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# AMMAN FORUM ON MEASURING, MONITORING AND ASSESSING PVE

18-19 June 2019  
Amman, Jordan

## Meeting Report



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**United Nations Development Programme  
Regional Hub for Arab States  
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Canada 

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## 03 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recent years have seen a number of high-profile events seeking to further understanding of violent extremism and inform the policy and practice of Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE), including the Oslo I and II Global Conferences on PVE, organized by UNDP. There has, however, been less time and space given to discussions on measuring impact in this complex field. To explore best practice and potential solutions to the conceptual and practical challenges of measuring and monitoring prevention, UNDP convened researchers and practitioners at the Amman Forum on Measuring, Monitoring and Assessing PVE.

The Amman Forum, held on 18-19 June 2019, offered an opportunity to take a deep-dive into issues of measurement, and to share experiences and learning and address some of the common challenges for researchers and implementers of PVE programmes. The growing body of evidence on violent extremism has started to influence individual programmes, yet knowledge is often siloed and major donor policies are yet to reflect the complex nature of the violent extremism phenomenon. Researchers and practitioners recognise the need to share evidence and learning, including drawing from across disciplines and sectors, and to more proactively engage with policy makers to ensure that policies and donor-supported programmes are based on context-specific evidence of drivers of violent extremism, risks and local sensitivities.

### AMMAN FORUM OBJECTIVES AND FOCUS

The aim of the forum was to expand learning and research on measurement, monitoring and assessment of PVE and focus on linkages to programming, generating ideas and recommendations for further research and practice. Plenary sessions were followed by smaller parallel sessions that provided space to explore specific topics in greater detail. Contributors in parallel sessions used the space to share their approach, methodology and experience as a way to stimulate discussions.

### KEY THEMES AND DISCUSSION AREAS

Context specific insights and globally comparative quantitative data in recent years have enriched the academic understanding of violent extremism and informed PVE programmes. Recent trends in PVE research have shifted towards quantitative research, research in the online space and research with communities of returning fighters. Challenges in applying traditional research methods to complex and dynamic environments remain, and researchers recognise the need for creative methods to extract data and inclusive approaches to analysis. Research on disengagement and de-radicalisation in particular has evolved since so-called Islamic State (IS) fighters started to return to their countries and now include a range of qualitative methods such as personal narratives and reconstruction of biographies. Current trends include evaluations of re-integration programmes, research on recidivism, and the social context of reintegration. The online space is another pivotal tool for research on violent extremism, which offers an opportunity for learning about recruitment strategies and sentiments towards violent extremism, as well as improving efforts to prevent violent extremism online.

Ethics in PVE research and programming require a consideration of how PVE programmes fit into the broader development work, how to avoid stigmatisation and how to include perspectives of target communities. While research has generated a localised evidence of conflict dynamics and the interplay of VE drivers, push and pull factors, key research gaps remain, particularly with regards to the role of gender and masculinities, the link between economic development and prevention of violent extremism, factors contributing to resilience as well as the effectiveness of counter-narratives. Findings in these areas are expected to inform programming on messaging and counter-messaging, as well as reintegration efforts.

While research has the key to designing relevant and effective programmes responding to local needs and vulnerabilities, the theories of change that underpin PVE interventions need to be rigorously tested. M&E needs to be built into programme design and to ensure that practitioners use data to inform their implementation and advocacy strategies. Furthermore, data needs to inform programme interventions from the start. Participatory research, baseline assessments and experimental evaluations are some of the practitioners' approaches to ensuring programmes are evidence-based and tailored to local factors of violent extremism.

Collaborations between academia and practitioners can further policy-relevant research and inform PVE programmes through sharing of research findings at adequate times for policy makers, framing new evidence for audiences of policy makers and supporting programme evaluations with adequate academic and experimental tools and approaches.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Recommendations for researchers**

- Focus efforts and resources on making complex research findings on violent extremism more accessible: Increase capacity of researchers to translate complex findings on violent extremism to an audience of non-specialists, and to formulate evidence-based policy recommendations. Use existing platforms such as global research networks, including that convened by UNDP's Oslo Governance Center, connecting academics and practitioners, to share research findings and influence policy.
- Research further behaviours and gender roles and dynamics in violent extremism and its prevention. Develop research and monitoring and evaluation tools informed by behavioural sciences to complement data on perceptions.
- Test the evidence base on the impact of counter and alternative narratives and explore the extent to which building resilience to false information is impactful for PVE.
- Explicitly consider and address risks related to data collection and analysis in research design which are often more challenging in researching violent extremism including risk of stigmatisation, security of data collectors and of research participants, and risks of response bias.



## **Recommendations for implementers of PVE programmes**

- Conduct meta reviews and impact evaluations of CVE and PVE programmes with coordination between donors and implementers to strengthen the consistency of and evidence base for PVE approaches applied by practitioners.
- Use mixed methods in assessments, baselines and evaluations, including quantitative and qualitative approaches, behavioural tools, and engage programme stakeholders as both data sources and analysts to ensure contextual relevance and sensitivity.
- Create safe platforms for exchange and learning on methods, gaps and failures between implementers. Build advocacy into project designs and engage donors in PVE fora to ensure that programme learning and evaluation results inform donor policies.
- Ensure analysis and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are planned and budgeted for from the beginning of programmes, and build staff capacities on context analysis and M&E, even if some work is outsourced to consultants.
- Use standardized tools and approaches for assessment and evaluation only after an in-depth analysis of the context to ensure applicability to local drivers of violent extremism in different contexts.
- Undertake a context analysis and risk assessment which takes into account issues relating to M&E data prior to finalising programme design, and ensure the risk management strategy is regularly assessed and updated, and feeds into programme implementation strategies.

## **Recommendations for donors**

- Require and allocate budgets for robust M&E frameworks and for sharing and disseminating M&E results across different sectors as part of granting mechanisms.
- Encourage a culture of sharing and learning from PVE programming, including learning from what does not work and failures in programmes.
- Encourage collaboration between funders and grantees in the design and implementation of independent evaluation and engage evaluators in the early phases of the project cycle.
- Consider conflict sensitivity and risk in decision-making and policy levels (such as at country programme planning and portfolio levels) and in commissioning research, broadening the focus from Do No Harm in implementation only.

## 04 INTRODUCTION

As conflicts have grown in intensity and number over the past decade, terrorist attacks have simultaneously increased and spread. The UN Secretary General has been clear that security responses alone cannot meet this challenge but that preventive measures are needed for long term change.<sup>1</sup> Because underlying conditions and drivers of violence vary between states and localities, so too do interventions, resulting in an array of prevention-focused programming approaches.

The context-specificity of violent extremism (VE) drivers and diversity of programming presents challenges for contextualising and understanding impact. In order to be effective, research questions and protocols, programme design and measurement frameworks need to be tailored to the specific contexts and integrate a nuanced understanding of conflict and VE dynamics, actors, and risks. The sensitive nature of preventing violent extremism (PVE) research and interventions provides further operational, political and security challenges for participants, implementers and partners. This is particularly so in the complex, conflict-affected environments where PVE research and programming takes place, often heightening the risks of doing harm.

In recent years, a community of practice has formed looking to improve how prevention work is undertaken, researched and measured, but gaps in evidence persist as to what works, how and why. While research has generated localised evidence of conflict and VE dynamics, key research gaps remain, particularly with regards to the role of gender and masculinities, the link between economic development and prevention of violent extremism, factors contributing to resilience and cohesion as well as the effectiveness of counter-narratives.

The growing body of evidence on violent extremism has started influencing individual programmes, yet knowledge is often siloed and major donor policies are yet to reflect the complex nature of the violent extremism phenomenon. Researchers and practitioners recognise the need to share evidence and learning, including drawing from across disciplines and sectors, and to more proactively engage with policy makers to ensure that policies and donor-supported programmes are based on context-specific evidence of drivers of violent extremism, risks and local sensitivities.

The Amman Forum, held on 18-19 June 2019, offered an opportunity to take a deep dive into issues of research and measurement and to share experiences and learning, and address some of these common challenges. The Amman Forum aimed to create a space to share insights and lessons from researchers and practitioners and to explore potential solutions to the conceptual and practical challenges of understanding complex VE dynamics and measuring PVE interventions. The Forum provided a rare opportunity to bring together global experts and focus exclusively on research and M&E, bringing evidence and the latest research designs, methodologies and analyses to the forefront of the discussion.

This report summarises the main issues discussed in the Amman Forum, with a focus on key recommendations and questions for further exploration or research. The report structure follows the forum agenda, first by providing an overview of Plenary Sessions, then reviewing the corresponding parallel session. Each session provides a summary of the main points raised by speakers and discussed by participants. Each session also includes the names of the speakers and panellists, the main highlights, the key recommendations and identifies questions for further discussion.





