to continue engaging groups across the ideological spectrum.

Choosing appropriate messengers can be particularly challenging in conflict contexts. Peacebuilders must choose whether and how to highlight former fighters, religious leaders, political figures, activists, and victims—all of whom can contribute to or detract from peace efforts in different contexts.

Amplifying the voices of ex-prisoners, for example, can give them a platform to expand or combat ongoing recruitment to violent organizations depending on the context. In Nepal, Search hired a former nationalist militant after a careful, informed decision to provide outreach to active members of armed groups. He was able to use the credibility and relationships he had built before defecting to encourage other young fighters to choose peace. The sincerity of this individual's personal transformation was essential to the success of his outreach and rewarded Search's sensitive selection effort. Similarly, outreach from families and loved ones can leverage the emotional connection and credibility between them to encourage peace and disengagement. In Colombia, for example, radio broadcasts of family messages reaching out to individual members of the FARC helped drive defection around holiday periods.

Caution is similarly vital when contemplating the use of victim narratives. In some environments, employing a victim-centered approach is fundamental to building empathy and breaking the narratives that justify violent extremist behavior. The narratives of victims can also be powerful in highlighting examples of people who transcend their suffering and publicly recognize the humanity of their perpetrators, as occurred around South Africa's famous Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In other instances, particularly where the notion of victimhood is deeply engrained into local culture, victim narratives can also be used to mobilize others into violence and justify continued cycles of violence. Beware of the sensitivity around these particular voices of victims.

4. ENGAGE AND WORK WITH PROFESSIONAL MEDIA OUTLETS TO EQUIP THEM WITH SKILLS IN COMMON GROUND JOURNALISM.

When journalists themselves are not convinced of the value and feasibility of peaceful solutions, they can prove harmful to the broader peacebuilding process. Alternatively, when journalists are empowered with the skills and understanding to transform conflict through their work, they can use their platforms to challenge violent narratives and create a space for peaceful dialogue.

Our work on Common Ground journalism is founded on two principles of journalism. First, that journalists should be aware that when they cover incendiary topics like extremist attacks, the details of the event are not the only important news and their portrayal of the event can either generate or alleviate animosity toward the communities involved. Second, journalists have an obligation when

covering conflict and extremism to widen their framework for understanding the problem in order to highlight where people are productively working together across dividing lines, rather than simply those who do so violently. This avoids exclusively covering grievances that legitimize the means that extremists use for recruiting.

Similar to our work at the community level, our work with journalists should rely on using local influencers and thought leaders to initiate discussions about peace and conflict issues in a way that is both trusted and organic. Religious leaders, for example, can play a helpful role in listening to journalists' personal grievances, acknowledging their own viewpoints, and opening discussion about possibilities for productive steps forward.

Common Ground journalism magnifies diverse voices from the ground up without stigmatizing different groups with different labels such as "radical" or "moderate." This in turn allows citizens to feel that they have a regular, peaceful, and legitimized outlet for discussion and acknowledgment of their grievances. It also creates an environment where people feel comfortable reflecting on different viewpoints while touching upon underlying grievances and still offering respect to those with extremist views.

For example, Search's work with journalists in northern Nigeria helped to reshape discussions to highlight not only the devastation caused by Boko Haram but also local initiatives of people working to better their own lives after escaping or recovering from Boko Haram. Similarly, the HEROES program in Burundi sought to address the widely held belief that other people were responsible for each community's suffering. For five years, Search produced radio shows every week that told the story of someone whose life was saved by someone from the other ethnic group. The program helped debunk stereotypes and prejudices that enabled extremist views to take hold in each community.

OTHER RESOURCES

• "The Counter-Narrative Handbook" by Henry Tuck and Tanya Silverman (Institute for Strategic Dialogue)

• "Developing Effective Counter-Narrative Frameworks for Countering Violent Extremism" by Hedayah and ICCT

• "The Impact of Counter-Narratives" by Tanya Silverman et al. (Institute for Strategic Dialogue and Against Violent Extremism)

• "Countering Violent Extremism Through Media and Communication Strategies: A Review of the Evidence" by Kate Ferguson (Partnership for Conflict, Crime and Security Research)

Working with Young People

Today's generation of young people is the largest generation the world has ever seen. One out of every 6 people worldwide is aged between 15 to 24 years and the median age of the global population was 29.6 years of age in 2015. Over 600 million young people live in conflict and fragile environments, where often the percentage of young people is even higher.

