



Lessons learned from preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) programmes amid ongoing conflict

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Question

What are the lessons learned from Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) programming implemented amid ongoing conflict globally?

- Please focus on what has worked and what were the challenges in delivering interventions addressing 'push' and 'pull' factors:

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1. Summary

This review finds that there is relatively little evidence on what has worked in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) in conflict settings. Overall, there is stronger evidence for programmes that seek to counter violent extremism among at risk populations, than for those that seek to prevent violent extremism by reducing the structural drivers. However, this review found a weak evidence base, and a lack of agreement on the best way to prevent and counter violent extremism in these contexts (Holmer, Bauman, & Aryaeinejad, 2018). It therefore discusses understandings of P/CVE and the evidence base in section 2, before highlighting some of the evidence from programmes and the lessons learned in sections 3 and 4. The review includes lessons from countries with low level or latent conflict and post-conflict settings.

Push and pull factors are widely used to understand the risk that individuals might take up violent extremism. **However, the review has found several difficulties cited with this approach.** First, some authors suggested that existing programmes did not always accurately assess the push and pull factors in given contexts (Romaniuk & Durner, 2018). Other authors questioned the approach of addressing push and pull factors, in favour of considering the structural factors driving conflict (Attree, 2017). Such authors therefore advocate integrating P/CVE efforts with peacebuilding efforts in security contexts.

However, some studies showed positive results in addressing individual push or pull factors. For instance, a study of programming used to increase participants' 'value complexity' (i.e. ability to acknowledge and understand multiple values and views) in Kenya showed positive results and has been replicated in other contexts, although not in conflict contexts (Nemr and Savage, 2019). However, this review found that understanding how push and pull factors worked in a specific context was very important. **In particular, 'CVE-relevant' programming, i.e. addressing push factors, did not always address VE effectively.** For example, Aldrich's study (2012) of USAID programming in the Sahel showed that radio and USAID programmes effectively increased listeners' civic engagement. However, it did not have any effect on listeners' willingness to support VE, which had been expected to follow from increased civic engagement.

Key findings and opinions include:

- The need for effective assessment of the context and at risk populations.
- The need for a 'theory of change' to understand how addressing certain push or pull factors are expected to influence VE. This is particularly the case with development work which also hopes to address P/CVE.
- In conflict situations, the need for a broader peacebuilding plan.
- In conflict situations, the need for security to prevent reprisals against former fighters in C/PVE programmes.
- The value of not labelling a programme C/PVE.

There are few quality studies of P/CVE in conflict settings. Partly this reflects the difficulty of gathering evidence in such settings, and partly donors' desire for secrecy in sensitive contexts. Evidence on P/CVE in conflict settings is also hampered by the range of factors addressed by different actors, and divergent understandings of how factors will influence VE in different settings. Several authors point to the need for a more rigorous evidence base (Amy-Jane Gielen, 2017; Holmer et al., 2018). This review has drawn lessons from reports and evaluations of P/CVE, as well as disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) as many agree it has

significant overlaps with P/CVE. Lessons are drawn from fragile and unstable states as well as conflicts, as these have some similarities and there are more examples. There is a small number of studies of the outcomes of programmes on participants. However, most studies consist seek to measure attitudes relevant to VE. Conflict and political analysis of the contexts in which P/CVE is undertaken is also included.

2. Background

Definitions

There is disagreement on the meaning of violent extremism (VE). While some include individuals holding extreme views, others focus on the use of violent methods (Stephens, Sieckelinck, & Boutellier, 2019, p. 1). Moreover, both USAID and the Australian Counter-Terrorism Committee include supporters of violent extremist groups/individuals under violent extremism, while others only consider those who join extreme groups under this category (Khalil & Zeuthen, 2014, p. 3).

