

Bottom-Up Approach to Countering Violent Extremism in Tunisia

Final Evaluation Report

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1. Executive Summary

Search for Common Ground (SFCG) has been working for 35 years to transform the way communities deal with conflicts. SFCG promotes cooperative solutions to conflicts based on mutual understanding and confidence-building between stakeholders. SFCG operates in 36 countries using creative, multi-faceted approaches to help divided communities understand differences while working toward commonalities. Working with a wide range of local stakeholders, SFCG has been operating in Tunisia to “*help members of Tunisian society approach conflicts and differences in a constructive manner, through cooperation and dialogue*”. SFCG Tunisia, aims to promote a culture of dialogue, build social cohesion and provide youth, women and media with the needed skills to move towards peaceful coexistence.

Since 2012, when Tunisia experienced the very first terrorist attacks, there has been an increasing concern about violent extremism in Tunisia, both at a decision-making level and among civil society organizations (CSOs). Thousands of Tunisians have joined armed conflict areas in Iraq and Syria fighting in the ranks of terrorist groups. Tunisians’ attraction to the rhetoric of violent extremism (VE) and their joining of violent extremist groups remains influenced by various local and regional factors. However, more research and analysis are required to understand the push and pull factors that lead to radicalization especially among youth and to pave the way for a well-informed and organized response that may effectively counter violent extremism.

In this context and based on its extensive experience on peacebuilding approaches to countering and preventing violent extremism (CVE), SFCG launched the *Bottom-up Approach to Countering Violent Extremism* which aims to “*increase the ability of vulnerable communities to prevent and counter violent extremism in Tunisia*”. By addressing the CVE issue at the local level, the project aims to increase the engagement of diverse stakeholders and produce knowledge of the factors that drive Tunisians to support violent extremist propaganda or groups. By turning this knowledge into concrete community-based activities, the project seeks to strengthen the capacity of stakeholders in dealing with and preventing VE.

This evaluation report is based on qualitative information collected through focus group discussions (FG) and/or interviews with 10 partner NGOs in 6 communities where the program has been implemented.¹ Generally speaking, promoting community-led approaches has proven to be an effective approach in engaging different stakeholders in a dialogue process which aims to unveil VE drivers and understand how they can be prevented. Partner NGOs have expressed great satisfaction about the program which seems to have succeeded in (i) increasing the engagement of diverse stakeholders and (ii) strengthening the capacities of

¹All views reflected in this report belong solely to the consultant and do not reflect opinions of SFCG, nor of the Canadian or US governments.



local partner NGOs to ignite dialogue initiatives within their communities and deliver CVE-oriented activities.

According to participants, the program contributed to raising communities' awareness on contextualized violent extremism drivers and promoting a culture of dialogue particularly within schools, with youth and with religious leaders. The latter have shown willingness to take a more active role and integrate violent extremism prevention as part of their ordinary activities.

The CVE-oriented activities implemented in the course of the program reached hundreds of people and allowed local partner NGOs to tackle a contentious issue such as terrorism and to investigate the root causes of radicalization. Partner NGOs consider that the program activities offered an opportunity for civil society to advocate for a more active role and for greater responsibility to be assumed by schools in order to protect children from falling victims to extremism.

Despite this overall positive assessment, SFCG team needs to pay particular attention to some aspects of the program in order to ensure its long-term effectiveness; in particular it needs to: (i) continue to support cultural activities as a means for children and youth personal development, (ii) call for greater coordination between civil society and religious scholars and authorities, (iii) address the lack of confidence between citizens and the police forces and (iv) support civil society organizations in tackling youth economic marginalization as a key driver to extremism.

2. Context and Program Overview

While the figures may change according to the sources, there is no doubt that Tunisia has given birth to the largest recruiting pool for foreign fighters in Iraq, Syria and Libya. It is acknowledged that over 3,000 Tunisians have joined the ranks of foreign fighters in these regions while thousands more have been prevented from leaving the country as recruits of the so-called Islamic State or its affiliates. In addition to the threat posed by foreign fighters after their return home, homegrown terrorism, manifested violently in two particularly deadly attacks in Bardo and Sousse, has shown, if there was any doubt, the real danger of violent extremism in Tunisia. Yet, the government's response to the threat has intensively relied on heavy-handed security interventions and little has been done in addressing the drivers of VE for prevention purposes.

Tunisians' attraction to joining violent extremist groups is rooted in various push and pull factors which vary across different geographic and socio-economic groups. These factors may include identity crisis and the search for a purpose in life, social exclusion or economic marginalization, tense relationships between citizens and the government, etc. To effectively address these issues and counter violent extremism it is essential to support community-led approaches that are based in localized knowledge and debate of push and pull VE factors.



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In this context, the *Bottom-up Approach to Countering Violent Extremism* program seeks to increase the ability of vulnerable communities to prevent and counter violent extremism in Tunisia. The program has promoted local research and information-sharing on the drivers of violent extremism in order to enhance community relationships with local authorities and security forces, promote alternative narratives, and strengthen ties at the community level to advance youth and women’s roles in building resilient communities and effectively countering and preventing extremist recruitment. It supported community-led approaches through reflective learning, monthly dialogue sessions, and local sub-grant initiatives for more effective and participatory CVE strategies which are tailored to the context of the five targeted communities’ context: Menzel Bourguiba and Bizerte City in Bizerte governorate, Kasserine, Gaafour in Siliana, Ben Guardane in Medenine, Sahline in Sousse, and Sidi Hassine in Tunis. The *overall goal* of the program is to increase the ability of vulnerable communities in Tunisia to prevent and counter violent extremism. This is to be achieved through the following two objectives:

- **Objective 1:** To increase the engagement of diverse stakeholders (including civil society, youth, women, religious leaders, schools and universities, local governments, and the police and army) in community-level dialogue to identify push and pull factors for Tunisians who support violent extremist or join as foreign fighters.
- **Objective 2:** To strengthen the capacity of diverse stakeholders to implement initiatives within their communities to counter violent extremism.

In a first stage, SFCG undertook an initial mapping and context assessment through extensive desk research, consultation with international researchers and Tunisian national-level stakeholders - youth, local government representatives, national level officials -, as well as conducting one round-table with ten Tunisian national experts. These activities aimed to gather information to identify the most vulnerable Tunisian communities where there is both a need for intervention and a willingness for cooperation among community stakeholders to take action in countering violent extremism². Following this, SFCG conducted field visits in the potential target governorates of Kasserine, Sousse, Siliana, Medenine, Ben Guardane, Zarzis, Bizerte, and Greater Tunis (Tunis, Manouba, Ben Arous, and Ariana governorates) to validate and confirm the information gathered previously. From these meetings, SFCG identified local CSOs to act as project partners. Eventually, SFCG conducted 24 Localized Dialogue Sessions (LDS) that were attended by 516 participants and allowed the community to identify and analyze key, context-specific drivers of radicalization in the six selected communities and surrounding areas. Additionally, the information gathered during the program start-up activity phase was synthesized by SFCG staff into a draft report on the push and pull factors of violent extremism and radicalization in Tunisia, which takes into consideration the socio-political and economic context of each community.