The majority of Boko Haram fighters are teenagers, the typical ISIS recruit is around 26 years old, and most Jemaah Islamiyah members are young and male. Real or perceived disengagement and marginalization leaves young people vulnerable to recruitment. Other young people join violent extremist groups because they see the underlying extremist narratives as the best way to rectify real and/or perceived injustice, or to feel part of something larger than themselves. Some feel coerced to use violence because of manipulation or fear.

The large youth population combined with their visible involvement in violent extremism has led many to see young people as a threat. But research shows that youth who participate actively in violence are a minority, while the majority of youth – despite the injustices, deprivations and abuse they confront daily, particularly in conflict contexts – are not violent and do not participate in violence. Too often efforts around violent extremism seek to understand solely the reasons why young people support or join these movements, rather than learning about why it is that they are indifferent, resisting, or actively seeking to address the factors favoring violent extremism in their communities.

Young women and young men have historically been dissatisfied with how their elders have tackled grievances. They have driven forward social movements which advocate what seem to be radical ideas and approaches to long-standing social and political injustice. This 'radicalism', in itself, is not the problem. The challenge is how to translate these radical ideas into positive, collaborative and non-violent action which does not rely upon violent and exclusionary ideologies and tactics to be achieved.

In transforming violent extremism, youth engagement is paramount. But rather than considering young people as either perpetrators or victims, young people must be engaged in programming as key partners in preventing

violence and promoting peace.. This means that their engagement is active through all stages of programming: analysis, design, implementation, learning and monitoring, and developing recommendations for the future based on lessons learned. This is now recognized best practice in peacebuilding work, and is applicable to the challenges of violent extremism as well.

Over the last 10 years, an architecture has been laid out for this type of youth engagement. This includes the *Guiding Principles on Youth Participation in Peacebuilding* to the first *Global Forum on Youth, Peace, and Security* that produced the *Amman Declaration on Youth, Peace, and Security (calling for a global policy framework on youth as partners in peace and security)*, the *Youth Action Agenda to Counter Violent Extremism and Promote Peace (the first policy document where young people articulated what violent extremism means to them, what they are doing to address it in their communities and ways key stakeholders and engage young people as partners to expand and strengthen prevention efforts).* These and other efforts led to the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopting [Resolution 2250](#) on Youth, Peace and Security. This Resolution calls of governments, international actors and civil society to invest and engage this youthful majority as partners in peace

As peacebuilders, how do we engage young people in transforming violent extremism?

Here are five guiding principles:

1. DON'T SEE THEM ONLY AS VICTIMS OR PERPETRATORS, BUT RATHER AS PARTNERS FOR CONSTRUCTIVE CHANGE

In developing strategies and policies, avoid the conceptual trap that youth only constitute a risk factor. Programs with this underlying assumption are characterized by fomenting a sense of dependency, disempowerment and entitlement.

Young people have a unique and critical perspective on violent extremism, based on their understanding of what drives recruitment at the community level and the programs and policy necessary to address it. Their proximity to local realities, systemic grievances, and messaging that may lead to radicalization result in unique insight on how to effectively de-radicalize those who have chosen to join extremist groups.

In Tunisia, the youth-led association Tunisians Against Terrorism worked with the Ministries of Youth, Education and Interior, as well as members of the National Assembly, to develop a curriculum for Tunisia including critical thinking skills, analysis and peaceful tenets of Islam. The association also worked on community policing initiatives including training of police officers.

In Cameroon, the Association of Dynamic Young People in the north of the country held dialogue sessions in 47 municipalities of the country most affected by Boko Haram. These sessions brought together local government representatives, security forces, religious leaders and other youth organizations to build confidence amongst these stakeholders and reflect inclusively on a collective

response. The Association also ran awareness campaigns aimed at communities vulnerable to recruitment as well as trainings to promote economic opportunities for young people.

In Bangladesh, the youth-led MOVE Foundation developed the first campaign on constructive narratives, in consultation with faith leaders and security experts and vetted by a diversity of youth, government, and law enforcement. Opposing political parties, including the ruling party and top Islamic parties in Bangladesh, also publicly endorsed the campaign.