Understandings of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) are further hampered by disagreement over the process by which individuals come to violent extremism, and thereby the ways by which to counter or prevent this. While some analyses centre on the process of 'radicalisation', others argue that individuals join extreme groups because of either existing grievances with the political system or personal vulnerabilities, and only adopt extreme views afterwards (ICRC, 2017; O' Neill & Van Broeckhoven, 2018, pp. 64–65). Research has found a disconnect between 'attitudes' and 'behaviour,' with many members of extremist groups unsupportive of or indifferent to the groups' ideologies (Khalil, Brown, Chant, Olowo, & Wood, 2019, p. 8). Moreover, in conflict settings, what constitutes 'extremism' is often not always clear – seemingly extreme actions may be seen as legitimate by many – and extremists may also be seen as rebels, combatants, prisoners, fighters or victims (Grip & Kotajoki, 2019, p. 391). This has consequences for how the resulting 'extremism' is best addressed. According to a recent literature review of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes, '[m]ost studies also agree that de-radicalisation is not a necessary condition for successful disengagement from violent extremism' (Grip & Kotajoki, 2019: 383).

P/CVE is defined differently by different actors. This emerged following the failure of military led efforts to counter terrorism originating in Western societies as part of the 'war on terror' from 2001 (Frazer & Nünlist, 2015, p. 2). While PVE and CVE are often bracketed together as 'soft' anti-extremism approaches, some scholars argue that PVE should be understood separately, to distinguish itself from the security concerns which often accompany, and sometimes undermine, CVE approaches (Stephens et al., 2019, p. 1). Indeed, CVE is generally used to denote efforts targeting individuals or groups either already in extremist groups or deemed at risk of joining. PVE is used to denote more 'upstream' activities targeting the structural factors that may 'push' individuals or communities to undertake VE. However, given that push and pull factors vary from context to context, and analysis to analysis, there is clearly overlap between CVE and PVE. It is also worth noting that some development actors in particular avoid labelling their work as P/CVE for strategic reasons (Boutellis & Fink, 2016, p. 3).

Push and pull factors are one way to look at the influences on individuals taking up violent extremism. Push factors refer to general conditions that allow violent extremism to spread, while pull factors are the benefits individuals may get from joining a violent extremist movement.

Push and pull factors vary from context to context. Push factors may include: social marginalisation, poorly governed areas, government repression, government corruption, police harassment, unemployment, injustice to a particular demographic, historical injustices. Pull factors may include: access to material resources, social status and respect, belonging, a sense of adventure/quest, self-esteem, social networks, radical institutions, radical religious ideas/institutions, charismatic radical preachers, the idea of a religious/ideological community, the influence of the internet, a lack of 'moderate' religious or civic influence (Khalil & Zeuthen, 2014, p. 4).

The relationship between push and pull factors and radicalisation is complex (Khalil and Zeuthen, 2014, p. 5). There is debate over which factors push and pull individuals towards extremism, but the relationship between different factors is not always straightforward. For example, unemployment can push individuals towards VE, but P/CVE programmes including training for work may stigmatise them as 'extremists' and make it harder to get a job. Romaniuk (2015) therefore emphasises the importance of P/CVE programmes identifying a causal mechanism, or 'theory of change,' by which they aim to counter or prevent violent extremism.

Some scholars reject the focus on push and pull factors because its focus on the individual ignores wider structural causes of VE. For example, the think tank Saferworld criticises focusing on CVE rather than the causes of extremists' grievances, as well as the fact the P/CVE has often been accompanied by greater spending on military/policy counter terrorism (Attree, 2017). Using the example of Garissa in Kenya, they argue that programming should not focus on push and pull factors for individuals, but the drivers of conflict in general, such as unemployment, disenfranchisement, civil rights violations, and the causes of conflict (Wakube, Nyagah, Mwangi, & Attree, 2015). Even if these structural causes are understood as 'push factors', it is very hard to address them in the terms of a P/CVE framework as they encompass a range of broad, often deep-seated problems that go beyond the scope of most programmes (Van Zyl & Frank, 2018, p. 36). Instead, such scholars argue that P/CVE efforts in conflict situations should be carried out as part of peacebuilding efforts, or at least in co-ordination with security and conflict-resolution processes.