## Plenary 1:

Researching the Violent Extremism (VE) phenomena

# PLENARY 1

## Researching the Violent Extremism (VE) phenomena



### SPEAKERS

Malin HERWIG,  
*Advisor Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding, UNDP Regional Hub for Arab States*

Jonathan GITHENS-MAZER,  
*Associate Professor, University of Exeter*

David HAMMOND,  
*Director of Research, Institute for Economics and Peace*



### HIGHLIGHTS

Research on violent extremism has multiplied in recent years providing both more context-specific insights and globally comparative quantitative data. However, researchers continue to face challenges applying traditional research methods to complex and dynamic environments, increasingly recognising the need to involve research participants in the analysis of individual and community susceptibility to violent extremism.



### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Balance quantitative research methods with qualitative methods for researching PVE and seek to engage research subjects in data collection and analysis through participatory methods.
- Create shared safe and confidential spaces for academics and practitioners to discuss sensitive PVE research findings.



### QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- How do researchers ensure do-no-harm and conflict sensitivity when working in complex environments?
- How can researchers and practitioners gather and validate local and indigenous forms of knowledge?
- How can research in other fields, such as conflict prevention or criminology, be used in research on violent extremism?
- How does gender dynamics affect radicalisation and what is the gendered impact of PVE interventions?
- Why are some communities more vulnerable to violent extremism than others? What factors make communities resilient?



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## SESSION SUMMARY

Trends in PVE research: The body of research on PVE has grown over the past years, spanning multiple disciplines and producing new evidence on the causes of violent extremism and prevention approaches. However, it remains fragmented and the gaps in understanding of the violent extremism phenomenon persist.

Malin Herwig of UNDP highlighted several areas where research has generated new knowledge: the drivers of extremism, the process of radicalisation, youth perceptions and reintegration of disengaged fighters and returnees.<sup>2</sup> Understanding the drivers of extremism has become even more nuanced and context-specific. UNDP's research on extremism in Africa, which used one of the largest interview bases with individuals who have joined violent extremist groups, revealed that the tipping point for 71% of those who joined extremist groups voluntarily was a government action.<sup>3</sup> According to another study conducted in Afghanistan, status and inequality constitute key drivers.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to localized, mostly qualitative knowledge, quantitative data has also become available in recent years and provides insights into regional and global patterns. The Global Terrorism Index has provided a benchmark for tracking trends and patterns in terrorist activity in 163 countries. From its peak in 2014, terrorism has decreased by 44%. The analysis of data on terrorism incidents has also established that 99% of deaths resulting from in the past 17 years of terrorist activities have been recorded in countries in conflict or countries experiencing high levels of political terror.<sup>5</sup>

However, in research on violent extremism "a purely academic approach is not working," Jonathan Githens-Mazer of University of Exeter warned. Strictly academic methods are not suited for the open-ended, chaotic, dynamic systems, in which violent extremism occurs. In complex, and often dangerous situations, researchers need to find creative ways to extract data.

**Remaining gaps in knowledge:** Researchers continue to face a challenge with understanding the real motivations behind joining violent extremist groups. Traditional methods such as leaver interviews with former fighters produce data of questionable credibility. "When people leave the military, they give you different reasons for joining than what they tell you at joining," commented one participant. Quantitative methods are also limited in the data they produce and particularly weak in assessing complex issues such as sense of purpose and dignity. This researcher's dilemma was summarised by another participant: "Different methods produce different truths." One of the recommendations for reducing the risk of bias is to gather and validate local, indigenous forms of knowledge, i.e. to let the research subjects explain their own reality. Other methods, such as involving the community in participatory mapping of vulnerability and resilience factors, allow researchers to tap into the local knowledge and decrease reliance on Western analytical frameworks.

While in some areas recruitment has been successful on the basis on economic incentives, several participants argued that violent extremism is more likely a result of a combination of factors including perceived economic deprivation.

Ongoing research by the Institute of Economics and Peace and UNDP explores the impact of violent extremism on the economy at a micro level (local markets, labour pool and functioning of businesses) and macro level (foreign direct investment, tourism, transitioning from formal to informal economy, and a prioritisation of security over service provision).<sup>6</sup> It established that countries with low levels of terrorism attract two to three times more foreign direct investment. Violent extremism forces economies to transition from formal to informal, thus creating more

fragility, while securitized responses to violent extremism divert funding from other sectors.

In some cases, economic development programmes could be a basis for prevention work but measuring their impact on PVE continues to pose a challenge. “If we agree that economic inequality and violent extremism are linked, we do not know how PVE differentiates from economic development, and we do not know how to measure impact. Does it need to differentiate? Or how does PVE fit in a broader development agenda? How does programming fit with longer term development,” asked David Hammond of the Institute for Economics and Peace.

**Challenges to utilising research findings in programmes:** Researchers can find it challenging to influence programmes and policies due to publication timeframes. To make policies and interventions more relevant, decision makers and practitioners need to open up spaces for learning from emerging evidence, rather than waiting for research to be complete. Preliminary findings can be instrumental in informing policies when released at the right time in the policy cycle.

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## PARALLEL SESSION 1.1:

### Ethics around PVE research and programming



#### SPEAKERS

Neven BONDOKJI,  
*Team Leader and Senior Researcher, WANA Institute*

Sarah MACLAUGHLIN,  
*Senior Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist, US Department of State*



#### HIGHLIGHTS

It is important to emphasize the human element of PVE. When conducting research, comparing communities is complex and nuanced. When implementing programmes, while considering different contexts, there is a need to take into account the human dimension.

There is a fine line between capacity building and instrumentalization. It is important to keep in mind that communities are the ones that bear the weight of the consequences of interventions.



#### RECOMMENDATIONS

Questions to be asked before research and programming of PVE:

- How are we integrating PVE relevant approaches into broader development work?
- How not to create stigma in the targeting of PVE programmes? How to frame them in a way that is more conflict sensitive?
- Who is the research for? How is that taking into account the different contexts and experiences of different communities?

Recommendations for PVE programme design include:

- Incorporate a local perspective, through conversations with local communities.
- Require a “Do No Harm” approach and risk assessment to be explicitly planned out in research and programme design and regularly review.



## SESSION SUMMARY

The legal and social context must be taken into account when considering the ethics of research and programming, including to what extent research goals will conflict with the safety of research subjects. It is also important to know to what extent you can protect yourself from harassment from intelligence agencies since the practice is not uncommon in CVE and PVE research. Taking notes might be a good idea because you can only provide a certain quantity of information.

A “Do No Harm” approach should be laid out in the grant proposal and should be used through the research process or programme cycle. This includes writing up research, where it is important to keep quotes from research participants in their correct context and to minimise any risk to participants.

### ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AROUND PVE RESEARCH:

- **Purpose of the data:** What is this data used for? Who is the data for and why? What are ethical considerations when putting out the call (i.e. to avoid stigmatisation of a community)?
- **Issue of bias:** When trying to listen to a certain trend or topic, NGOs may choose specific groups or people, and this may create a bias. How can one ensure they are not being biased? Or not unwillingly applying censorship?
- **Gender sensitivity:** A lack of data on women can impair projects. This is particularly sensitive in the Middle East and can induce bias.
- **Representation of local perspectives:** Incorporate a local perspective into design, through preliminary conversations with local communities.

### ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AROUND FUNDING PVE PROGRAMMES:

- **PVE as a “trendy” subject that attracts donor interest:** NGOs can feel forced to add this aspect to their programming, even if that was not their primary focus, in order to secure funding.
- **Use of the term PVE:** Communities in which CVE and PVE programmes took place understood that they were seen as “a troubled child” and felt stigmatised. The CVE/PVE label can also have a negative impact on existing conflict dynamics. For example in Lebanon, programmes were only in Muslim areas which exacerbated rifts between communities.

### ETHICAL QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER IN MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF PVE:

- **Context:** How are you monitoring programme evolution and results? What ethical considerations are you taking into account in collecting data?
- **Value of data:** What are we trying to measure and how measurable is it? It is important not to be limited to numerical results.
- **Implementation:** What was your process for identifying participants? Whose voices have been included and does this induce bias?
- **Data security:** If you are doing a focus group discussion, how do you identify the people in the group? How are you ensuring the safety of the people you are drawing information from? How are you asking questions? Who will have access to the information? Data security issues also apply to conducting surveys and other forms of data collection.