2. FACILITATE COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIP ACROSS DIVIDING LINES.

Systemic mistrust remains one of the most significant impediments to increased inclusion of young people in CVE programs. Tension, rather than trust, often characterizes the relationship between government and security forces and young people. Within government, a closed-door approach to security matters and the perception that youth are either troublemakers or are not credible or qualified counterparts may discourage otherwise champions from pushing for greater youth cooperation and partnership. In parallel, youth are wary of ulterior motives behind government engagement, particularly in environments with a history of domestic spying.

Youth organizations working with government may face backlash or a loss of credibility within their own communities if cooperation is perceived as government affiliation or undue influence over their priorities and objectives. In parallel, such dynamics of mistrust also discourage otherwise champions from within government from pushing for greater youth cooperation and partnership.

Many governments and their ministries continue to keep decision-making around VE closed to youth, despite young people's insight into recruitment and the mechanisms by which de-radicalization might be most effective, lasting, and respective of human rights. This may be the result of unwillingness or uncertainty on how to engage youth. Peacebuilders can enable governments at the local and national level to create informal and formal channels for collaboration and coordination with youth on specific issues, such as: education, entrepreneurship and job creation, social cohesion, rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners or ex-combatants, countering extremist messaging, and implementation of national laws against terrorism.

Channels for input, collaboration, and partnership should be reliable, equitable, and transparent, and could be pursued through:

- Youth advisory boards at the local level
- Offices within municipal bodies, public administration, and school associations designated for youth engagement and collaboration across sectors
- Outreach by and access to representatives of relevant ministries and government agencies
- Youth Parliaments at the national level
- Funding mechanisms supportive of youth-led programs

This will increase the relevance of P/CVE policies and programs and ensure that partnership and collaboration is not pursued on a case-by-case basis. Equally important is to recognize that 'youth'

are not a homogenous block, and that the dividing lines – be it across ethnic, sectarian, or regional lines – run deep and long.

In Central Asia, Search facilitated a the first ever Central Asia Youth Forum with young people from Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The young people were able to understand the dynamics of VE in each of their countries, and agree on a resolution which put young people at the heart of initiatives across the region. A similar effort took place in West Africa between young people in Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria.

3. RECOGNIZE YOUNG PEOPLE'S NEED FOR RESPECT, DIGNITY, AND AGENCY

Research from development psychology, criminology and sociology suggests that some adolescents may be more vulnerable to recruitment into armed groups due to their transitional stage of biological, psychological and social development. While material incentives may contribute to young people's choice to engage in violence, research shows that "greed" is rarely a motivating factor in its own right and that various forms of "grievances" are more or just as important. Self-realization is not only about obtaining economic resources but also gaining access to the respect, dignity and status benefits associated with adulthood. When young men in particular, face failure in front of social norms expecting them to be providers, or face with obstacles in accessing love and affection, they can seek out other avenues to satisfy these needs. The pressures of masculinity are far greater than simply material well-being, and speak to young people's need to have meaning, value and often valor in their lives.

Just as young people over time have joined gangs, many of the same factors are at play in the choice to join a violent extremist movement. It offers not only a sense of purpose, but also the comfort of a shared sense of identity, and a path to heroism or becoming a protector.

In Palestine, Search has produced two seasons of 'The President', a reality TV show modelled on 'The Apprentice' which puts young people through a set of challenges as they 'campaign' to be elected 'the President.' This show, seen by 40% of Palestinians, has brought prominence, respect, prestige and honor to the young people participating in the program. As the contestants have battled to find collaborative, non-violent solutions to conflict, they have also promoted positive models of leadership and heroism.

4. BE WARY OF QUICK FIXES.

When an analysis of grievances points to socio-economic marginalization, programs are often designed to create jobs or build employment skills.

Be open to engaging young women and young men who are beyond the "usual constituency". Look for ways to move beyond the capital-city-based elite youth organizations towards associations of motorcycle drivers, or sports clubs, or associations linked with religious organizations.

Another quick fix can be to overlook the potential for young women to be at the heart of programs to transform violent extremism. Just because young men may be more numerous as fighters, does not mean that only men must be engaged in initiatives to encourage withdrawa. In fact, young women's initiatives can often be exactly what is needed to draw young men out of these movements. This is because women have shown to be powerful influencers in men's decisions to join, or not join, VE movements.