PVE sometimes refers to efforts to reduce push factors, and CVE to deal with already radicalised individuals or at-risk individuals. Another way to classify P/CVE is as P/CVE-relevant and P/CVE-specific. For example, some development programmes address the push factors towards radicalisation without it being their primary or even conscious aim. These can be called 'P/CVE-relevant' rather than 'P/CVE-specific' (Boutellis & Fink, 2016, p. 6; Romaniuk, 2015, p. 30).

In practice, P/CVE overlaps with three other programme types:

- development work that addresses the 'push factors' for VE (from education and training to governance and civic inclusion programmes) (USAID, 2011);
- Counter-terrorism programmes. While the methods of CT are usually different from P/CVE, they are sometimes carried out by the same organisations and seen to be associated by affected populations (Gjelsvik, 2019);

- Peacebuilding, as violent extremism is often driven by material and political conflict and can therefore be addressed by these means (Attree, Street, Venchiarutti, & Venchiarutti, 2018).
- Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) (Richards, 2017). In some contexts, DDR may function as a form of P/CVE, in that it seeks to prevent the re-radicalisation of captured extremists (Boutellis & Fink, 2016, p. 16; Grip & Kotajoki, 2019, p. 373; Oliver Kaplan & Enzo Nussio, 2018; USAID, 2011). Moreover, it has some overlap with P/CVE in that both use some of the same tools, such as education, training and trying to achieve community acceptance and economic reintegration.

P/CVE activities can take a number of forms. As an example, the most popular objectives and activities surveyed in a recent review of P/CVE in West Africa were (Van Zyl & Frank, 2018, p. 9):

- Promoting multiculturalism and tolerance (through radio programmes, cultural activities, meetings between communities, and interfaith dialogue).
- Capacity building (through training and workshops).
- Awareness raising (through radio, cultural activities and school peace clubs).
- Promoting co-operation (through meetings between communities, civil society organisations and government departments).
- Building resilience (through training and workshops).
- Socio-economic empowerment (through vocational training and humanitarian outreach).
- Rehabilitation and reintegration (through trauma counselling, counter-narratives and meetings with communities).
- Education (through training, workshops and school).
- Humanitarian/development aid (through building education and communication infrastructure).
- Counter-narratives (through radio programmes, religious education, social media and interfaith dialogue).
- Research.
- Psychosocial support (through counselling).

Quality and extent of evidence

It is widely agreed that there is relatively little evidence on the outcomes of C/PVE programmes in conflict areas. There are several reasons for this. First, the broad range of P/CVE aims and activities makes it hard to compare different ones in a systematic way (Romaniuk, 2015, p. 9). Moreover, in some cases, P/CVE programmes are not labelled as such in order to avoid stigmatising targeted populations. In other cases, development work can be classified as P/CVE in the sense that it can target ‘push’ factors. In both instances, the lack of the C/PVE label can mean it is not evaluated as part of the P/CVE body of evidence (Brett, Erikson, Ronn Sorensen, & Aps, 2015, p. 29). Second, it is widely agreed that CVE is difficult to assess because of the range of different social, political, economic and ideological factors affecting radicalisation. A programme may target one or more factors, but assessing its role in relation to the broader environment affecting those who may be radicalised is not simple (Holmer et al., 2018, p. 8). In addition, ‘attributing causality where the desired outcome is a non-event (i.e. number of individuals not being radicalised)’ is difficult (Holmer et al., 2018, p. 4; Luengo-cabrera & Pauwels, 2016, p. 3). Third, evaluations have not always been undertaken for reasons of cost, time, or in order to protect sensitive information (Holmer et al., 2018, p. 9). Fourth, many

evaluations have focused on programmes undertaken rather than outcomes, and research design varies in quality (Van Zyl & Frank, 2018, p. 2).