In a second stage, building on the assessment of violent extremism’s push and pull factors in Tunisia, SFCG facilitated 6 local Shared Learning Sessions (SLS) which enabled participants to draft recommendations to contribute to preventing violent extremism from emerging or reinforcing itself. Moreover, these sessions encouraged exchange of best practices and lessons

²Narrative Quarterly Report, SFCG, October 1 – December 31, 2105, p.5.

learned in the country and interaction among different actors towards mutual learning. The SLSs allowed the different participants to identify and assess the local relevance and effectiveness of past and ongoing P/CVE initiatives carried out by local and national institutions and civil society. Finally, SFCG supervised and monitored the implementation of a small grant program: eleven small grant project proposals were selected out of 21 in the six target communities of Ben Guardane, Bizerte, Kasserine, Siliana, SidiHassine, and Sahline. The eleven small projects were successfully implemented by the local sub-grantees with the collaboration of local stakeholders in each community. The small grant project was a direct response to the push and pull factors identified by the communities during the LDD sessions.

3. Methodological Framework

The present evaluation report is a qualitative study. It is intended to assess the effectiveness of the program in relation with the ability of the delivered activities to implement the Theory of Change (ToC) underlying the program. The ToC of the program suggests that increased engagement of stakeholders – civil society organizations (NGOs), youth, religious leaders, schools, security forces, local and central government and public structures) in community-level dialogue on CVE-related issues will result in their greater capacity to implement initiatives that address different VE drivers. The outcomes of the program imply that change may occur at different levels (Table 1) namely, the personal level (stakeholders' representatives), the organization level (stakeholders' organizations) and the community level (citizens). The following table shows the methodology of the evaluation study addressing different levels of assessment while specifying the target groups and the key evaluation questions.

All levels of evaluation refer to a deeper analysis of the qualitative aspects of the program whose conduct is inspired by the “Most Significant Change”³ (MSC) technique. As such, the evaluation relies exclusively on a qualitative approach. Indeed, the MSC is a monitoring and evaluation technique which does not rely on specific *quantitative* indicators that need to be measured and counted. It focuses instead on qualitative inputs from most of the project stakeholders –participants in the program, local partners, program managers and field staff. In this context, all stakeholders are asked to provide personal *reasoned accounts* in relation with changes they may identify resulting from the program. By doing so, the use of the MSC allows eventually for a *hierarchy of changes and needs* which is useful for both monitoring and evaluation purposes. Besides, the MSC technique has the benefit of identifying the specific features of different actors' perception of the program in relation to the achievement of the program objectives.

³MSC is a participatory monitoring and evaluation technique that refers to a set of steps and actions and covers the *entire* implementation period of a program. However, it can be adapted to particular phases of a program evaluation.



Table 1. Evaluation Framework Methodology

Evaluation Level	Main Evaluation Dimension	Target Group	Key Questions
Personal; Organizational	Effectiveness	Stakeholders' representatives SFCG staff	<i>How the program has matched the stakeholders' requirements/expectations? To what extent did the program design effectively address the community engagement issue? How has the implementation of small grants fostered the relationship between stakeholders?</i>
Organizational	Effectiveness Sustainability Relevance	Stakeholders' representatives	<i>To what extent have the capacity building component of the program been successful? How it may translate into operational sustainability after the program ends? Were there any external/internal factors that influenced (negatively/positively) the program's implementation? Any problems or bottlenecks encountered? What were they?</i>
Community	Effectiveness Sustainability	Stakeholders' representatives	<i>What has been the reaction of the community towards conflict transformation and enhanced dialogue?</i>

In addition to the use of the MSC technique which allows for the collection of first-hand information from the project stakeholders, the evaluation takes into account the in-house monitoring process provided by SFCG staff and documented through various reports. Finally, whenever possible and to support the qualitative analysis, the report makes use of some quantitative indicators collected periodically by the SFCG team through its internal monitoring and evaluation process.

Given the adopted methodological framework, the data collection design is based on focus group discussion or semi-structured interviews with 1 or 2 most involved stakeholders' representatives in all localities where the program was implemented. Focus groups and interviews were conducted to highlight factors that either facilitated or inhibited the project's success. In each governorate, a number of interviews were scheduled with public and private players and with beneficiary communities of the project. In addition – and as part of the MSC implementation – interviews were conducted with key SFCG staff members, the program manager and the M&E manager in order to collect relevant information and evidence to assess the program's effectiveness. Interview guides (data collection tools) were prepared in line with the target audience for those interviews. In addition, the evaluation takes into account the in-house monitoring process provided by SFCG staff and documented through various reports.



However, given the logistic and operational constraints and also the availability of the stakeholders by the time the evaluation study was completed, some limitations still prevail and may affect the depth of the analysis delivered. Indeed, 6 interviews and FG have been *mostly* conducted with the local partner NGOs while only 5 interviews included local public authorities or community members. Consequently, the views of other stakeholders (youth, religious leaders, teacher, parents, local/central government representatives etc.) expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect their genuine opinions and should be treated with caution.

4. Main Findings and Analysis

4.1. Meeting Stakeholders' Expectations

Full involvement of stakeholders is a basic requirement of the program's rationale which aims to "increase the engagement of diverse stakeholders in community-level dialogue [on CVE related issues]". However, the achievement of this objective presupposes greater awareness of stakeholders of the relevance of the topic and of the need to address the many community-specific factors driving violent extremism. In this regard, the program has undeniably succeeded in generating the stakeholders' interest, providing a stimulating environment for debates and knowledge-sharing on push and pull factors that attract young Tunisians to violent extremist activities.

From the SFCG team's perspective, it was the very first time that CVE-focused activities were implemented in Tunisia – at least simultaneously on such a large scale. This novelty implied difficulties in managing different stages of the program. At the beginning, the lack of in-house human resources and the insufficient field experience in managing a CVE-oriented project delayed the program start up as SFCG spent more time than initially foreseen in appointing skilled staff as program manager and program coordinator.

According to discussions with NGOs and other stakeholders interviewed, it emerged that interest in the program has been fundamentally influenced by two factors.