Research about the impact of VE programs points out that livelihood responses are not complete in tackling vulnerability. For example, International Alert's research about young people's involvement in VE in Syria suggests that the main factors that underpin resilience are:

1. alternative and respected sources of livelihood outside of armed groups, which give individuals a sense of purpose and dignity;

2. access to comprehensive, holistic and quality education in Syria and in neighboring countries;

3. access to supportive and positive social networks and institutions that can provide psychosocial support, mentors, role models and options for the development of non-violent social identities; and

4. avenues for exercising agency and non-violent activism that provide individuals with a sense of autonomy and control over their lives, as well as a way to make sense of their experiences.

The sense of self-realization, the relationships of respect and dignity, and the potential to exercise agency are equally important as the needs for material well-being.

In Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Lebanon and in Indonesia Search for Common Ground ran a program where young people were equipped with skills to produce short films about their lives, their conflicts, and their aspirations. The pride of being able to tell their stories, and then use these films in public screening and facilitate discussions, responded to young people's need to feel relevant and powerful in their communities. From this space of pride, they were able to reach out across dividing lines, and towards local authorities, to facilitate dialogue and collaborative problem solving.

5.

BE COMFORTABLE WITH DIVERSITY OF VIEWPOINTS.

In the age of social media, everyone is a broadcaster. As in the earlier section on narratives, peace-builders should not aim for young people to all speak with one unified voice against violent extremism. On the contrary, it is the availability of diverse viewpoints and a plethora of tactics and approaches to tackle the grievances that make for a healthy and resilient society in which violent extremism will find it difficult to gain traction.

While campaigns can be effective, they sometimes risk to engrain the notion of 'black or white' perspectives, rather than recognizing that most people's ideas are neither black or white, but rather different shades of grey. A campaign which seeks to demonize young people who have chosen violent extremism fails to recognize that young people are always somewhere on the spectrum between positive engagement and negative, violent disruption. Such initiatives can also prematurely close the door for young people hoping to step away, or step out, of violent extremist movements.

In Indonesia, Search established youth-run radio stations inside the Islamic boarding schools. The students were trained and coached - not just to broadcast a radio drama series on tolerance – but to hold discussions which valued all points of view, created a safe space for questions, and told stories of young students in all of their diversity.

In the Netherlands, a group of young people created 'Dare to be Grey' as a way of 'branding' the middle ground amidst a polarized world. Dare to be Grey tackles this on-line polarization by creating a platform for the "grey" middle ground with its different views, room for listening, nuance and countless personalities, anyone's opinion can become the focal point of tomorrow's debate.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- "Youth and Violent Extremism in the MENA Region: Risk and Preventive Factors of Youth Violence in the MENA Region in the Context of Ongoing Crisis" by Mark Clark (Generations for Peace)
- "Working Together to Address Violent Extremism: A Strategy for Youth-Government Partnerships" by Margaret Williams et al. (Search for Common Ground)
- "The Role of Education in Countering Violent Extremism" by Naureen Chowdhury Fink et al. (Hedayah)
- "Abu Dhabi Memorandum on Good Practices for Education and Countering Violent Extremism" by GCTF and Hedayah
- "Youth Action Agenda to Prevent Violent Extremism and Promote Peace" by the Global Youth Summit Against Violent Extremism
- "Security Council Resolution 2250: Annotated and Explained" by UNOY
- "Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security" by Youth4Peace
- "Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding: A Practice Note" by James Rogan et al. (Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development)
- On Violent Extremism Podcast: "Voice of Youth in Tunisia – Ahlem Nasraoui"
- On Violent Extremism Podcast: "Voice of Youth in Europe – Hillary Briffa"
- On Violent Extremism Podcast: "Voice of Youth in Myanmar – Thinzar Shunlei Yi"

Risks

While CVE work holds great transformative potential, it also carries significant risks. These risks may put people in physical danger, damage reputations, and strike at the heart of core values that organizations hold; they will depend heavily on the local context as well as the way in which the global framing of violent extremism issues plays out in the coming years.

By addressing each area of risk thoughtfully, we can empower communities that are participating in or vulnerable to violent extremism to find more affirming and peaceful avenues for self-realization and societal change. Reliance on some of the core principles of engagement of peacebuilding can help, notably: conflict-sensitivity, transparency, impartiality, inclusivity, local empowerment, and long-term and reflective engagement.