There are nevertheless a number of publications that evaluate the evidence on P/CVE and related fields in conflict or fragile settings, or try to learn lessons. They fall into the following categories:

- Some have made 'observations on the design, implementation and evaluation' of a range of programmes in order to draw lessons relevant to the whole sector (Van Zyl & Frank, 2018).
- Some analyse the strategic effectiveness of P/CVE within certain contexts, considering the roles of government and civil society alongside the P/CVE programmes (Romaniuk & Durner, 2018).
- Analyses of the drivers of violent extremism, such as the EU's STRIVE study in the Horn of Africa, which aims to inform later programming (see section 3).
- Others use social science methods, such as surveys and control groups, to determine the efficacy of programmes targeting particular push and pull factors (Aldrich, 2012; Mercy Corps, 2018).
- Literature reviews have also been undertaken to identify the scope and standards of research on P/CVE and related fields (Grip & Kotajoki, 2019).

This rapid review therefore considers all these types of evidence.

3. Examples of programmes

Horn of Africa and East Africa

Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism (STRIVE)

Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism (STRIVE) was a pilot programme funded by the EU in the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Kenya, Puntland, South Central Somalia, and Somaliland). It was implemented by the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), and ran from 2014 to 2017. It aimed to 'test assumptions around what works' in CVE in the area (Zeuthen, 2015). Findings include:

- Semi-structured interviews showed that **diaspora Somalis** were found to be no more susceptible to radicalisation than non-diaspora Somalis, and may in some cases inspire violence in the host population. Programming should therefore 'focus on relations between the two groups, rather than engaging with one primarily'
- **Women** have several direct and indirect roles in VE, including hosting members of extreme groups, or recruiting to religious institutions friendly to the VE group. In terms of programming 'a starting point could be working with women's organisations active in these locations to raise their understanding of the problem and work with them to develop innovative ways of building relations with other women and to help them to discover the signs of radicalisation.'
- A study of recruitment by Al-Shabaab in south central Somalia found that patterns were changing and '**highlighted the need for an understanding of how varied recruitment processes [to VE] can be in Somalia.**' For example, clan-based recruitment leads to

very different CVE methods than individual, ideologically motivated recruitment. It suggested the following push and pull factors:

See: Table 1: Push and pull factors for VE in Somalia (Zeuthen, 2015, p. 34), <http://www.hedayahcenter.org/Admin/Content/File-23201691817.pdf>

DFID's Sustainable Employment and Economic Development (SEED)

The programme was a livelihood programme with CVE as a 'sub objective' (Luengo-cabrera & Pauwels, 2016). An evaluation concluded that **the programme's CVE work had limited efficacy** because it selected participants based on livelihood vulnerability rather than vulnerability to extremist recruitment, and because it could not address a range of other factors driving VE recruitment: government failures to provide justice and services, clan politics, and the personal gain promised by Al-Shabaab (Brett et al., 2015, p. 38).

The Somali government's Defector Rehabilitation Programme (DRP)

The DPR is a DDR programme. Launched in 2012, the programme runs nine rehabilitation centres. Somali security services screen the fighters, and individuals deemed to be low risk are taken to rehabilitation centres where they are offered education and training.

A review by the think tank Accord, based on interviews with practitioners and stakeholders, emphasises that **the centres face the risk of attack and infiltration by Al-Shabaab**. It also points to the need for psychosocial support, and a good understanding of the group dynamics of former members of a violent extremist group. It also faces challenges in reintegrating the participants in a country where Al-Shabaab still controls some areas and maintains sleeper cells (Gjelsvik, 2019).

The Serendi rehabilitation centre in Mogadishu

The centre is part of the government's National Programme for the Treatment and Handling of Disengaged Combatants. It is supported by international donors. It provides support and rehabilitation services to fighters who have voluntarily disengaged and are deemed low risk. Most of these fighters will therefore not have been attracted to Al-Shabaab for ideological reasons (Khalil et al., 2019).

It has not yet been possible to undertake longitudinal research into the success of Serendi in deradicalising former Al-Shabaab members. However, the report suggests, based on interviews with staff randomly chosen participants, that the centre is **a useful model for the rehabilitation of low risk extremist group members outside of prison** (Khalil et al., 2019, p. 4). The centre provides vocational training alongside civic, political and religious education.