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## PARALLEL SESSION 1.2:

### Connecting standardisation with localisation



#### SPEAKERS FROM PLENARY AND PARALLEL SESSION

Sara ZEIGER,  
*Programme Manager, Department of Research and Analysis, Hedayah*

Gayatri SAHGAL,  
*Research Manager, RUSI*



#### HIGHLIGHTS

Standardization (using standard programme designs or tools that have been successful in other contexts) is a response to the urgency and broadness of the issue of PVE. However, the desire for replication of models can be in tension with local context dynamics. A context-specific lens helps to identify where standardization is useful and applicable and where it is not. Patterns can be found across countries or regions, as well as within them.

Attempting to standardize runs the risk of: a) ineffective programming targeting the wrong factors or wrong groups of beneficiaries b) exacerbating dynamics of radicalisation. However, standardization in M&E can provide valuable data sets that would feed into programme design where similar context dynamics allow for standardized procedures.



#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Using standardized PVE approaches should come after an in-depth context analysis that makes sure the approach would address relevant factors.
- Frame PVE-related issues sensitively when engaging local populations since there is a danger that standardization (of factors, of language, of terms) can lead to marginalization and the perception of stigmatization of certain groups, undermining integrity and legitimacy of the programme.
- Look for cross-country similarities in VE context where standardization within a country is not relevant.



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## SESSION SUMMARY

PVE programming and monitoring must remain rooted in the local contexts; since dynamics of radicalization can significantly vary, even locally. Yet, there is a call for standardisation of monitoring and evaluation methodologies as a response to the limited evidence and limited capacities of actors.

Standardization comes with several challenges. First of all, PVE/CVE is not a separate field in development cooperation, rather something that can be tackled in a variety of social and economic contexts, thus comprising a range of approaches from development cooperation for peacebuilding. Therefore, the definition of objectives, desired outcomes and target groups is a very context-specific exercise and every context needs a specific theory of change. Second, focusing on contextuality and locality is especially important against the backdrop of conflict sensitivity: Generalization (such as standardization) can lead to stigmatisation of particular groups and can exacerbate dynamics of radicalisation instead of mitigating them. This is true for gender considerations as well: Cultural considerations around gender differ – sometimes gender would address only women, instead of all dynamics around gender such as power relationships, masculinities, and so on. Even if regarding “women” as “gender,” the role of women and their role in VE would differ across localities. In programme design, these differences need to be taken into consideration.

**Balancing hyper-local and broader trends – factors of radicalisation in Kenya:** In Kenya, RUSI identified experiences of police force abuses in Nairobi, but also the prevalence of the feeling of historical injustices in the coastal regions, as factors of radicalization. This leads to the question of how to make sense of super-localized dynamics; how can we systematize approaches given the individuality of all contexts of radicalization?

In response, RUSI found that sometimes it makes more sense to look at cross-country similarities, instead of looking for similarities within countries. Coastal Kenya and Tanzania can have similarities (when it comes to radicalization and the perception of historical injustices), whereas coastal Kenya and Nairobi are different. Cross-country data collection helps to identify patterns of radicalization that occur in different localities. Standardized approaches can be tailored to certain patterns and be applied in the individual contexts, where needed. This recommendation comes with the need for more data gathering and a better (cross organizational and inter organizational) exchange of findings.

**How can we benefit from standardization and make sure we use standardized approaches only in the right context?** Programme design must come along with a set of definitions: Is the context of the CVE program of economic, social, etc. nature (what are most prevalent factors for radicalization)? Who, in turn, are important target groups/beneficiaries? The theory of change for programmes needs to be drawn along these definitions, and they need to be validated with relevant stakeholders.

Sara Zeiger presented Hedayah’s phone app MASAR as a tool to support standardised programme design. This facilitates exchange of information, good practices and provides relevant literature on PVE. MASAR addresses challenges that organizations face particularly with M&E. It enables collaboration across several locations and teams aiming to facilitate information exchange, project design and evaluation by offering a set of approaches that can be adapted to local contexts.



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## PARALLEL SESSION 1.3:

### Bringing conflict sensitivity and Do No Harm to the centre of research and measurement



#### SPEAKERS

Anita ERNSTORFER,  
*Principal and Owner, Untangle (LLC)*

Josie Lianna KAYE,  
*Researcher-Practitioner, TrustWorks Global*



#### HIGHLIGHTS

Conflict-sensitivity and risk management build stronger programmes that work more effectively in conflict-affected situations. This is a fundamental part of programme design and an ongoing process of monitoring and evaluation. Low appetite for risk and the absence of ongoing mechanisms for assessing and managing the intended and unintended impacts of an organization upon the contexts in which it operates (and vice versa) are reasons for limited programme effectiveness and cause of unintended harm.



#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Undertake a risk assessment prior to finalising programme design and ensure the risk management strategy is regularly assessed and updated.
- Take a systems approach to looking at conflict sensitivity and risk in VE beyond focusing on programme implementation.
- Ensure adaptivity of the programme to changing dynamics of radicalisation/conflict.
- Programme managers should shift from being risk-averse to being risk-ready and foster a culture of learning from challenges and failures.



#### QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- How can institutions get better at managing risks?
- How can development partners be encouraged to be more risk tolerant?
- How can the PVE community improve lesson learning from failure?
- How best to understand the contribution of other PVE programmes to the risk that programmes face?
- How to really get conflict-sensitivity and Do No Harm considerations into policy and organizational decision-making structures (not as an afterthought at project level)?



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## SESSION SUMMARY

Conflict sensitivity in development cooperation is too often little more than a 'box-ticking' exercise. Many practitioners are familiar with Do No Harm or conflict-sensitivity as a principle, but do not know how to translate it into practice – from analysis and design to implementation and M&E. This is problematic since conflict sensitivity requires the adaptation of programmes to individual conflict contexts and therefore requires a profound context analysis and programme adaptation based on the observed interactions between an intervention and the socio-political and economic dynamics in a given context.

Similarly, few programmes incorporate risk management strategies into the programme design process: risk is either overly associated with the security realm alone or is viewed as a technical process requiring a specialist skillset. When risk assessment processes are undertaken, invariably it is at the beginning of a project, also as part of a 'box-ticking' exercise. Moving the risk management process 'upstream' ensures that programme design is informed by risk.

**Understanding VE within a broader conflict context:** VE is often considered a separate and independent phenomenon and particular groups are singled out as vulnerable or as extremists. VE dynamics need to be understood as dynamics within the broader conflict systems and political economies in which they occur. Thus, successful PVE engagements address a broader system of issues, requiring an understanding of the variety of driving dynamics of conflict and extremism and engaging different kinds of stakeholders.

**Need to take a look at and move the discussion beyond conflict sensitivity in programmes to conflict sensitivity at portfolio and policy levels:** The debate around conflict sensitivity and risk management tends to be focused on programming, which is a crucial element, but this tends to draw the focus away from integrating conflict sensitivity and risk management at a policy level and in higher level decision making processes. Participants agreed that it would be valuable to take a systems approach to risk and conflict sensitivity.

**Importance of openness and communication:** The success of a programme depends on the legitimacy that it has within its target community. For example, communities might feel themselves labelled as extremists, especially when programmes are not transparent about their theory of change, their objectives and their funding. Blurred lines that exist between counter terrorism and PVE, including expectations of donors (e.g. sharing knowledge with intelligence), can reinforce distrust between target communities and programmes, which may undermine the success of a programme. Involving the communities in context analysis, programming and feedback mechanisms builds trust between both parties and can help programmes to better track the dynamics of conflict and radicalisation that might require adaptations of the programme.

**Interconnections between conflict sensitivity and risk:** Conflict sensitivity involves risk assessment and risk management. Too often, risk is being seen as something that should be avoided and, consequently, a programme that is risky would be stopped. However, risk assessment and risk management helps to better address the issues that are most crucial to conflict sensitivity, since the willingness to take risk enables programmes to work in conflict-affected contexts, where they may be needed most.

**Data sensitivity and security:** The data collected in PVE and CVE is often sensitive, and those who provide it must be protected. When sharing data, there is a risk of stigmatizing a location, an individual or a community. A few elements to take into account in order to protect the identity of the people/ communities involved in the research:

- Identify a space where results can be shared without putting anybody at risk.
- Keep in mind that the publication of results can create negative impacts for the communities from which the data was collected.
- Use tablets when doing a survey (avoid hard copy and data can be held off the tablet by securely logging in) when the subject of the survey is sensitive.

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## PARALLEL SESSION 1.4:

### Research on and with youth



#### SPEAKERS FROM PLENARY AND PARALLEL SESSION

Gemma WOOD,  
*Co-Founder/Principal Statistician, Numbers and People Synergy*

Michael SCHROLL,  
*Senior Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Adviser, GCERF*



#### HIGHLIGHTS

Doing research with youth rather than on youth can ensure that the perspectives of young people are included, and the research does not lose the human perspective.