What are the risks involved in conducting peacebuilding programs within the CVE arena?

1.

LOSING IMPARTIALITY AND CREDIBILITY

Firstly, the very definitions of terms like "extremist," "terrorism," or "insurgent" are a reflection of both local and global power dynamics. State authorities – both Western donor governments and governments in the countries where we work – often have the greatest authority to choose which groups receive these labels in a way that may or may not coincide with our peacebuilding values. This is particularly sensitive when there are extremist ideas underpinning the majority party in power.

Often, such labels can be quite harmful to our peacebuilding goals, such as when governments desire programs that exacerbate dividing lines through both stigmatizing certain groups, curtailing human rights, and limiting freedom of expression.

In many contexts, the dominant political narrative of the state frames political opposition as treasonous or terrorist in nature. At best, this can make it difficult for peacebuilders to find the right political space for their programs and, at worst, peacebuilders can be seen as colluding with "terrorist" groups. The adage that one group's "terrorists" are another group's "freedom fighters" is especially true in the CVE space, where we maintain our integrity and impartiality by working with all types of groups and communities.

Secondly, we risk being perceived as standing in opposition to certain viewpoints including those labeled as "radical." Our ability to connect with all stakeholders rests on reassuring them that their values, beliefs, and identity are not under attack. In the area of CVE, radical ideology and violent tactics are often seen as going hand-in-hand. Within extremist groups, an emphasis on rationality, social disconnect, and narrow and exclusionary doctrines are intentionally intertwined to encourage members to commit violence. Alternatively, governments or other powers threatened by extremist groups may seek to associate challenging ideologies with socially reprehensible behavior in order to preserve their own credibility. Ordinary citizens, caught in an environment of insecurity, inflammatory media, and social instability can be easily swayed to adopt this association. Even on the ground, our own staff might be motivated to join our organization out of a desire to fight extremism.

In recent decades, this challenge has also arisen more frequently around the discomfort of Western donors with the role of religion, particularly Islam. Donor governments often inappropriately weave religion or religious leaders in discussions that frame them all as either moderate and benevolent or radical and threatening.

Thirdly, taking on a large volume of programs labeled as CVE can inadvertently align us with domestic political figures or movements, which leaves our work exposed to abrupt changes in funding or strategy when political circumstances change. The threat can be further exacerbated when, as

funding for CVE starts and stops unpredictably, our programs are then unable to deliver evidence of meaningful change. Even worse, this failure can be used by politicians and funders to justify abandoning peacebuilding work in favor of hardline approaches.

Finally, the way we frame our work as CVE affects our funding, staff, stakeholders, and organizational mission. Determining how and when to be explicit about our CVE goals - as opposed to general peacebuilding goals - requires flexibility and thoughtfulness. Confusion around CVE framing not only risks misleading our stakeholders but also ourselves as we reflect on our organizational mission. There are additional risks around CVE framing regarding whether or not we can get buy-in for programs from both donors, who have their own political agendas, and our own staff, who may be concerned about potentially being endangered.

To address these challenges, peacebuilders should ensure that throughout our engagements with donors, local governments, civil society, and local communities, our spoken and written language should reflect an understanding that extremism can exist in all ideological spaces, whether religious, political, or otherwise. We choose also not to use words like "terrorist" that may cast aspersions on a particular political or religious viewpoint. Instead, we stress the values of ideological diversity, political pluralism, and peaceful means of activism and conflict resolution.

These ideals are included in our social media presence, staff recruitment efforts, outreach to new partners, and our convening role when we begin and implement official programs. We use language around our goals, beliefs, and aspirations that emphasizes the importance of separating ideology and tactics. Additionally, in selecting role models to spotlight through our media and public engagement efforts, we look for individuals of all ideological backgrounds who represent a commitment to peace and a tolerance for diversity.

Taking this approach is not without additional risks. Many CVE contexts are so politicized that the choice of not being in opposition to a radical group is perceived as being tacit supporters. Again, by highlighting our roles as facilitators, conveners, and interlocutors, we can promote understanding around our purpose and activities.

2. RELATIONSHIPS AND INFORMATION SHARING ENDANGER STAKEHOLDERS

While we always strive to engage partners who are sensitive, thoughtful, and credible, in conflict settings, the changing interests and cultures of each of our partners create risks that they might use relationships and information they receive through our efforts to exacerbate conflict. These risks are inherent to much of our work and must be managed with care.