First, the *context-related* factors translate into a general concern among participants regarding the relevance of CVE for their community. All participants recognize that their communities are highly affected by the phenomenon of violence in general – violence in the streets, violence in schools, violence

"This program has offered us an opportunity to work with real responsibility towards the community. Given that nowadays, VE is a very sensitive topic we probably would not have been able to debate on that matter without the support provided by SFCG."

NGO representative, Kasserine

in the neighborhood – and violent extremism in particular – terrorist attacks in Kasserine and Ben Guardane, terrorist recruitment in Sahline, Sidi Hassine, and Gaafour (Siliana). They emphasize their respective regions’ vulnerability to terrorism risk and the urgent need to address its roots. However, participants have called attention to the necessity of conducting in-depth analysis of the phenomenon in order to determine its extent and its driving factors and eventually devise an effective response to the challenge it represents.

Second, the *methodology-related* factor particularly values the approach that SFCG has put in place in the program through convening community-led dialogues with the participation of diverse stakeholders. Indeed, participants argue that while authorities’ response to VE has mainly been focused on the use of security forces and intelligence services little has been

“People see differences as a threat. If you wear a beard or integral full-face veil, people see you as a suspicious extremist. But, violent extremists are ‘normal’ people, like you and I and nothing predetermines them as ‘dangerous’.”

NGOs representative, Ben Guardane

done on the prevention side of the phenomenon and particularly in fostering a climate conducive to collaboration between security forces and NGOs. The latter, possess first-hand field knowledge, a developed network of contacts and they enjoy the confidence and support of the local communities. Thus, collaboration between security authorities, local authorities and

NGOs can improve the efforts of preventing VE. Yet, this avenue remains unexplored. Such a claim clearly emerges from interviews with other stakeholders that have particularly welcomed the dialogue sessions as an effective means to bring under examination different views on a contentious subject like VE. Stakeholders value the inputs provided by participants in these events and welcomed the overall “spirit of collaboration” that prevailed in the discussions. However, stakeholders regret that the dialogue sessions have not received the press coverage they deserved so as to favor greater public awareness on the topic and encourage the culture of dialogue within communities.

The Shared Learning Sessions that took place in each of the 6 regions have been a good opportunity to introduce local stakeholders to the CVE topic and to fuel discussion on local VE drivers and possible prevention policies. In particular in Kasserine and Ben Guardane, NGO representatives as well as local authorities consider that the Shared Learning Sessions and the Dialogue sessions have provided for the very first time an “excellent opportunity” for VE debating. These events also allowed the SFCG team to showcase the partner NGOs on-going activities in other regions. However, no cross-fertilization meetings have been implemented which could have been effective in order to widen the audience, share specific experiences and create conditions for eventual networking among the partner NGOs of the program.

“It is not common to see participants from different stances sustain free communication and rich debates on such a sensitive topic.”

Stakeholder, Kasserine

Violent extremism for a long time has been a taboo subject. According to participants, terrorism in these regions is exclusively managed from a security perspective mainly through repressive actions by the police forces with no collaboration with communities. Fierce relations between citizens and security forces in the past have led to mutual distrust and citizens are mostly reluctant to talk about terrorism concerns as they fear being involved in police investigations. Moreover, the stigmatization of religious people or practices contributes to developing greater divides among citizens who prefer not to raise discussions on this matter. In this context, the program has served as a catalyst to tackle a contentious issue such as terrorism and to investigate the root causes of radicalization and VE.

Participants from Ben Guardane acknowledge that violent extremism, both as a narrative and as a practice, is well rooted in their region. However, there is a widespread “ambiguity and poor understanding” of the mechanisms that underpin and feed the phenomenon. Despite previous attempts originated by local civil society mainly through information and training sessions on VE, little has been done to explore the phenomenon and undertake actions that deal with its roots. The March 2016 events when an armed group of at least 50 Libyan-based but home-grown jihadists attacked the town were the turning point for youth consciousness on the urgent need to get involved and address the issue of VE. This attack created an unprecedented distressful situation when the president of the partner NGO lost his life during the attack. From this perspective, NGOs in these cities have welcomed and appreciated the program’s activities as they have represented a genuine opportunity to put the VE issue on the table and trigger constructive discussions with various stakeholders. At that time, the program activities in Ben Guardane had just started yet the local partner NGO had to quickly reorganize itself and avoid further delays, and the SFCG team had to closely monitor the situation.

Context-related challenges, mostly unpredictable, are based in the overall political instability factors in the country and have called for systematic SFCG team interventions. In all areas where the program was implemented, the team had to cope with the local authorities’ staff turnover⁴ implying recurring field visits to newly appointed representatives in order to ensure their support to the program and to the local partner NGO. The SFCG team acknowledges that these time-consuming additional activities gave rise to organizational constraints causing the team to promptly react and guarantee that the program’s activities in the selected community were being delivered in the best conditions.

The city of Menzel Bourguiba (Bizerte) appears particularly concerned that conflict and violence have become “a way of settling disputes” in everyday life. Violent behavior is noticeably prevalent within schools yet nothing has been done to effectively address this issue. Public authorities, school teachers, and parents, although fully aware of the seriousness and the consequences of this widespread culture of violence on children and teenagers, feel powerless or lack initiatives to deal with it. Indeed, the program activities were previously planned to take place in the nearby locality of Joumine which presents similar characteristics to Menzel Bourguiba. However, lack of motivation among public stakeholders, school

⁴For example, the governor of Siliana changed 3 times over the period of the program.

teachers, and parents to engage in dialogue activities on violent extremism made the program change its target population.⁵ This shows that open debate on violence in general and violent extremism in particular not only remains a highly sensitive issue in the region but it may also reveal a kind of apathy among relevant stakeholders in coping with it. Taking up this challenge in Menzel Bourguiba is considered a great achievement of the program by the local partner NGO.

Finally, in Sahline (Sousse) the activities developed within the program have given fresh impetus to the local partner NGO “*Association de la Culture et du Dialogue*”. Participants recognize that, building on the valuable experience of the NGO’s members, the program has allowed for new skills to be acquired and new dialogue approach to be implemented.

The selection process of local partner NGOs was not restrictive so as not to close the door to new local organizations that show great motivation in engaging in such a program but may lack the required organizational skills to successfully carry out the program’s activities. The SFCG team preferred not to tighten up NGO selection criteria in order to widen the pool of NGO candidates, especially considering that the newly introduced CVE topic could act as a natural deterrent against NGOs engagement. However, the main drawback of this choice was that some selected NGOs showed little organizational capacity – a problem that SFCG needed to address. SFCG provided half-day capacity building sessions which proved to be insufficient for the NGOs to improve their organizational skills. These shortcomings generated considerable delays during the small grant funding phase when the partner NGOs were invited to submit their activity proposals. Although the NGOs were provided with SFCG guidelines to help them draft their proposals, the process took up to 3 months and considerable feedback from the SFCG team in order to help NGOs produce acceptable proposals.