#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Seek to engage youth in the design of the research, the data collection and analysis, this is important to avoid stigmatisation and to ensure that young people shape definitions of VE based on their experience.
- Research targeting youth in relation to VE needs to be culturally sensitive, as well as age and gender sensitive.
- Data protection is particularly important if working with data about youth. This is especially true when working on a sensitive subject such as VE.
- Researching with youth can require specifically tailored tools (see below for examples).



#### QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- If you change the wording of a robust tool, to what extent does it undermine the quality of the tool?
- Is data comparable when age brackets for youth are different?
- When research is tied to projects and researchers are not allowed to ask questions on opinions of specific groups, how do you capture this data?
- How do we ensure that the need to obtain parental consent for conducting research with children under 15 does not limit our choice of research subjects?



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The Commonwealth. [Youth Development Index 2016](#)

First ASEAN Youth Development Index

The Australian Youth Development Index

[BRAVE-14](#)

Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM-12)

UNESCO. [Jordan Youth Media Perception Survey](#). Amman: UNESCO (commissioned under the EU's Networks of Mediterranean Youth Project), 2016.



## SESSION SUMMARY

Youth are one of the groups targeted most frequently in PVE research. Research methods should be specifically designed to be appropriate to this group, especially considering the sensitivity of PVE research and the risk of stigmatising youth by 'labelling' them as vulnerable to VE.

**Things to consider in researching young people's involvement in VE:** Research targeting youth needs to be culturally sensitive, as well as age and gender sensitive. Younger youth, for example, have shorter attention spans and research tools need to be adapted. Anonymising data and ensuring that research participants cannot be identified is a major ethical requirement in youth research, particularly when the research deals with highly sensitive issues such as crime, drug use and violent extremism. Data needs to be collected in safe spaces. In contexts where free speech is not respected, researchers may, for example, opt for interviewing youth while taking a walk to ensure the safety and anonymity of the research participants.

**Examples of indicators and tools relevant to youth-focused PVE research:** The World Youth Report offers a range of indicators that may be relevant to PVE research, ranging from education and employment to gender equality and discrimination. The Youth Development Index (YDI) also offers comparable data on key indicators such as literacy, race and gender equality. In youth resilience programming, indicators of resilience are multi-faceted. The BRAVE-14 tool for measuring resilience includes five resilience factors: cultural identity and connectedness, violence-related beliefs, bridging capital, violence-related behaviours and linking capital. The Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM-12) is a similar tool drawing from the field of psychology, which measures individual traits, relationship to caregiver(s), and contextual factors that facilitate a sense of belonging. These tools have limitations and it is recommended that they are used alongside qualitative tools.

An example of a qualitative methods successfully used in programmes in Niger and Burkina Faso is the community vulnerability and resilience assessment toolkit, the primary tool of which is the Village Selection Tool. The vulnerability criteria include socio-economic, educational, governance and ideological factors and the resilience factors include religious convictions, culture of non-violence, acceptance of others, inter- and intra-community dialogue, self-defence groups, and military protection.

Behavioural games offer another tool to measure behavioural change of youth. Board games with cards have been used to measure stigmatization while creating an environment of openness. In the game, youth show behaviours but these cannot be validated outside the game.



## Plenary 2:

Tackling the challenge: Emerging methodologies  
in measuring PVE programmes

## PLENARY 2

### Tackling the challenge: Emerging methodologies in measuring PVE programmes



#### SPEAKERS

Matthew NANES,  
*Assistant Professor, Saint Louis University*

Maggie JANES-LUCAS,  
*Deputy Country Director, Mercy Corps Niger*

Peter BAUMAN,  
*Founder and CEO, Bauman Global LLC*



#### HIGHLIGHTS

Implementers of PVE programmes should use M&E findings to test programme assumptions and use the data to inform interventions and adapt methodologies. They need to manage bias at multiple levels: from confirmation bias in the use of certain types of questions and analysis bias that overlooks the non-responses, to a bias towards exaggerating positive outcomes and minimising negative outcomes and unintended consequences. Finding ways to share information from M&E – both raw data for future use and evaluation findings to inform programme design – will be essential for improving evidence-based PVE programming.



#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase opportunities for collaboration between practitioners and academics on M&E.
- Learn from other fields, e.g. peacebuilding, development and public health, and how they are managing the challenges of PVE and M&E for PVE.
- Design programmes based on data collected from a range of sources with different power and perspectives, use participatory methods in assessments and evaluations, such as community mapping, prioritisation and analysis.
- Integrate academic approaches in programme evaluations such as randomized control trials, endorsement experiments and behavioural insights.
- Share assessment and evaluation findings from PVE programmes to inform policy and programming.



#### QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- Could there be a way of storing de-identified raw data from PVE research that makes it available to others?



#### REFERENCES

Mercy Corp. [Vulnerability and Resilience Assessment Initiative to counter Violent Extremism \(VRAI\): Final Synthesis Report](#). Washington DC: Mercy Corps, 2018.

J. Kurtz, B. Tesfaye and R.J. Wolfe. [Can economic interventions reduce violence? Impacts of vocational training and cash transfers on youth support for political violence in Afghanistan](#). Washington DC: Mercy Corps, 2018.



## SESSION SUMMARY

**Collaboration between practitioners and academics and with other sectors:** Academia has a lot to offer practitioners for M&E in terms of expertise, especially when it comes to quantitative measurement and designing approaches that are reliable and generalisable. However, academics need to be better at articulating and generating findings in a way that is timely and useful to practitioners. Practitioners can equally support research by providing access to research locations and sharing local knowledge, and some are already involved in testing and applying sophisticated sampling for surveys. Academics and practitioners would benefit from working together to identify what knowledge is needed for improving policy and programming and in finding the best, and time sensitive ways to measure it. Similarly, academics and practitioners working on PVE need to learn from those working in related disciplines such as peacebuilding, conflict prevention, development and public health. Those sectors face many of the same challenges and have found ways to manage these that could be useful for PVE programming.

**Using data in design from the start:** Many organisations plan programmes based on an ‘inclusive key stakeholder approach’; they talk to local leaders and community figures and design programmes based on the problems that they identify. Whilst stakeholder consultations are an important part of problem identification and design, this approach holds risks. Those within contexts may have a narrow focus on the problem or specific interests. Organisations should use a range of data to design their programmes and be open-minded if the data contradicts conventional wisdom. One example of combining data-driven design using participatory approaches is Mercy Corps’ Vulnerability and Resilience Assessment Initiative (VRAI) in Niger and Burkina Faso using a participatory approach to develop and test tools to measure vulnerability and resilience at a community level. The approach helped build trust across a range of stakeholders – offering a broader perspective than if it had been focused on community leaders.

**Improving the use of surveys:** A hard turn towards quantitative research in academia has resulted in more generalizable and reliable data. Unfortunately, instead of being need-driven, quantitative research is often designed to test new tools. Researchers are increasingly aware of the limitations of using surveys in studies and evaluations related to PVE. Respondents who refuse to take part in surveys cause inaccuracies in the data, as do false responses. Surveys can work, if privacy and anonymity are ensured and if there is trust between the respondent and the researcher.

One participant suggested the possibility of using an analysis that focuses specifically on those who do not answer questions, gathering information on this by using both direct questioning and an endorsement experiment. Analysing the differences between them could help understand biases and why people are afraid.

The use of hypothetical questions in surveys was suggested for sensitive topics, to improve the response rate (this way respondents avoid admitting direct involvement), although hypothetical questions have a greater confirmation bias. Participants also underlined the need to be aware of respondents’ perceptions of who is asking for the data and who is present at the interview. In one example from the Philippines enumerators were seen as authority figures and therefore associated with the police, while bystanders present during the survey were perceived by respondents as potential spies. Another example demonstrated that response rates can be increased when the research or assessment is commissioned by a UN agency, rather than an NGO, which was the case in Lebanon. Understanding these perceptions can help manage bias.

**Participatory research and M&E:** Mercy Corps has used different methodologies to conduct evaluations of PVE projects. Participatory community action research involves a set of community assessment tools to measure resilience and vulnerability to recruitment by violent extremist groups. Some of these tools borrow from traditional methods such as household surveys and focus group discussions, while others are used with community groups to conduct joint analysis, such as a conflict tree and a social cohesion tree.