In conflict environments, where the state has a reputation for repressive tactics, our efforts may inadvertently aid government agencies in expanding the scope of their abuses. That is, as we build inroads between state partners and local communities, we allow states to increase both their reach and authority in communities; if they may later seek to harm these individuals or communities through violence or oppressive surveillance in the name of public security, we may also risk being

seen as either endorsing or collaborating with such state behavior. This level of risk not only harms our organizational credibility but threatens to exacerbate tension and mistrust within a community.

On the other hand, our work at the community level involves working with groups and individuals who may be drawn into recruitment by violent extremist groups. Finding a way to hold that space while maintaining trust can be challenging, particularly in contemplating at what point to collaborate with security agencies in reporting high-risk individuals for the sake of public safety.

Risk management in this area begins with transparency around the core intention behind our work. As peacebuilders, we have a responsibility to our stakeholders to be clear about our purpose of convening different groups and enabling them to collaborate more effectively, while also reminding them that we do not control, influence, or condone the behavior of the groups that we engage. By being open about our purpose and scope, we support each of our partners in making informed decisions about when and how to engage with one another. We can also be clear with our stakeholder participants what aspects of our program activities are confidential, which are not, and where exceptions can be made so that we avoid exposing ourselves and our stakeholders to risk.

In Morocco, for example, Search's youth councils invited an influential Salafi imam to visit a Catholic church as part of a national day of tolerance and reconciliation. The visit received substantial press coverage, and the imam, who was very active on social media, shared his trip with his thousands of followers. Shortly after, this imam received hate mail and death threats from many of his followers who believed he was selling out on the "true Islam" he claimed to preach. Because the imam had by then been exposed to Search programming around tolerance, dialogue, and conflict resolution, he reached out to the lead individual behind the threats and learned that this person had himself been radicalized through extremist, disaffected Muslims living in Europe. Together, the two reached a point of reconciliation, which was shared publically with the imam's followers in Morocco and abroad.

In Nigeria, Search has organized monthly coordination meetings for state security agencies and local CSOs to share updates on conflict dynamics and violent activities around the area. This collaboration has enabled local actors to feel confident that local threats will be heard and appropriately addressed by the police and intelligence services, but also creates a risk that those same responders will use repressive tactics that drive communities apart. To mitigate this risk, Search worked for a long time to build a culture of trust and honest information sharing among participants. Each group who attends these meetings and their constituents understand the purpose of participating.

3. INCOMPLETE OR UNEVEN RESOURCES WITH OVERPROMISED OUTCOMES DAMAGE CREDIBILITY

Funding for CVE programs can be inconsistent, political affairs in our donor and project countries can shift rapidly, and security challenges are ever changing. Although peacebuilders aim to develop CVE programs that are thoughtful, innovative, and contextually responsive, the aforementioned factors can derail success. When that happens, we risk not only convincing donors that our work is ineffective but also our stakeholders that non-violence is a false opportunity. This is particularly true when our programs require long-term engagement to deliver results, but funding cycles last only one or two years and have rigid expectations. For example, if we develop youth programs to teach entrepreneurship skills, but then lack funding to help them launch new businesses, our participants can feel misled and could even turn to harmful activities instead.

At the political level, we can use our credibility within the peacebuilding space to advocate for increased, long-term funding for both peacebuilding programming and evaluation. Through our role as experts and advocates, we can use our field experience to remind policymakers and donors that there is no one program strategy or approach that works as a silver bullet and that instead, CVE requires sustained investment in real community issues. One way to do this is to highlight change indicators from other areas of peacebuilding that identify relationship changes, collaborative action, accountability measures, and social shifts toward inclusivity that model the changes we look for in CVE as well.

Peacebuilders also face challenges with the emergence of CVE as a formal and separate field. While the challenges around violent extremism are not new to peacebuilding, we see a significant movement in Western countries who feel threatened by violent extremism to create a whole "new" field of international engagement around these themes.

Governance and development work should not all be directed to serve the purpose of CVE, as it disorients us from the need to focus broadly on grievances and dividing lines. In the Sahel, for example, communities struggle with real challenges around economic opportunity, child marriage, and gender-based violence in addition to the violent presence of Boko Haram. As peacebuilders, our mission is to bring people together in collaborative responses to these problems and avoid derailing this focus in the name of combating violent extremism.