4.2. Enhancing Community-level Dialogue

To what extent have the aforementioned high interest and motivation expressed by the partner NGOs been translated into effective dialogue among stakeholders? To what extent have these dialogue sessions enhanced active listening and confidence among citizens and public stakeholders and helped promote better understanding of VE and practices to prevent it? According to FG discussions with local NGOs and some public officials participating in these activities, the program seems to have succeeded in creating a stimulating environment for debate and helped ease strained

“Audiences in the dialogue sessions were very heterogeneous. Therefore, it was not easy to bring participants’ points of view close together but, I think that a consensual approach has eventually prevailed.”

An NGO representative, Ben Guardane

⁵According to the interview with the Director of the NGO “Citoyens Acteurs” who participated in the program and represents as well the Association of Secondary School Teachers of Joumine.

relations between citizens and police forces. While enhancing a deeper understanding of the VE phenomenon by large audiences, participants emphasize the relevance of the activities in raising public awareness on this issue. *However, as far as this evaluation report is concerned, it should be noted that participants in the FG seldom support their opinions with specific examples or narratives.* When invited to provide a detailed description on how the positive changes they attribute to the activities implemented during the program occurred, participants tend to be less specific and mostly refer to a general assessment.

NGO representatives unanimously recognize the usefulness of the dialogue events initiated by the SFCG team and/or implemented by the locally-based partner NGOs, in bringing together a wide spectrum of participants from civil society, religious leaders, local government, security forces representatives, etc., with youth representing 34% of the participants.

Table 2. Participants in Localized Dialogue Sessions

	All participants	Local authority representatives	Religious leaders/Imams	Women
Bizerte	118	2	8	46
Sidi Hassine	65	2	0	30
Ben Guardane	74	4	1	26
Sahline	106	8	13	21
Kasserine	93	3	2	28
Siliana	60	33	7	14
Total	516	52	31	165

Source: Narrative Quarterly Reports, SFCG

According to participants in focus groups, these dialogue sessions have been a valuable opportunity:

□ *To emphasize the importance for youth to be granted access to cultural and educational activities as a deterrent to VE.* Partner NGOs in Kasserine successfully explored dialogue approaches in their efforts to involve school in providing an enabling environment for students to debate on extremism and other youth-related issues. In Siliana, the “IbtikarMasrahi” partner has made art an alternative way to deal with violence among youth by establishing theater clubs in four primary schools of the town of Gaafour to help run puppet shows. In Bizerte, the theatrical workshop and performance for local high-school students aimed to help students “develop a sense of personal accomplishment and be able to build on their personal development.”

□ *To showcase how the education system needs to fulfill its role as a major actor in preventing VE.* In Ben Guardane, local partner NGOs succeeded in mobilizing school teachers and the Ministry of Education representatives in a discussion panel on teenagers’ school dropout phenomenon which creates a breeding ground for extremism in the region. Such an event was an opportunity for civil society to advocate for a more active role and greater responsibility to be assumed by the school staff in order to prevent children from leaving school and falling victim to the extremism.

❑ For local NGOs to introduce their work with the community and to show how violent extremism recruits among young people and how it is related to other at-risk categories such as unemployed youth, school dropouts or smugglers. This avenue has been particularly explored in Sidi Hassine where the UTIL partner organization has been operating since 2011 mainly targeting at-risk youth and organizing awareness raising activities not only within the local community but also with governmental bodies. UTIL has gathered significant first-hand field experience conducting, among others, a survey-based sociological research “to gain a deeper understanding of how radicalization is perceived and perpetuated in Sidi Hassine.” Globally, 6 out of 10 partner NGOs have expressed high or average improvement in their perception of the degree of collaboration between State and non-State actors in CVE-related issues⁶.

“The program has been an opportunity to address the marked absence of the culture of dialogue in the region.”

An NGO representative, Kasserine

❑ In addition, UTIL considers that the Dialogue Sessions conducted with SFCG support, along with other youth-oriented activities focused on local risk factors of violent extremism among young people, proved to be very successful. The activities provided new evidence on youth legitimate concerns closely related to the driver factors of violent extremism and allowed for a better relationship with high-level government representatives.

❑ To create spaces for religious community dialogues with pro-active involvement of religious authorities. According to participants in the focus groups, the curtailment of religious freedom in the past supported by repressive actions towards religious community leaders as well as the recently experienced weakening of the State control over mosques, have created conditions for VE advocates to recruit among youth with little or no religious education particularly among those who are vulnerable to VE narratives. In Sahline, the dialogue sessions have allowed religious authorities’ representatives (imams, Ministry of Religious Affairs officers) to share opinions with youth and school

“Most of the time, youth lack sound religious education and knowledge based on principles like tolerance and acceptance of others’ creeds and opinions. This kind of deficiency is readily exploited by extremist recruiters who provide youth with alternative narratives under the cover of religion.”

An NGO representative, Sahline

teachers and provide them with religious vocabulary and stories which oppose the extremist narrative. In Bizerte, according to the local partner NGO, the imams have shown great interest and motivation to participate in the debate on VE. They have recognized that religious authorities lack relevant information on the specific driving forces of terrorism in their region

⁶Narrative Quarterly Reports, SFCG.

and seem not fully aware of the necessary prevention measures which were exposed during the dialogue events. Imams participating in the program reportedly acknowledged that their responsibility goes beyond performing religious rituals and they need to play a more active role outside the mosque in closer contact with at-risk youth.

❑ *To contribute in addressing the lack of confidence* between security forces and youth. Despite the continuous efforts of authorities in devising ways of improving the relationship between police forces and the community, it emerges from the FG discussions that an attitude of mutual mistrust is still widespread in particular on the youth side towards the police. Such an attitude prevents local communities from cooperating with the police in creating a secure environment and also hampers police intelligence capacity in preventing violent extremism. In Siliana and SidiHassinethe dialogue sessions have given youth a chance to voice their concerns and put forward proposals to security forces representatives. These exchanges are considered by the participants as “highly valuable” as a first step in easing tensions in the community. More generally, 7 out of 10 partner NGOs have acknowledged reasonable improvement in their perception of the degree of trust between state and civil society actors in efforts to counter violent extremism⁷.