**Experimental evaluations:** The use of experimental evaluations is relatively uncommon due to the high cost, though they produce reliable data on project impact. Mercy Corps conducted a randomized control trial in Afghanistan to assess the impact of economic interventions on reducing political violence. Control group participants were recruited from waiting lists of individuals interested in the programme. The research participants were beneficiaries of vocational training, recipients of cash transfers or both.<sup>7</sup>

**Addressing bias in M&E and taking a more holistic view:** Practitioners need to be honest about the lessons from M&E of VE programmes in order to learn from experience (i.e. sharing examples of challenges, limitations and failures). The interests of organisations implementing PVE programmes and their existing assumptions should not cloud the interpretation of research and M&E data. If the analysis of the problem and data underpinning it are biased, the programme is likely to end up being poorly designed for the intended impact.

**Sharing M&E information:** The sensitivity of many PVE interventions mean that it can be hard to share data. In addition to the issues of participant safety and data protection, many organisations are reluctant to be open about failure because it may impact reputation and ability to secure funding from donors. In other cases, organisations simply do not have mechanisms for saving and sharing data. The importance of finding ways to share information was highlighted with consideration of engaging Embassy staff and governments privately, where information is particularly sensitive and/or critical (i.e. what are the red lines for sharing, concerns over intelligence gathering).

**Risk in M&E for PVE:** Assessing the risks to staff and enumerators, in addition to research participants, and finding ways to minimise these is essential before undertaking any data collection. Mercy Corps' work in Niger including on the border with Burkina Faso relies on local agents and uses mobile phone technology to ensure the risk to staff is minimised. In this situation there can be less direct control from 'experts' and more reliance on local staff and their partners. The difference between random risk (where violence in a society is generally high and anyone may be a victim) and targeted risk (where there is a risk of violence to a specific group or individual, e.g. where 'outsiders' may be targeted) was highlighted. In situations where risk is targeted, it can be avoided by precautions such as using enumerators local to their neighbourhood, whose presence is not going to be targeted. Although, in these situations we need to consider the content of the survey and the risk of the questionnaire being captured. Tools such as tablets that store data in the cloud, rather than on the device itself, can minimise risk because they mean that enumerators are not carrying data with them. Other approaches include using 'uninteresting' looking tools such as endorsement lists.

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## PARALLEL SESSION 2.1:

### Establishing baselines in complex VE environments



#### SPEAKERS

Michael J. WILLIAMS,  
*Assistant Professor, American University in the Emirates*

Caitlin AMBROZIK,  
*Adjunct Professor, George Washington University*



#### HIGHLIGHTS

- Baselines provide a benchmark for measuring impact with greater confidence, although in complex environments they cannot guarantee that impact results from the intervention and not the context.
- Baselines and evaluations can be most useful when they are inquiring about participants' needs and expectations, triangulate data collected with different methods and are combined with ongoing data collection during the implementation.



#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Test and validate baseline questions prior to conducting baselines, especially useful to refine questions relating to sensitive PVE issues.
- Collaborate/seek advice from other experts including from other disciplines to develop thorough surveys which capture an integrated understanding.



#### QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- How best to retroactively set a baseline if a project has adapted and baseline data that was measured at the beginning is no longer relevant?
- If measurement scales are built around a degree of Western values, often based on understanding power dynamics, institutions, gender roles, etc from the perspective of Western universities, is there a theoretical reason to believe that respondents are interpreting a question/scale differently than how it was intended?



#### REFERENCES

Williams, Michael J., John G. Horgan, and William P. Evans. [Evaluation of a Multi-Faceted, US Community-Based, Muslim-Led CVE Programme](#). Washington DC: National Institute of Justice, 2016.

Williams, Michael J. *Countering violent extremism: Designing and Evaluating Evidence-Based Programs*. (Forthcoming)

## SESSION SUMMARY

Baseline assessments provide a benchmark for measuring intervention impact and allow for more sensitive comparisons. Baselines are economical and contribute to the projects' effectiveness by providing methodological due diligence. To have a perfectly scientific proven causality of any intervention is impossible in a complex environment, however baselines allow us to "make an assessment of insufficiency to claim an outcome."

**Types of question for baseline assessments:** Baseline assessments, and particularly survey-based baselines, include four kinds of questions:

- Main research questions.
- Baseline knowledge questions on level of knowledge mirrored in the post survey to compare responses.
- Baseline behaviour questions, which can be concerned with the likelihood of individuals to share results with others in the community. For example, at baseline, the questions to ask are: "How often do you share new information, knowledge and impressions with the following groups of people?". At endline, this question would be reformulated to: "Do you think you will share new information, knowledge and impressions you have gained with the following groups of people?"
- Demographic questions to compare results with data on other participants and programmes.

**Researchers need to consider three things:** According to Caitlin Ambrozik's presentation, it is important to consider: 1) the sample population, 2) the dissemination method, and 3) the implementation strategy. For example, if the sample population is young people, they may be more willing to participate in an online survey than a face to face interview. The implementation strategy also concerns the sequencing of activities, as such the start of the programme needs to ensure that participants are not influenced before the surveys are conducted.

**Challenges in undertaking surveys as baselines for PVE:** One of the main pitfalls is asking the wrong questions and gathering the wrong data. This can be the case when implementers commission a baseline under time pressures and collect data on issues which are different than the ones to be measured at the end of the project. Expectations to change attitudes and behaviours within short project cycles, for example in 12 months, are often unrealistic, and in the course of implementation, strategic shifts may happen that result in different types of data being needed to evidence results. Overlooking basic demographic data can further limit baseline results. Not using or sharing baseline data is a major limitation to projects.

**The importance of regular data collection:** In addition to baselines, collecting measurements at different points during the implementation can more accurately capture change.

**Triangulating data to minimise with bias:** Research bias, which is a challenge in all research and assessments, can be mitigated through accurate triangulation of data, including triangulation of findings from surveys with qualitative data.

**Learning from applying survey methods elsewhere:** One example of a survey method cited as potentially relevant to a broad range of CVE projects include the evaluation of multifaced Muslim-led CVE programmes, which are readily adaptable.<sup>8</sup> The suite of 12 measures and subscales (e.g. adapted modern racism scale, emotional stability scale, etc) is not oriented for Islamists or far right ideologies and are, in principle, applicable to any ideology.



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## PARALLEL SESSION 2.2:

### Conducting surveys in a PVE context



#### SPEAKERS

Matthew NANES,  
*Assistant Professor, Saint Louis University*

Charles HARB,  
*Professor, American University of Beirut*



#### HIGHLIGHTS

- The effect of the enumerator's presence on survey participation and accuracy can be significant. Self-enumeration is an effective response to this, giving participants more anonymity and resulting in more accurate data. Moreover, it has been shown to work better than complicated techniques which participants may not understand and may therefore make them feel 'tricked.'
- The importance of context and language on accuracy of survey response should not be underestimated.



#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Use self-enumeration rather than more complicated techniques to provide anonymity when conducting surveys related to PVE.
- Understand the context in which the survey is being implemented and the impact that this will have on the best language and terminology to use, and the best format.
- Keep surveys as short as possible and be able to justify the use of someone's time.
- Be aware of the impact of the order of questions on response, especially in relation to sensitive topics. This can be addressed by some participants seeing questions in a different order.



#### QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

How to address oversampling in a small population?



#### REFERENCES

Nanes, Matthew, Dotan Haim and Michael Davidson. "[Family Matters: The Double-Edged Sword of Police-Community Connections](#)" (as yet unpublished).

Nanes, Matthew, Dotan Haim and Michael Davidson "Evaluating Community Policing in the Philippines: Communication, Trust, and Service Provision (as yet unpublished).

Nanes, Matthew and Dotan Haim. "Reducing Survey Response Bias with Self-Enumeration." Working paper.

## SESSION SUMMARY

**Techniques for minimising enumerators' effect on answers:** For in-person surveys on sensitive topics anonymity is critical to an honest answer, but enumerators' presence makes this difficult. There are different methods of addressing this but the simplest is to let participants record their own answers. Matthew Nanes has shown the value of this approach in the survey that he conducted on willingness to report the activities of insurgent groups.<sup>9</sup> The survey participants were divided into three random groups and each group was assigned a different way of answering the questions: direct response, self-enumeration, random response based on flipping a coin. Self-enumerators used tablets to enter their answers. Once they entered an answer, the survey moved to the next page so that when they handed the tablet back to the enumerator, their answers weren't visible. Symbols were also used so that illiterate participants could also answer the questions. The results showed that self-enumeration appears to have been the most successful at getting honest answers.

Charles Harb's gave an example of another technique: printing instructions on survey forms which enumerators explain. Enumerators then leave the room and allow participants to complete the form. Enumerators do not ask the questions. Participants put the completed form in a sealed envelope in a basket of sealed envelopes, so that it cannot be identified.