In the short term, we should remain honest with ourselves and with our donors, recognizing the volatility and time-intensive nature of results and explaining to participants what programs and initiatives we can support and which we cannot. Our program design should avoid raising unrealistic expectations aimed simply at gaining buy-in from donors and participants. Finally, peacebuilders can partner with local governments and other institutions with both resources and authority to give them ownership – both funding and otherwise – in order to continue program efforts even beyond the life of the project.

4. ROOT CAUSES OF INJUSTICE AND STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE ARE IGNORED OR SMOOTHED OVER

In our efforts to offer non-violent channels to tackle grievances, it is important that we do not risk dismissing the importance of macro-level issues relating to injustice, structural violence, and endemic corruption.
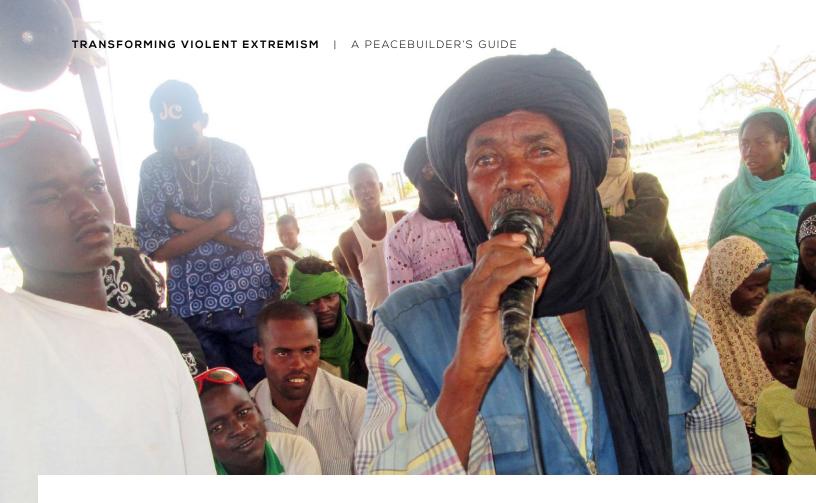
As discussed above, individuals commonly join violent extremist movements out of feelings of frustration, marginalization, and a legitimate dearth of opportunities to address very real and pressing problems in their communities. Working to change their tactics without discussing their underlying grievances can lead partners and stakeholders to feel ignored or manipulated. Initiatives which promote tolerance, for example, without tackling the root causes of inequality, can end up backfiring on our credibility.

Lastly, there are several risks involved in placing too much emphasis on counteracting the work of a particular extremist group in the short term while ignoring the longstanding grievances and social divisions that have fueled the current violent situation.

In Yemen, for example, the majority of Western foreign assistance in recent years had focused on trying to uproot Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), yet the challenges of social cohesion of integrating the disaffected Houthi community in the post-Arab Spring national dialogue process require working across multiple dividing lines throughout the country.

To address this challenge, peacebuilders should focus not only on educating vulnerable communities about the value of non-violent conflict transformation but also on educating governments about the importance of giving regular citizens a greater role in shaping the laws and practices that control their daily lives.

In Tunisia and Timor-Leste, for example, the involvement of local government officials in mock youth government activities showed local officials the importance of giving youth a greater role in policy-making. Similarly, by working with the media to understand the principles of Common Ground journalism, we can empower journalists to give greater voice and attention to community issues driving core grievances, including through the increased use of citizen journalism and public consultations.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The monitoring of efforts to prevent and transform violent extremism can appear challenging. As seen from this guide, there are multiple factors at play in determining whether an individual or community will support, advocate or eventually use violence to pursue a violent extremist agenda. These relate to the profile of the individual and his or her relationships, as well as the interplay between external influences—not only in the immediate community but also via the virtual/online experience.

The insights of peacebuilders in designing, monitoring, and evaluating programming are highly relevant for monitoring the types of initiatives shared here. The five following guiding principles can be applied:

1. CRAFT A THEORY OF CHANGE ONCE YOU HAVE IDENTIFIED WHICH TYPE OF INITIATIVE YOU WILL UNDERTAKE.

A theory of change lays out your assumptions of change. Typically framed as an "if-then" or "because" statement, a theory of change (like a hypothesis) guides your initiative with a focus on what your input is, with which stakeholders, and in which geographic area or scope it should occur, to drive what type of change is sought. It also reminds you why you think this change will occur. Over the life of your initiative, the theory of change should be ever-present and used to reflect upon whether or not – through observation and monitoring tools – you are indeed seeing that causality take place.