4.3. Increasing Cooperation among Stakeholders

Did the program activities result in a greater level of cooperation among stakeholders and achieve one of the program’s main objectives? A generally positive assessment seems to prevail among NGO participants who mostly recognize that the program led to deeper relationships and cooperation among stakeholders. Throughout the interviews and the FG discussions, participants acknowledge that greater motivation is expressed by all stakeholders along with a stronger involvement in partner NGOs activities. Public officials emphasize that collaboration between civil society, community members, and local public structures was strengthened during the program owing to youth greater awareness of the threat that VE represents for their community, especially in Kasserine and Ben Guardane. The SFCG team reports that while NGOs partnership with local government on CVE issues was bound to be poor before program implementation “90% of the partner NGOs perceived that the involvement of local authorities has improved” after the program.⁸ Local authorities and public structures provided valuable support, particularly on the organizational front, hosting 77% of the program activities (Figure 1). However, not only does the extent of stakeholders’ involvement depend on the implemented activities but it also reflects a

“Local authorities but also school teachers and students’ parents have been very dynamic in supporting us during the program. Indeed, there is a long-standing tradition of working together on education-related issues.”

An NGO representative, Kasserine

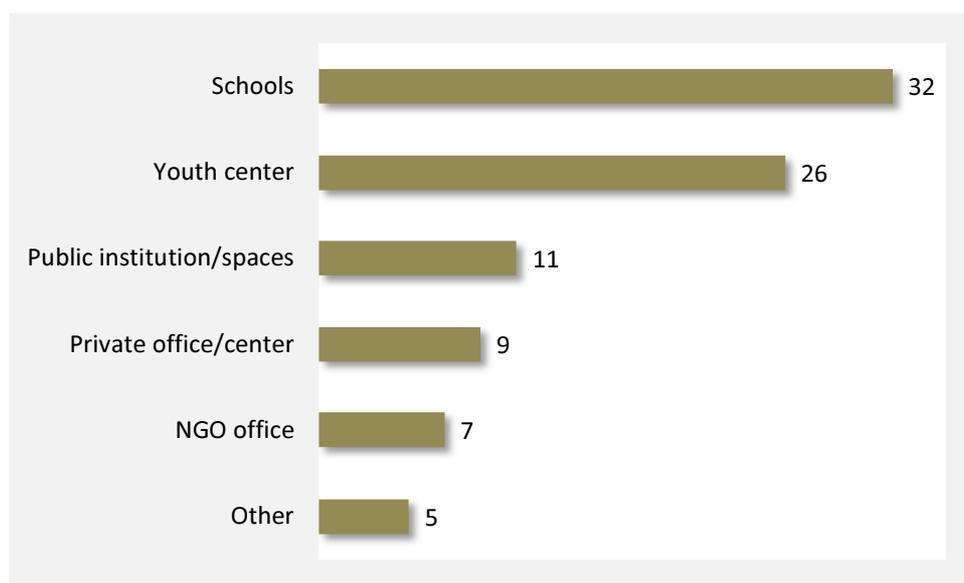
⁷ Narrative Quarterly Reports, SFCG

⁸ Ibid.

“tradition of collaboration” that local partner NGOs have fostered in the past at both local and national levels.

Experienced NGOs, like UTIL in Sidi Hassine or Amal in Kasserine - which have been operating for several years now and have gained good reputation both among stakeholders and within the community - benefit from a network of supportive stakeholders developed over time. Such relationships turned out to be very effective in implementing the program activities and sometimes, like in Sidi Hassine, in allowing for long-standing unresolved problems to be settled⁹.

Figure 1. Location of the activities of the program



Source: Narrative Quarterly Reports, SFCG

In Sidi Hassine, top-level government representatives - two members of parliament, the governor of Tunis, the delegate and mayor of Sidi Hassine, and the General Director of Youth - attended the Shared Learning Session and the closing ceremony that was chaired by the Minister of Youth and Sports, Ms. Majdouline Cherni. According to the SFCG staff report, the Minister “was positively impressed by the projects produced by the youth of Sidi Hassine and their testimonies [...] (she) stressed her intention to organize an art and music festival in Sidi Hassine showcasing local artists and invited

“School clubs have offered a safe space for dialogue. Students feel freer to express their opinion and communicate more easily there.”

An NGO representative, Ben Guardane

⁹ For example, in supporting youth musical activities and the web radio broadcasting, the Minister of Youth and Sports kept her promise and took actions to restore internet connection in the « Maison des Jeunes » (Youth Center) in Sidi Hassine after a 2-year interruption of the service.

Soldat Boyz [the youth rap group] to perform on national television the rap song on VE composed as part of the small grant activities.”¹⁰

In Kasserine, the creation of dialogue clubs in two primary schools was facilitated for the local partner NGO by the Ministry of Education which granted access to these schools prior to the program. In Ben Guardane, one of the local partner NGOs (ABFID) has succeeded in mobilizing education workers, parents, and school directors to raise awareness about the risk of dropping out of school and the methods of reaching out to at-risk students. As participants have mentioned, these activities resulted to additional efforts from parents and education workers leading to the reintegration of two students who had dropped out of school. The school clubs that the NGO helped set up with the support of teachers were reported as highly appreciated by students and their parents. This overall positive assessment is also supported by monitoring indicators collected by the SFCG team which show that 9 out of 10 partner NGOs experienced improved collaboration with stakeholders (local authorities) after the program has been implemented.¹¹

4.4. Ensuring Program's Sustainability

To what extent has the program paved the way for self-sustained NGOs activities on CVE related issues? Are the partner NGOs taking advantage of the momentum gained during the program to advance VE prevention in their communities?

Generally speaking, partner NGOs show strong commitment and determination to continue working on CVE topics. They express their concern that violent extremism still remains an unexplored threat for youth that needs to be properly addressed by governmental actions and civil society activities as well. However, beyond the achievements of the program and the willingness of the partner NGOs to take further action, some context-dependent considerations emerge from the FG discussions which may help answer these questions and shed lights on future perspectives.

Building on the experience gained from the program, the “Youth & Skills” NGO in Bizerte is currently expanding its intervention on CVE related activities. The organization has obtained funding for a new project which focuses on delivering informational sessions on violent extremism in order to improve youth resilience towards extremist narratives. Moreover, the organization has initiated the “Kafae” (Skills) regional network which brings together civil society organizations from the region dedicated to awareness-raising activities on VE, while joint actions are currently being discussed.

The partner NGO in Sidi Hassine, a relatively large organization with sound experience, has clear vision of their upcoming CVE-oriented activities. Relying on a developed network of partners and building on its past accomplishments, UTIL takes advantage of its local knowledge and proximity with the community and expects to continue its work with youth.