Even with self-enumeration, participants can be influenced by how enumerators act. One way to minimise this is to select someone who is from a similar background to participants and who respects local culture. However, in sensitive contexts, people may also be concerned about the presence of those from their communities who could be spies. This also leads to concerns about answering surveys in the presence of bystanders.

**Avoid using overly complicated techniques or equipment:** In Matthew Nanes's example of the survey in the Philippines, one group of respondents was asked to respond using randomised response: Participants were told to flip a coin out of sight of the enumerator to either answer truthfully or answer yes (as the more sensitive answer). This should have meant that 50% of 'yes' were true responses, but researchers would not know if an individual's response was true, thereby guaranteeing anonymity. However, fewer people actually said 'yes' to questions in using randomised response option when 50% had been removed. This was even true on a non-sensitive question on high school attendance. The researchers surmised that people were confused by the randomised response technique and so just answered truthfully. In this case, subtracting 50% of affirmative answers actually removed some that were honest. This result demonstrates the need for caution in using complicated surveying techniques.

Complicated techniques can be problematic, especially in sensitive environments. People tend not to trust online methods or phone interviews, fearing that they could be monitored by security forces. There have been instances of security forces dumping fake data into online surveys.

**Importance of context and language in survey responses:** Understanding the context in which a survey is being conducted is crucial. Not just the larger issue of what is sensitive and who to speak to, but also how people will understand the questions and whether they share your understanding of them. For example, in the Arab world, 1 (on a 1-5 scale) is usually seen as the most positive, rather than 5 in the Western world. Using this kind of scale can therefore lead to confusion and inaccuracy.

Translating surveys is also challenging. Separate translation committees were recommended so that nuances and meaning attached to specific vocabulary are kept. In a gendered language such as Arabic, print male and female versions of the survey in order to be inclusive and make participants feel comfortable. Standard Arabic is often used in surveys. It has advantages since most participants will understand it. However, it can discourage some participants because it is formal and far from everyday language, therefore include local vocabulary where appropriate.

**Other key points for improving accuracy of survey response:**

- Logos/sponsors: It looks suspicious not to show any logos. In some contexts, such as Syria, Lebanon and Iraq, displaying the UN logo can provide key access to some populations.
- Gatekeepers: It is important to talk to gatekeepers. Sometimes you need the gatekeepers to retreat so that people feel safe to speak. In other circumstances, you may need an agreement to prevent the arrest of enumerators and data being confiscated.
- Length of survey: Although conventional logic says an hour is fine for adults, in many cases that is too long. More than 20 minutes is challenging. Every second that you use of someone's time should be justifiable. A pilot stage helps to prune irrelevant questions from the survey.
- Counterbalance: The order of the presentation of questions will affect the answers given. For example, you get a different response if asking about justice than about governance and vice versa. Address this by printing different versions with sections in different orders.

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## PARALLEL SESSION 2.3:

### Resilience



#### SPEAKERS

Jill FLINT-TAYLOR,  
*Practitioner-Psychologist and Executive Director, Rusando Ltd*

Maggie JANES-LUCAS,  
*Deputy Country Director, Mercy Corps Niger*



#### HIGHLIGHTS

- Resilience is an important and relevant, but contested, concept in the PVE space.
- The relationship between resilience and vulnerability to VE is complex. Work still needs to be done to understand the connections between resilience and vulnerability.
- Resilience is not simply about adapting to challenging circumstances or threats (i.e. surviving). It is about supporting individuals, communities and systems to thrive.



#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Avoid imposing external (Western) concepts of resilience and ensure that any resilience-based approach is rooted in the local context.
- Focus on strengthening protective factors (of individuals, communities and institutions)



#### QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- How does the concept of resilience connect with broader peacebuilding and conflict prevention approaches?
- Do resilience 'frameworks' overcomplicate the issue or reduce experience? How can we simplify this?
- What further evidence or examples are there of truly contextualised frameworks for resilience in PVE?
- Does a resilience lens take into account the significant trauma or violence that communities in crisis suffer?



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Ellis, B. H. & Abdi, S. (2017). "Building community resilience to violent extremism through genuine partnerships", *American Psychologist* 72 (3): 289-300

Mercy Corps. **Resilience Framework**. 2015.

Mercy Corp. **Vulnerability and Resilience Assessment Initiative to counter Violent Extremism (VRAI): Final Synthesis Report**. Washington DC: Mercy Corps, 2018.

## SESSION SUMMARY

**Understanding of resilience:** In the context of VE-related threats, resilience can refer to a person, community, organization, institution, economy, region or country. Individual resilience can be understood as a person's capacity to recover, keep going and grow through adversity; a dynamic process of accessing and shaping personal and social resources, to survive and thrive. Personal resources include confidence, social support, purpose and adaptability. External resources include family involvement and support, accessible help, supportive friends, development opportunities, inclusive community customs, community justice and support, positive role models, and education.

For Mercy Corps, building resilience in protracted crises means building capacities to:

- Transform the underlying conditions that drive the shocks and stresses defining the crisis (root causes, immediate drivers).
- Anticipate, prevent, or mitigate emerging and future threats.
- Better cope with and adapt to existing shocks and stresses.

**Systemic resilience:** Programmes are moving from an individual approach to resilience to a more systemic approach ("resilience ecosystems"). We need to constantly look at the interaction between the individual and the community and the broader environment. Resilience is never only individual; there is always a contextual nature and an organization around resilience e.g. a social and ecological context. PVE is a cross-cutting issue with many factors influencing it. This highlights the importance of avoiding a non-systemic approach, e.g. focusing on building resilience only at the individual level. A systemic approach towards resilience looks at how to build resilience across all levels of community.

**Mercy Corps' approach:** Mercy Corps' experience comes from Niger where the context is volatile and complicated. There is a conflict involving non-state actors who are able to cross the porous borders. There is also renewed inter-community/ethnic violence between Peulh, Tuareg and Arab communities, and a revival of banditry, including the theft of cattle and the looting of property. There has been an implementation of the state of emergency measures which has greatly exacerbated the humanitarian situation in this area. Mercy Corps takes the approach of conflict-sensitive humanitarian action, violence reduction, development and peacebuilding. In addition, they put a lot of emphasis on measuring peace, social cohesion and resilience.

In resilience projects, Mercy Corps measure the capacity of the community or individual to learn, cope, adapt, and transform in the face of shocks and stresses. This is achieved using collaborative and participatory tools such as piloting committees. For example, in the Vulnerability and Resilience Assessment Initiative to Counter Violent Extremism (VRAI) project, they developed adaptable tools that identify community vulnerabilities and resilience capacities to inform effective CVE programs. The process and lessons learned have been disseminated so that they can be improved and adapted. Based on the lessons from VRAI, they have designed a new programme in Niger Preventing violent Extremism Actions through increased social Cohesion Efforts (PEACE).

**Gender:** We need to bear in mind that resilience may look different depending on your gender, age, and location. We should be careful about interpreting evidence in the gender context if we have insufficient gender information, for example a young woman may go through the programme, but it may have limited impact on her behaviour if it has not addressed her family or community context.



### **Some challenges raised relating to applying resilience to a PVE context:**

- The overarching emphasis on factoring in context makes it hard to apply core learnings and principles from across different research, interventions and experiences. Resilience has been criticised as a Western concept that is not applicable or relevant in all circumstances.
- There is a danger that resilience becomes “asking people to tolerate the intolerable,” i.e. putting emphasis on individual change when the problem is much larger.
- Communities are never fully vulnerable nor fully resilient – the level and nature of their resilience depends on constantly shifting dynamics.
- The links between VE and resilience can be tenuous. Whilst some participants argued that keeping them separate, not examining further risks misses the opportunities and insights that a robust, well-informed and systemic resilience-based approach can offer.
- There is a risk that both resilience and PVE are seen as “flavour of the month,” restricting the credibility, sustainability and relevance of applying these terms and approaches. A more robust, systemic approach has the potential to address this, but it requires opening minds to what this can offer.

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## PARALLEL SESSION 2.4:

### Evaluating the impact of PVE programming



#### SPEAKERS

Lillie RIS,  
*Design, Monitoring and Evaluation Consultant*

Arlinda RRUSTEMI,  
*Strategic Analyst, HCSS*



#### HIGHLIGHTS

- Impact refers to long-term, societal level results.
- A shared understanding of intended impact is key to being able to realise and measure it.