The report found that:

- **Attitudinal change was driven not just by the programmes, but also 'the the positive influences of family members, Serendi management and staff, and access to a wider range of media sources outside Al-Shabaab were of comparable importance'**. The report argues that 'implementers should aim to establish environments that are broadly conducive to such positive attitudinal change, rather than focus only on training that specifically aims to provoke this effect' (Khalil et al., 2019, p. 25).

- The centre aims to help residents maintain relations with their families, including hosting visits.
- The residents expressed satisfaction with the training offered (such as welding, mechanics courses, ICT and tailoring). Few had found jobs in these fields, although this was attributed to a lack of money to buy equipment.
- Former Serendi residents have not reported much stigma, because most move to the 'relative anonymity' of Mogadishu, or because they have hidden their pasts, or family members have helped them reintegrate.

Mercy Corps' Somali Youth Learners Initiative (SYLI)

The SYLI programme opened 60 secondary schools and trained 3,000 teachers to address the push factors of lack of education and civic engagement for the 45,000 children attending. Children were taught leadership, civic engagement, etc.

Controlled surveys were carried out in 2017 in Puntland and South Central regions. The surveys measured attitudes to armed groups and terrorism, the capacity of the state and local government, their ability to change things, and their own prospects. It did not measure outcomes, however (Mercy Corps, 2018).

They showed that the provision of education and civic engagement programmes helped to reduce levels of support for political violence. They showed that education alone also reduced support. A survey of Somaliland in 2016 had shown that education alone *increased* support for violent extremism, which the report authors attribute to its relative stability.

UNDP's Youth at Risk in Somalia

The programme was funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Japanese government, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the International Labour Organisation. It ran from 2011 to 2015. The programme mixed criminal youth with former Al-Shabaab members in order to reduce stigmatisation of former fighters. It included low- and medium-risk but not high-risk youth based on factors including their role in Al-Shabaab. It used a curriculum including anger and stress management, conflict resolution, and religious teaching, as well as music and sport. The curriculum was intended to be tailored to the Somali context and customs, and to provide a range of subjects rather than just de-radicalisation. The study did not undertake a baseline assessment, but used a questionnaire to identify aggressive feelings among the participants, as these are believed to be a push factor towards violent extremism. It found that these **feelings of aggression had fallen after the programme** (Schumicky-Logan, 2017).

USAID Office of Transition's (OTI) Kenya Transition Initiative (KTI)

The KTI operated in Eastleigh, Lamu, Kilifi, Kwale, Malindi and Mombasa. It gave grants for activities that aimed to 'counter the drivers of VE, including livelihood training, community debates on sensitive topics, cultural events, counselling for post-traumatic stress disorder' (Khalil & Zeuthen, 2014).

Qualitative evidence shows that **'KTI's efforts achieved a positive impact in dissuading certain individuals from following the VE path'** (Khalil & Zeuthen, 2014, p. 2).

However, a review notes 'that the **background research for KTI did not appear to capture all the push and pull elements (or prioritise them sufficiently) and that this had an impact on the relevance of grant allocations**' (Brett et al., 2015, p. 34). In particular, the programmers 'neglected the role of material incentives, fear, revenge, status-seeking and other individual-level drivers' and did not do enough to identify vulnerable sections of the population (Khalil & Zeuthen, 2014, p. 9).

Being Kenyan Being Muslim (BKBM) in Kenya

BKBM was funded by USAID and run by the Kenya Transition Initiative (KTI). It aimed to test the effectiveness of promoting 'value complexity' in individuals as a way to reduce their risk of taking up violent extremism.¹ It took the form of a 'sixteen-contact-hour course using films and group activities that enable participants to solve problems on extremism-related topics according to a broad array of their own values' and explore different values on issues relevant to violent extremism. It was piloted on 24 individuals in Eastleigh, eight of whom were seen as vulnerable to extremism, including six members of Al-Shabaab. **The intervention was found to increase the participants' value complexity**, as measured by written and oral assessment, including the former Al-Shabaab members.