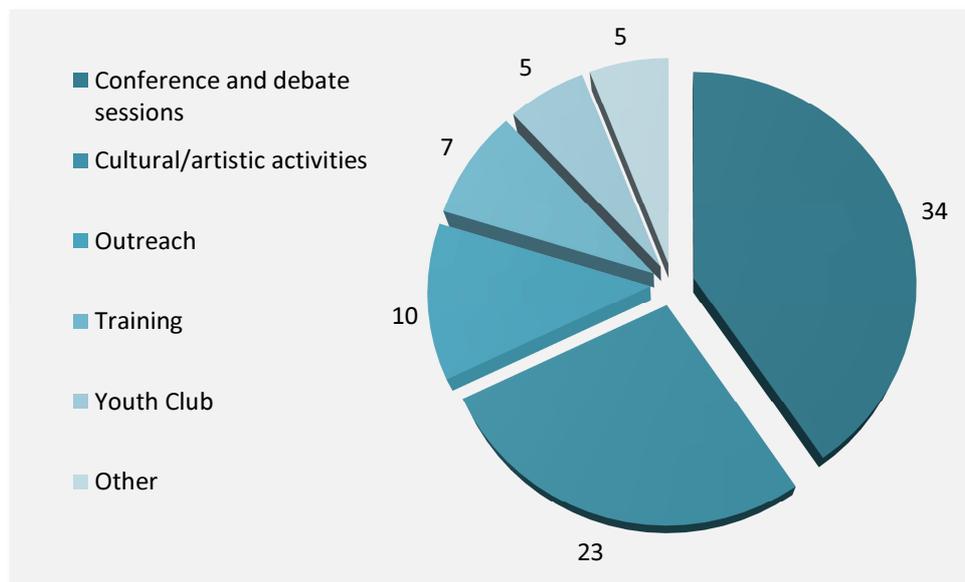
¹⁰ Narrative Quarterly Report, January, 1 – March, 31, 2017

¹¹ « Bottom-up Approach to Countering Violent Extremism in Tunisia – Booklet”, p.6



UTIL considers that the new research on VE drivers in Sidi Hassine will serve as background for raising awareness and enhancing advocacy actions on VE prevention, while specific activities are currently under elaboration.

Figure 2. Methods of delivering small grants activities



Source: Narrative Quarterly Reports, SFCG

In Kasserine, the AMAL NGO’s work with club schools is very well valued by local authorities, teachers, and parents. According to AMAL representatives, developing a culture of dialogue among youth through cultural activities remains an important widely-shared avenue to prevent violence. This will guide their future intervention in schools with a view to providing youth with non-violent communication training. While AMAL recognizes that a mid-term strategy needs to be developed in order to consolidate the current achievements, no specific activities are planned to date.

The partner NGOs in Ben Guardane particularly appreciated the originality of the program which focused on a “much-debated but little-understood” subject in a region that shows particular vulnerability to violent extremism. Activities undertaken to address the school drop-out phenomenon have also gained large interest among stakeholders and even resulted in

“As a youth-oriented public service we have already planned to deliver sensitization activities on VE drivers on a weekly basis for youth and teenagers.”

Youth Center representative, Ben Guardane

the reintegration of two children who had left the school. However, NGO representatives recognize that, without additional actions to support the dialogue sessions in the school clubs, the present momentum will vanish. They particularly emphasize the need for school clubs to be provided with some equipment – dashboards,

computers, or other utilities - which may serve as incentives for students and schools to keep working on dialogue issues. Recently, the local partner NGOs have drafted and submitted for

funding a proposal for cultural events- summer camp retreat, drama activities – to try and ensure the continuity of the school clubs sessions.

In Sahline, the partner NGO argues that the program has offered the opportunity for the NGO members to upgrade and improve their skills, particularly on the aspects related to project and financial management. According to the participants, delivering large scale activities like the retreat campus has required more coordination and better organizational skills than usual. The successful achievement of the small grant activities has led reportedly to a greater self-esteem for the NGO members.

Ibtikar Masrahi, one of the partner NGOs in Siliana, specialized in theatrical performances, organizing interactive assemblies in different primary schools and proposing various CVE-oriented plays. In order to remedy to the recurring obstacle that lack of appropriate space for performance represented and to ensure the continuity of its work, the organization has built a mobile stage hall and has already planned “an artistic itinerary” for the summer on an exclusively voluntary basis. The organization recently won the National Theater Festival First Prize with a performance developed during the program. According to the SFCG staff, given the very positive reactions of school teachers and students, the Regional Director of Educations asked Ibtikar Masrahi to establish their theatre clubs and non-violence assemblies in schools in the whole region of Siliana.

It is worth noting that the partnerships developed between stakeholders during the program generally receive positive appraisal from the partner NGOs. Among other, SFCG staff acknowledges the continuous support provided by the National Youth Observatory, which allowed for the Shared Learning Sessions along with other activities to be held in the local Youth Centers. However, cooperation with public structures still suffers from bureaucratic red tape, like in Kasserine, or mistrust, like in Sahline and personalized relationships still remain fundamental to gain the support of public authorities. Local stakeholders emphasize the need for NGOs to keep implementing CVE-oriented activities as the fight against violent extremism is a long-term challenge that cannot be effectively addressed through sporadic interventions. They call for greater responsibility and commitment of local authorities to support CVE initiatives taken by NGOs.

Finally, the Vice-President of the Counter Terrorism Commission, who attended the closing ceremony of the program, expressed firm commitment by stating that “all the recommendations of this program will be taken in consideration.”¹²,

¹² Closing ceremony report, SFCG, May 15, 2017

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

In the last five years, violent extremism has become a major concern for Tunisian authorities. The phenomenon has been mainly managed from a security perspective, but it clearly goes far beyond. Indeed, it calls for multi-level interventions, like prevention, sensitization, and support to at-risk populations, returnees' integration, etc., and implies sound knowledge of the factors that made extremist narratives attractive for Tunisians. Yet, these avenues remain little explored. In this context, the “Bottom-up approach to countering violent extremism in Tunisia” program has been particularly valuable for participants as it:

- ❑ Succeeded in motivating local partners – NGOs, teachers, religious leaders, youth, and parents –by providing them with first-hand field-based analysis of the drivers of violent extremism in 6 localities. Participants have particularly welcomed the originality of the program, while emphasizing its positive role in instilling a culture of dialogue in their community and easing relationships between stakeholders.
- ❑ Contributed to enhancing visibility of the partner NGOs within their communities by helping these NGOs develop community-led activities that reached hundreds of people and increased public awareness through workshops, school clubs, mass media, or cultural productions. The program showed how specific phenomena of social exclusion, like school dropouts or other less-suspected factors such as the absence of alternative narratives, may act as recruitment drivers for violent extremism.