#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- To understand an intervention's impact in complex areas such as PVE, one way to begin is by examining the incremental changes that add up to or catalyse intended impacts.
- Traditional evaluation designs and methodologies can be adapted to suit some of the major challenges of PVE evaluation if they are contextualized and applied with sufficient rigor.



#### QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- Assessing the impact of adaptive programming that has evolved over the course of many years is a particular challenge as baseline information from the start of the intervention may be irrelevant as approaches and assumptions shift. Further research is needed to identify measures that can be used to retroactively examine resilience and vulnerability to extremism in a given community.



#### REFERENCES

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Holmer, Georgina, Peter Bauman and Kateira Aryaeinehad. **Measuring Up: Evaluating the Impact of P/CVE Programs.** Washington DC: US Institute of Peace, 2018.

## SESSION SUMMARY

**Considerations for evaluating the impact of PVE programs:** Impact typically means change taking place at the societal level, extending beyond individual and changes in specific communities. Impact takes a long time to be realized. Defining impact is key to measuring it. Partners from different fields will have a different understanding of what is meant by 'impact.' Differences can be substantial. Formulating an anticipated impact together with project partners and key stakeholders is necessary to ensure that evaluations are calibrated to the context and to be able to measure expected and feasible impacts.

**Incremental Progress Towards Impact:** One way to build an understanding of impact is to breakdown the ways that an intervention works towards impact, looking at the different levels of change. The following is a simple analytical model for understanding different layers of programming effect.

- The inner layer, the direct participants, are those who have the most involvement with the intervention. They receive training and in turn engage others by providing mentoring. They experience changes on the individual level. The changes they experience are: knowledge, skills, and capacities (among others).
- The second layer is the indirect beneficiaries. They experience the intervention through the activities carried out by the direct participants. They experience primarily individual-level behavioral and attitudinal changes.
- The final layer is the community, societal or institutional level. The changes seen at this level are changes in public awareness, attitudes, and behaviors and changes in institutional processes, policies and practices.

To assess impact, we need to look at the final layer and beyond. Changes catalyzed at that level are harder to attribute directly to the intervention because they are often indirect results. In addition, to link impact-level results to the intervention, it is essential to have documented effectiveness within the preceding layers of change.

**Evaluation designs that have proven useful for assessing impact:** The type of evaluation used to measure impact depends on the type of programming, the context, and the resources available for evaluation (including financial resources, as well as timing and access to programme components). The following outlines three scenarios common to PVE programming, identifying evaluation designs that have proven useful in each scenario.

<i>Where it is possible to construct a control group:</i>	Quasi-experimental design
	Before and after measures of participants and control group
<i>Where it is not possible to construct a control group:</i>	Before and after measures at the community level
	Contribution analysis to link changes to intervention
	Use baseline to estimate what could have happened without the intervention
<i>Where the programme model is highly adaptive:</i>	Developmental evaluation
	Continuous data collection and analysis
	Baseline and ongoing mid-term assessments inform subsequent programming but may not form as comparison point

**Ways that evaluation designs address hard to measure questions in PVE evaluation:** The aforementioned designs can be adapted to address some of the major challenges faced in PVE evaluation. Strategies for adapting them include:

- Attribution: Lacking a randomized control, work with stakeholders to examine causality.

- Contribution: Demonstrating achievement of tangible, sustainable PVE outcomes.
- Community and societal level results: Quantitative studies contextualized with observation and other qualitative methods.
- Institutional results: Examine both technical capacity and the norms and practices that prevail in the institution.

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## PARALLEL SESSION 2.5:

### Behavioural insights



#### SPEAKERS FROM PLENARY AND PARALLEL SESSION

Umar TAJ,  
*Research Fellow, Warwick Business School*

Fadi MAKKI,  
*Founder and CEO, B4Development*



#### HIGHLIGHTS

Behavioural science should be used in the conception of theories of change on PVE, based on evidence of behaviours. It is a complementary tool to be used together with measures of attitudes and perception in measuring PVE.



#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Using behavioural insights, in combination with other tools, can help to assess the impact of PVE interventions.
- Using randomised control trials provides more information on the impact of PVE interventions.



#### REFERENCES

Roozenbeek, Jon and Sander van der Linden. "[Fake news game confers psychological resistance against online misinformation.](#)" *Palgrave Communications* 5, Article number 65, 2019.



## SESSION SUMMARY

The reasons why people join violent extremism groups are many and varied. Conventional research and monitoring and evaluation methods often fail to measure the complexity in the individual changes that take place and what they add up to. Yet to be able to understand what is working and how it is working, in PVE programming we need to be able to develop approaches that can gather and analyse attitudinal and behavioural changes in a far more nuanced way.

The practice of behavioural science is gaining popularity in policy making. It entails a deeper look into how people make judgements and what influences their behaviour. Behavioural sciences offer an approach that is different from the traditional assumption that people act on sanctions and incentives. While a lot of development work seeks to influence attitudes or perceptions on the assumption that this will result in a change in behaviour, behavioural science approach cannot compute action from intention. Contrary to economics, psychology and neuroscience approaches that predict behaviour based on a cost-benefit analysis or a set of intentions, in behavioural sciences the environment is key.

UNDP implemented a project on employment generation for at-risk youth; the theory of change linked access to employment with decreased risk of joining violent extremist groups. The change pathway suggested that if communities are more cohesive, there will be less likelihood for youth joining violent extremist groups.

According to Fadi Makki, violent extremism has structural and behavioural roots, though behavioural roots to violence cannot be addressed using simple methods. He argues that the pathway to violence takes on average five years and behavioural insights can be used in the early phases of the radicalisation pathway, when push and pull factors are at play.

An example of a project using behavioural insights is the development of a game that trains the player to distinguish real news from “fake news.”<sup>10</sup> The concept is that people will develop resistance and better detect fake news. The game offers a “vaccine” to social media users against fake news. This strategy can be applied in PVE projects - another game is being developed to expose the player to recruitment strategies in order to make them more aware of how they work (using isolation, exposure to radical ideas, mobilisation, etc.) the idea being to protect them from being radicalised in real life.

In behavioural sciences, a new push for personalized interventions is observed. This approach can move interventions from the current targeting of communities towards a personalised approach based on diagnosing individual needs.

The panellist argue that behavioural science needs to be incorporated in the conceptualisation of theories of change. Behavioural insights offer a complimentary tool, not an alternative. It cannot solve the big policy problems but can help dissect the problem into small experiments.



## Plenary 3:

Understanding radicalisation and disengagement:  
Good practices and lessons learnt

## PLENARY 3

### Understanding radicalisation and disengagement: Good practices and lessons learnt



#### SPEAKERS

Mohammad ELSHIMI,  
*RUSI*

Christine FAIR,  
*Georgetown University*

Anne SPECKHARD,  
*Georgetown University*



#### HIGHLIGHTS

Research on disengagement, de-radicalisation and reintegration has evolved from focusing on the former fighter alone to exploring the conditions in the recipient community. Research is underway to address the gap in evidence around recidivism and reengagement with terrorism. The sessions raised challenges in relation to conducting research in this field, including around the limitations of available data, and the ethics of conducting interviews.



#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue to learn from other disciplines that have explored recidivism (such as criminology).
- Research the use of newly emerging tailored models for de-radicalisation responding to individual needs and impact of 'good life' model interventions.



#### QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- How do we conceptualise and research unintended consequences of deradicalization/ disengagement programming?
- How do researchers address ethical issues of interviewing members of VE groups?
- How much should researchers ask and when should they report suspected illegal activity to authorities?



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## SESSION SUMMARY

Research contributing to the evidence-base on radicalisation, recruitment and disengagement processes is still evolving, and have necessitated specific methodological approaches adapted to the particularities of these processes.

**From disengagement to re-integration:** CVE and PVE approaches include targeting members of violent extremism groups after their departure from these groups. This type of work became more pertinent with the return of former fighters from the battlefields in Syria and Iraq. Disengagement is the more popular term, according to Mohammad Elshimi of RUSI, as it does not carry the ideological connotations of de-radicalisation. The latter is associated not only with discontinuing participation and support to extremist groups but also with overcoming trauma and transforming one's belief system. De-radicalisation is also seen differently in Western and Muslim-majority countries, as it is related to religion. Re-integration is a process that involves not only the former fighter but the recipient community as well. It suggests that it is not sufficient to disengage, and that one needs to re-engage, to stop the violence and change one's views of society.

**Approaches to researching disengagement:** The evidence base on reintegration of former fighters with violent extremist organisations is not as robust as that on other criminal offenses. Research on de-radicalisation and reintegration faces multiple challenges, not least because of the sensitivity of the issue and governments' mistrust in researchers. Research to date has been largely descriptive and fragmented but has also developed with learning from other fields such as research on the far-right movement in the 1990s.