Similar programmes have been run in other countries including England, Kosovo and Pakistan, and found to be beneficial (Nemr & Savage, 2019, pp. 6–7). However, they have not been run in conflict contexts.

West Africa

USAID in the Sahel region

USAID programming as part of the *Trans-Sahara Counter terrorism Program* includes good governance, youth empowerment, and media and outreach support (Romaniuk, 2015, p. 30).

USAID uses radio for P/CVE activities in Africa. Radio has a wide reach across some African countries, including in areas where television and internet coverage is low. The programmes included:

- The Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP).
- The Peace through Development (PDEV and PDEV II) programmes.
- Smaller programmes within individual countries.

They aimed to alter listeners' norms and behaviour, particularly to increase their civic engagement, improve their views of the United States and reduce support for the use of violence.

Aldrich conducted a survey of 1,000 listeners in Chad, Mali and Niger. It was able to conclude that 'residents of communities where the United States has run educational, vocational, and capacity-building projects, such as Timbuktu in Mali, are more likely to listen to higher levels of peace and tolerance programming than similar, nearby communities such as Diré. Higher levels

¹ Value complexity is based on the theory of integrative complexity (IC): a way to measure an individual's 'complexity of thinking'. A lower score means an individual finds it hard to acknowledge others' viewpoints and this is seen to be a predictor of violence (Nemr & Savage, 2019, p. 2).

of listening, in turn, have **altered the norms and behaviors of listeners in ways that will connect them more firmly to the governance structures of their communities and make them more favorable to pursuing alliances with the West against terrorist groups'** (Aldrich, 2012, p. 55). However, **listening to the radio programming was not shown to have any relationship with the listeners' propensity to support or oppose the use of violence in the name of Islam** (Aldrich, 2012; Romaniuk, 2015, pp. 30–31).

Rest of the World

ETTY SAL in North Africa

ETTY SAL was a pilot project to build resilience among youth deemed at risk of radicalisation. It was funded by USAID and carried out by Creative Associates International. Of the 600 youth tested with the Youth Services Eligibility Tool (YSET), 100 were selected based on manifesting six of 12 risk factors. They and their families were given counselling and interventions. Focus was put on the importance of the family 'as a protective factor'.

According to the implementers' website, **'[a]fter completing the family counseling, 95 percent of participants were no longer eligible for the program, meaning they showed fewer than six risk factors and were no longer at high risk for radicalization to violent extremism'** ("Tunisia - ETTYSAL," n.d.).

Fostering Peaceful Communities in Morocco

This project ran from 2016 to 2018. It supported 'local religious and civil society leaders to work together in their own communities to address the factors that make youth more vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment by violent extremist organizations.' It worked in Beni Mellal, Casablanca, Fès, and Salé. **It offered training for local religious leaders to identify the drivers of radicalisation.** The leaders then developed intervention programmes. It was funded by the United States Department of State's Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations, and implemented by Creative Associates International.

A report into the programme drew several lessons, **including the importance of incorporating religion and religious leaders, contextualising the programme in the local culture, involving multiple stakeholders, integrating gender, building capacity and collecting and sharing information** (Conflict Associates International, 2018). The report does not offer any data on whether the training led to reduced risk of VE, as it focuses on training local leaders.

Mercy Corps' INVEST programme in Afghanistan

Introducing New Vocational Education and Skills Training (INVEST) provided education and training. It sought to improve employment levels, social connectedness and views of the government among participants.

A review found that the 'INVEST programme had positive effects across a range of economic outcomes, and led to an improvement on some social and political measures. However, it had little or no effect on support for political violence or the Taliban' (Marsden, Lewis, & Knott, 2019, p. 6)

DDR in Colombia

Since 2006, the High Advisory for Reintegration (ACR) in Colombia has helped to rehabilitate former rank-and-file combatants. It has 'assisted ex-combatants with education, vocational training, grants for microbusiness projects, psychosocial support, health care, and a monthly stipend conditioned on participation in program activities'. A study attempted to understand the risk factors for these ex-fighters recidivism (either to armed groups or crime) and the effect of the ACR's programme. The fighters who demobilised and took part in the programme were pardoned and promised reintegration, so may have been predisposed to leave the groups (Oliver Kaplan & Enzo Nussio, 2018).