While the program successfully pursued its main objectives, some recommendations are to be considered by the SFCG staff in order to reinforce the program achievements, ensure its long-term effectiveness, and support potential extensions or replications of the program. Hence, it is important to:

- ❑ Keep supporting school club activities as a means of providing young students with an enabling environment of youth and children-oriented leisure activities, which not only promotes the culture of dialogue but also offers new perspectives for children. The lack of cultural activities, especially in rural areas like Gaafour (Siliana) or Ben Guardane, exposes young people to a lifestyle that tends to worsen the youth's sense of loneliness and increase social withdrawal, which are promptly exploited by extremist recruiters. In this context, SFCG needs to capitalize on the current experience of the program, for example by editing a booklet based on testimonials from school teachers and directors, club moderators, partner NGOs in order to bring to the attention of the Ministry of Education the importance of such activities for the establishment of a healthier environment for children's balanced development.
- ❑ Engage more actively with religious authorities in sustaining VE preventive actions by providing communities with alternative narratives. Evidence shows that religious leaders lack appropriate training and/or information on the role of social exclusion factors that nurture violent extremism. At the same time, religious leaders participating in the program have acknowledged the need for them to play a more active role outside the mosque, entertaining closer contact with at-risk youth.

- ❑ Support activities aiming at strengthening collaboration between the police and citizens as a means of VE prevention. These activities need to address issues of mutual mistrust and lack of confidence as they are frequently mentioned as an obstacle to cooperation.
- ❑ Support NGOs in addressing the youth's economic marginalization, which is a key driver to violent extremism. The program has explored issues of social exclusion which lead to violent extremism – school dropouts, lack of cultural activities, lack of dialogue skills and opportunities. The economic aspect thus requires adequate attention. As unemployment remains one of the top youth priorities, it is recommended to SFCG to design programs that reward youth creativity on self-employment and provide youth with mentorship to help them implement their ideas.
- ❑ Extend the small grant implementation period and provide additional funding for the local partner NGOs. Educational and cultural activities, like school clubs and theater performances, as acknowledged by many local partner NGOs not only require extensive preparation, but also need time to have an impact.
- ❑ Provide additional capacity building for local NGOs that not only improves the program's effectiveness, but also paves the way NGOs engage in activities after the program ends.
- ❑ Consider cross-fertilization meetings in order to create conditions for experience sharing and networking between partner NGOs.
- ❑ Consider media coverage for the dialogue sessions, which would not only contribute to disseminating the work being done, but also to promoting the culture of dialogue within communities.
- ❑ Given that violent extremism has proven to be a sensitive issue– some focus groups participants and other program stakeholders did not hesitate to consider it as “a taboo” – and in order to ensure full collaboration of participants, it is recommended for final evaluation purposes that the evaluator(s) be involved since the beginning of the program. It not only raises participants' awareness on the evaluation process as an integral part of the program, but also helps participants feel confident and comfortable with sharing their views with the evaluator(s).



6. Appendices

6.1. Appendix 1: List of Activities Delivered by Local Partner NGOs

BEN GUARDANE

Association Ben Gardene Future for Investment and Development (ABFID)

Activity	Indicator	Target	Achieved
<i>Activity1</i> Discussion with education staff	# participants	15	20 participants
<i>Activity2</i> Education staff training workshop	# participants	20	18 participants
<i>Activity3</i> Parent involvement conference	# participants	15	18 participants

Union of Unemployed Graduates (UDC)

Activity	Indicator	Target	Achieved
<i>Activity1</i> Meeting with local authorities	# participants	15	39 participants
<i>Activity2</i> Employability workshop	# participants	20	40 participants
<i>Activity3</i> Workshops and discussions with local civil society members	#participants # sessions	2 sessions 15 participants	-2 sessions -30 participants
<i>Activity4</i> Open space dialogues with unemployed graduates and youth	#participants # open space	2 sessions 15 participants	-2 open space -44 participants
<i>Activity5</i> Create a permanent discussion group with civil society	1 club is created		1 club is created

BIZERTE

Citizen Actors

Activity	Indicator	Target	Achieved
<i>Activity1</i> Awareness and information meeting for parents and teachers: “Community mobilization for combatting violent extremism in Tunisia”	# participants	40	50 participants -19 students -12 professors -4 parents -15 CSO
<i>Activity2</i> Community dialogue and panel:	# participants	200	107 participants

Conference “Let's combat violent extremism”			
<i>Activity3</i> Art as educational tool	# participants	300	330 participants

Youth & Skills - Bizerte

Activity	Indicator	Target	Achieved
<i>Activity1</i> Conference “Causes and Results of Violent Extremism”	# participants	100	39 participants -10 professors -2 Imams -13 others -14 students
<i>Activity2</i> Communication training session: "Communication techniques and skills in relaying religious discourses to youth"	# participants	15	11 Imams
<i>Activity3</i> Communication training session: "Communication techniques and skills for professors"	# participants	15	12 professors
<i>Activity4</i> Communication training session: "Communication techniques and skills for youth"	# of participants	15	13 participants -3 boys -10 girls
<i>Activity5</i> Theatrical workshop and performance	# of cultural club produced	2	-One cinema club “ShkounEna?” -One theatre club “Al Tariq”

KASSERINE

Blédi

Activity	Indicator	Target	Achieved
<i>Activity1</i> Establishing the robotic club	# training session	2	2 training sessions
<i>Activity2</i> Training sessions on how to debate	# training session # of participants	8	8 training session
<i>Activity3</i> A contest between the 4 debate clubs	# club	4	4 clubs

Hope for Solidarity, Development and Knowledge (AMAL)

Activity	Indicator	Target	Achieved
<i>Activity1</i> Flashmob school assemblies and street performances	# of flashmobs # participants by entity	8 flashmobs	8 flashmobs 257 participants -22 professors -235 students
<i>Activity2</i>	# of dialogues	2	-2 dialogues

Dialogue sessions	# of participants	dialogues	-50 youth in the 1st dialogue -20 youth in the 2nd dialogue
<i>Activity3</i> Symposium	# participants	50	40 participants

Chaambi Association for the Promotion of Digital Media and Culture and Kasserine F.M. Radio (KFM)

Activity	Indicator	Target	Achieved
<i>Activity1</i> Radio show named "Street Talk"	# of broadcasts podcast	9 broadcasts	9 Broadcasts Podcast March 10,000/hours
<i>Activity2</i> Debate sessions on violent extremism	# of sessions # participants	26 participants 3 sessions	3 sessions 26 participants
<i>Activity3</i> Rap song			In progress
<i>Activity4</i> Training sessions in citizenship and journalism	# participants	10	6 journalists