2. UNDERSTAND YOUR ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT CAUSALITY, BUT BE AWARE OF EXTERNAL INFLUENCING FACTORS.

Because of the multiple layers of change, the interplay of various influences, and a dynamic context, the theory of change may prove to be true, or not, over the life of your initiative. If you remain open to ongoing reflection, you can learn from your assumptions at each stage of the initiative and adapt it based on insights and learning.

3. IDENTIFY WHAT YOU CAN MEASURE, WITH A FOCUS ON KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES, SKILLS AND RELATIONSHIPS.

Transforming violent extremism is fundamentally about changing the way human beings see themselves, how they think, and how they behave as individuals and in relationship with others. When you are able to track how changes are taking place on the level of knowledge, attitudes, skills and relationships, you will be able to identify shifts over time, and learn whether your assumptions of change are holding true.

4. USE APPROPRIATE QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGIES, INCLUDING APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY AND MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE, TO BE SENSITIVE TO UNINTENDED OUTCOMES.

While seeking to test whether the assumptions inherent in your theory of change are holding true, be sure to use various qualitative methodologies in your monitoring throughout the initiative. Using tools which offer the opportunity to identify any change taking place, not only related to your specific inputs, can give you a greater chance of understanding the interplay of various factors and their impact on your intended outcome. Importantly, using these techniques can also enable you to see when unintended changes – positive or negative – are also arising as a result of your initiative.

5. WHEN APPROPRIATE, SEEK TO DEVELOP INDICATORS OF CHANGE WITH VARIOUS STAKEHOLDERS AS A METHOD FOR GAINING JOINT OWNERSHIP OF THE ANALYSIS AND POTENTIAL OUTCOMES.

Particularly when it concerns the initiatives around enabling state responses, or harnessing multiple stakeholders to come together behind a shared framework to respond to violent extremism, there is an opportunity to identify indicators of change as part of the initiative itself. This can be a way to use the initiative to further hone in on the real drivers, the opportunities for change, and the obstacles preventing the transformation intended by the initiative. Moreover, this may serve to build the capacities of these stakeholders in understanding the how and why of good monitoring and evaluation of efforts.

Many resources on monitoring and evaluation from the peacebuilding field are highly relevant and applicable to working on violent extremism. For more resources, visit www.dmeforpeace.org.

OTHER RESOURCES

- "Does CVE Work? Lessons Learned from the Global Effort to Counter Violent Extremism" by Peter Romaniuk (Global Center on Cooperative Security)

- "Mid-Term Evaluation of Three Countering Violent Extremism Projects" by Jeffrey Swedberg and Lainie Reisman (USAID)

- "Learning and Adapting: The Use of Monitoring and Evaluation in Countering Violent Extremism" by Laura Dawson, Charlie Edwards, and Calum Jeffray (RUSI)

- "Evaluating Countering Violent Extremism Programming: Practice and Progress" by Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Peter Romaniuk, and Rafia Barakat (GCTF)

- "How Close Is 'Whole of Society' Movement Against Violent Extremism?" by Eric Rosand and Madeline Rose (IPI Global Observatory)

- "Countering Violent Extremism: Developing an Evidence Base for Policy and Practice," edited by Sara Zeiger & Anne Aly (Hedayah and Curtin University)

Conclusion

This guide has been conceived during a time of important change in the world. The 'field' of CVE took root and gathered momentum during 2015 and 2016, with the White House Summit and a subsequent stream of global meetings, inquiry, research and emerging best practices. In 2017, shifts at the head of some Western governments may influence this backdrop, potentially bringing a political lens to shape how we respond to and prevent violent extremism.

As we head into 2017 and 2018, Search for Common Ground will continue to learn from our dozens of programs around the world which seek to transform violent extremism. We will continue to engage, learn and share with other policy makers, practitioners and researchers. We will do so grounded in our organizational values, and the guiding principles that have led us over to the transformational changes of our programming over the last 35 years.

We welcome feedback, invite you to share insights, and look forward to further reflections and refinement of this guide over the coming months and years.

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