A survey of ex-combatants and records of their observed behaviour, **found that education in the programme had a significant effect on recidivism**. By contrast, weak family ties, antisocial personality traits, a loss of status from leaving the group, and the effects of combat experience, the presence of criminal groups, were cited as risk factors (Oliver Kaplan & Enzo Nussio, 2018, p. 21).

The study focused on recidivism to crime and violence, rather than violent extremism specifically. However, given the findings that many join VE groups for material and status reasons, the findings may well be relevant to CVE. The programme was undertaken before the cessation of hostilities, so has lessons for similar programmes in ongoing conflict (Oliver Kaplan & Enzo Nussio, 2018, p. 88).

4. Lessons learned

Need to understand conflict settings

Running P/CVE programmes in conflict areas raises a number of specific challenges.

- As with DDR programmes, individuals who have been through P/CVE run the risk of reprisals.
- Individuals who have been through programmes labelled P/CVE or something similar also risk being stigmatised, making it harder for them to reintegrate (Boutellis & Fink, 2016, p. 3).
- '[T]he use of risk assessments developed in wealthier non-conflict states cannot necessarily be adapted to conflict environments due to a more general lack of registered data, access to psychologists and clinical resources' (Grip & Kotajoki, 2019, p. 392).
- Family and community networks are seen to be more important than the state in many conflict settings (Grip & Kotajoki, 2019, p. 390).

Need to understand programme objectives and theories of change

Because P/CVE aims and methods are potentially very diverse, it has been hard to build a base of comparable evidence for future evaluations. A broad range of push and pull factors are widely cited, but their importance in individual contexts has not always been tested. Those running programmes should therefore have a clear 'theory of change' describing how the push and pull factors they target relate to P/CVE goals in that context (Romaniuk, 2015).

CVE-relevant and development projects are not always effective

Although it is widely agreed that factors such as poverty and lack of civic engagement are push factors to VE, evidence shows that programmes targeting these should be based on careful assessment. An evaluation of DFID's SEED project in Somalia/Kenya found that the focus on

livelihood vulnerability did not align with risk of radicalisation (Luengo-cabrera & Pauwels, 2016). Similarly, Aldrich (2012)'s study of CVE radio programming in the Sahel found that it achieved its objective of increasing civic engagement, but this did not translate to less support for extremists or more support for the US. A recent review of DDR in stabilisation contexts also finds that community-based reintegration (CBR), including relevant psychosocial, employment and community support, is more efficacious than socio-economic/development factors in reintegrating extremist fighters safely (Piedmont, 2019, pp. 16–17). Development programmes can target 'push' factors. However, if they are to work towards CVE objectives effectively, they need to make sure to target 'at risk' groups, and to be aware of the push and pull factors affecting VE specifically (Brett et al., 2015).

Contextual assessments

The context in which programmes are run is very important. According to Romaniuk (2015), '[c]ontextualized assessments and stakeholder consultations are critical to effective programming' (Romaniuk, 2015). According to Zeuthen (2015), 'CVE programming should integrate real-time research and data collection into activities to be responsive to constantly changing circumstances and to continue learning'. For example, an evaluation of a USAID programme in Kenya called for 'more systematic identification of at-risk population cohorts, particularly as many groups that were arguably eligible for inclusion in the programme did not end up participating' (Luengo-cabrera & Pauwels, 2016, p. 4).

Paying close attention to state-society relations

Some sources emphasise the role of local civil society in P/CVE work. 'CSOs, in coordination with international NGOs, tend to be anchored in local communities and are therefore most apt at identifying and assisting at-risk groups'. However, CSOs may have limited operational capacity (Luengo-cabrera & Pauwels, 2016, p. 4; Romaniuk & Durner, 2018).

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