SAHLINE

Youth for Culture and Dialogue in Sahline

Activity	Indicator	Target	Achieved
<i>Activity1</i> Information session and camp recruitment	# participants	30	35 participants -28 CSO -7 youth
<i>Activity2</i> CVE awareness camp	# participants	50	44 participants -27 youth -3 Imam -4 professors -10 parents
<i>Activity3</i> Symposium "Concepts of dialogue and the acceptance of others in Islam"	# participants		87 participants -15 CSO -20 parents -25 youth -27 others
<i>Activity4</i> Training "Concepts of dialogue and communication"	# participants	15	21 youth participants
<i>Activity5</i> Debate session	# participants		42 participants

SIDI HASSINE

Union of Independent Tunisians for Freedom (UTIL)

Activity	Indicator	Target	Achieved
<i>Activity1</i> Rap song against violent extremism	Rap song is produced # of share on social medias	1	Rap song is produced “matguedounech” 225 shares on Facebook
<i>Activity2</i> Seminar "Jihadism or Terrorism: Understanding the Destructive Ideology Targeting Our Youth"	#participants	50	30 participants
<i>Activity3</i> Community survey and study	One report is produced	1	A final report is produced
<i>Activity4</i> Web radio program	# interview podcast	5	5 interviews
<i>Activity5</i> Create awareness campaign	# fliers distributed # wall posters	5000 fliers 100 wall posters	2000 fliers 100 wall posters

SILIANA

Innovation in Theater

Activity	Indicator	Target	Achieved
<i>Activity1</i> Awareness campaign in primary school	# primary school # participants	5 primary schools	-5 primary schools -500 students
<i>Activity2</i> Puppet-show workshop	#primary school # participants	5 primary schools	-5 primary schools -200 students
<i>Activity3</i> Street theater	# of theatre club	5	5 theatre club
<i>Activity4</i> Mobile cinema	# mobile cinema	1	1 mobile cinema

Association for Sustainable Development and Environment El Aroussa (ADDEA)

Activity	Indicator	Target	Achieved
<i>Activity1</i> Young leaders training session	# participants	20	15 participants
<i>Activity2</i> Awareness workshops	# participants	200	150 participants
<i>Activity3</i> Religious discussion	# discussion sessions	4	4 sessions
<i>Activity4</i>	# club elaborated	2	2 clubs were created

Cultural activity			
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6.2. Appendix 2: List of Stakeholders Interviewed

Region	Profile
Bizerte	Teacher (Ministry of Education)
Tunis	Consultant, Journalist and writer (Facilitator of localized dialogue sessions held in Siliana and Kasserine)
Kasserine	Ex-mayor
Siliana	Representative of the governorate
Ben Guardane	Director of Centre of Culture



6.3. Appendix 3: Data Collection Tools

Local Partner NGO Focus Group Guide

1. What motivated you personally the most as well as your organization to participate in the program? What were you expecting from the participation in this program? Globally speaking, to what extent do you consider your expectations have been met? Have you encountered any challenges in the delivery of the program? (if so, what were they, what impact did they have on the program, how were they overcome?)
2. Which aspects of the program have worked best? (why?) Which aspects have not worked so well? (why?) Have there been any unintended effects, either positive or negative? How did the community respond to the program?
3. Prior to this program, how would you describe your knowledge on CVE related issues? Have you had any opportunities to freely discuss on extremism within your community? If yes, have other (local, governmental) partners been involved in such events? What have been the specific contributions of each partner? If no, why?
4. More broadly, what is your organization experience with community engagement activities? According to your experience, how receptive are community members to your activities in general, and to the CVE-focused project in particular?

Key evaluation questions: How the program has matched the CSO requirements/expectations? To what extent did the program design effectively address the community engagement issue?

Evaluation dimensions: Effectiveness; Relevance

5. How can you define the relationships you and your organization have developed with other stakeholders during the different levels of the program (on CVE issues but not only)? How did this relationship evolve during/after the program? How can you assess their willingness to cooperate with your organization? Did this meet your expectations?
6. Can you explain which of the partners mostly show an interest to support your activities with respect to others? Why?
7. Has your organization engaged in other CVE focused activities with these partners? How do you envision future collaboration with these partners? Have you received any proposals in this direction? What is your opinion about the next steps?

Key evaluation questions: To what extent did the program give rise to cooperation among stakeholders on CVE? What are the specific aspects of the program which clearly made a difference with past initiatives related to CVE? How partners envision their long-term collaboration?

Evaluation dimensions: Effectiveness; Relevance; Sustainability



Stakeholders Interview Guide

1. During the last two years, you have been involved in P/CVE-focused activities supported by SFCG and/or implemented by local CSOs. What is your opinion on the adequacy of these activities with the community and your organization's preoccupations? How much important is to you and your institution to engage in such activities with civil society organizations?
2. In the current situation, what is the CSOs ability to address the CVE issues in local or central decision-making process? Do you think that youth engagement can be, or has been especially important in relation with (i) influencing public policies, (ii) empowering citizens?
3. To what extent have these activities improved your understanding of the driving forces of VE? How this understanding has resulted or is likely to result in concrete responses/activities? Is there any mechanism you foresee in order to implement/institutionalize such activities?
4. To what extent has the program improved the relationship between your institution and the civil society? To what extent this collaboration can turn effective in preventing VE in your community/in Tunisia?
5. Are there any other stakeholders /institutions that you feel should be involved in the provision of CVE interventions?
6. With regard to your collaboration with CSOs in the CVE program and with SFCG office, what are the aspects of this partnership that you were most interested in, both at personal and institutional levels? How did this collaboration differ from other experiences you may have had with other CSOs or public/governmental bodies?
7. Can you mention some aspects/issues that you consider positive or very positive in this collaboration? Others which are less? Why?
8. From a general perspective, how would you assess the effectiveness of the program in increasing community's awareness and capacities in coping with VE?
9. In your opinion, what are the possibilities for future collaboration with communities, CSOs in CVE or community dialogue related topics? Are there any concrete steps that you are willing to take (or have already taken) in such a direction?
10. In your opinion, what is the *most significant change* you may point out at organizational level *resulting from your participation* to the program? How do you think that these changes you mention have affected the community members? (*elaborate and give examples*). What lessons have been learned and applied through the program? Have there been any lessons learned that would apply elsewhere? (overall/target population group)?

Key evaluation questions: *To what extent have the capacity building component of the program been successful? How it may translate into operational sustainability after the program ends?*

Evaluation dimensions: *Effectiveness; Sustainability*