Another approach in research on violent extremism is study of biographies of fighters. Christine Fair approaches her research on Lashkar-e-Taiba in Pakistan through texts such as military writing, jihadi literature and biographies of 'martyrs', which provides a data set of 800 biographies. She has chosen this approach out of appreciation for literature analysis and concerns over the credibility of interviews with members of terrorist organisations. The limitations of the approach are related to the available data, as Lashkar-e-Taiba only publishes biographies of those who actually died in fighting, and many members never get to the front line. Fair draws comparisons to state militaries and their techniques of recruitment and selection, and points out that "militants leave [their organisations] for the same reasons why military men leave the army."

Anne Speckhard of Georgetown University uses a slightly different approach of reconstructing personal biographies. She has interviewed 650 fighters who have been detained. She asks socio-economic questions on who they were before they joined the group, how they heard of IS, how they travelled, how they got interested in the group, what were their first impressions, what was their training, ideology, what jobs they did, what they loved and what they hated when being part of it. At the end she asks if they have advice for anyone thinking of joining a jihadi group. She found that many of the European foreign fighters were disillusioned. The international Centre for the Study of Violent Extremism uses footage from some of the interviews to produce counter-narrative videos and use them on social media.

In later discussion, ICAN shared another research approach conducting qualitative action research with women and girls.<sup>11</sup> They analysed case studies of return and reintegration of women and girls associated with violent extremist groups. This research led by civil society organisations revealed local gender dynamics of re-integration that are often overlooked.

Research on radicalisation has also started exploring the reasons for not joining extremist groups. When interviewing those detained for VE offences, researchers can ask "Did you have friends who considered joining up but didn't? Why didn't they?". This approach allows exploring other routes people took to achieve identity and status. However, there are others who criticise resilience because the concept is hard to pin down. When you look at protective factors (family values, strong culture), a lot of violent extremists have a lot of self-efficacy, they are

very resilient people. Others criticise resilience as “asking people to tolerate the intolerable” i.e. putting emphasis on individual change when the problem is much larger.

**Limitations of data from interviews:** Caution is needed in respect to the limitations of access in conducting interviews– who will agree to be interviewed and who won’t, who we are allowed to interview and who we aren’t – and the biases that this introduces into data sets. One participant shared experience from research with radicals in the UK and stressed the limitations of working with data only from those who agree to speak to researchers.

**Ethics:** Conducting interviews with former fighters raises ethical issues around information on illegal activities that researchers may obtain. One researcher considered it necessary to report to the authorities any current plans for terrorist attacks brought up in interviews. Other participants questioned the ethics of reporting incriminating information shared by interviewees. One participant also shared that she never asked questions on recruitment or links to IS, as such information can put interviewees at risk. Another participant shared that she would stop people from sharing specific information when videotaping interviews to prevent them from incriminating themselves.



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## PARALLEL SESSION 3.1:

### Monitoring and evaluating National Action Plans/Strategies



#### SPEAKERS

Mohammed ELSHIMI,  
*Research Fellow, RUSI*

Elli PARTANEN,  
*Legal Counsel, KPMG*

Samuli KINNUNEN,  
*Senior Associate, KPMG*



#### HIGHLIGHTS

For evaluations of PVE National Action Plans (NAPs) to be effective, a culture of transparency and feedback is necessary, whereby ministries work closely together across government departments with civil society and other institutions (national statistics office, academia etc.) and take their feedback on board. In cases where some parts of government are not aware of the NAP, we cannot expect to see much impact from its evaluation.



#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Data collection for M&E requirements for NAPs should be simple and aligned with existing methods, capacities and resources.
- Governments should encourage a culture of feedback and openness across different government actors if they want an evaluation of their NAP to be meaningful.
- Measurement should focus NAP progress and impact as a whole rather than being “projectized.” An integrated view of measurement would include assessing NAP design and implementation in terms of results *and* process (e.g. inclusivity, gender, Do No Harm).



#### QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- What are the prerequisites for developing a culture of feedback, participation and transparency in NAP development, implementation and monitoring?
- What is the most effective way to design systems for monitoring and assessing the impact of NAPs?



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## SESSION SUMMARY

**NAP design:** National Action Plans (NAPs) for PVE have been adopted, or are under development, in a number of countries. These provide a unified approach across government departments working towards PVE with clear milestones and planned actions. Each country bases the NAP on that country's specific definition of PVE.

There are two main approaches to the design – either one can take a whole of government approach and cascade downwards to local level and implementation, or one can start at a local level and stream upwards. KPMG argue that NAPs should be strategically ambitious but realistic when it comes to implementation.

According to RUSI, the ambition of a normative framework can create momentum for greater mobilization of civil society; in Kenya and Lebanon the NAP encouraged a civil society network to slowly develop around the issue of PVE. There are, however, also examples where civil society are largely absent from engagement in NAP development, implementation and monitoring, which is problematic.

**NAPs' scope vary widely:** Across different contexts, NAP processes are diverse. In some contexts, PVE NAPs take a broad, whole of society approach, others are more focused or closely tied with CT structures. The scope of the NAP frameworks has wide ranging impacts for measurement – definition of success, capacities and roles for implementing departments in monitoring, agencies and partners, accessibility, sensitive and security of data etc.

**Pitfalls of translating plans into practice:** There are examples of well-designed NAPs, using participatory, inclusive engagement and based on analysis and evidence. However, the process of translating the NAP development process into a well-defined, PVE specific, prioritized plan is a critical period for governing future NAP implementation and measurement frameworks.

**Current monitoring and evaluation of NAPs:** Assessments and evaluations are starting to take place of NAPs, but they are often very fragmented. There are, furthermore, not many examples of effective measurement of what the whole NAP adds up to in terms of meeting overall PVE objectives. One challenge is that measurement frameworks are often "projectized" and output focused, which reduces the ability to review overall NAP progress and impact. Another difficulty in conducting evaluations of NAPs is that there is often a lack of data (held by government and other NAP implementing partners). Data is not shared or stored for effective M&E (little publicly available data, patchy data collection and management systems across government departments, limits resources etc.) and little investment is made in baselines for NAPs. Data collection for M&E requirements for NAPs should be simple and aligned with existing methods, capacities and resources.

**Assessing Finland's National Action Plan:** One recent example of a PVE NAP evaluation was in Finland. The assessment of the 2016 NAP aimed to feed into the design of the new NAP. The overall evaluation approach focused on examining how the different actors implementing the NAP recognise their role in delivery, the level and effectiveness of cooperation and assessment of key results. KPMG's main areas of assessment were:

### PVE WORK WITHIN ACTORS

- Role of the actor: own description vs specified role in NAP
- Target group of the prevention work carried out by the actor
- Cooperation between authorities, NGOs, etc. and National/local cooperation forums
- Level of competences in PVE work, understanding of the phenomenon

### IMPACTS OF THE NAP

- Implementation of the NAP action point
- Impact of the NAP to PVE work within the actor
- Short-term goals of the NAP

**Gender and NAPs:** Participants commented that a lot can be learned from 1325 NAP monitoring processes and that there is potential for significant overlap with women, peace and security policy and programmes (in terms of what is included in the PVE NAP). There is still a tendency for NAPs to measure basic data on gender (i.e. disaggregation by sex) or focus on policy and interventions which target women (women's political and economic participation for example). Gender is not consistently mainstreamed and there is little focus on other gender dynamics and issues (such as masculinities).

**Culture of feedback and transparency:** In Finland, there is a good culture of civil society providing feedback to the government and the cooperation between civil society and ministries works well. This was deemed important for a good evaluation.

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## PARALLEL SESSION 3.2:

### Gender-sensitive research on PVE and incorporating intersectionality in M&E



#### SPEAKERS FROM PLENARY AND PARALLEL SESSION

Elizabeth PEARSON,  
*Lecturer, Swansea University*

Melinda HOLMES,  
*Programme Director, ICAN*



#### HIGHLIGHTS

Using a gender lens to explore PVE allows us to understand different perspectives, exposing power dynamics, highlighting common threads in ideologies, problematising what is defined as violence, and bring new elements from larger political economy context into the analysis.



#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Disaggregated data is necessary for a gendered approach to M&E and research but not sufficient by itself; we need strong gendered analysis and we need more people than only gender specialists to be able to conduct it.
- You do not necessarily need to use a 'gender' or 'feminist' label to discuss relevant concepts, as long as you keep to the content.
- Building advocacy components into any programme that is pushing against the mainstream can provide an opportunity to engage on methodology, show successes and pave the way for future work.



#### QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- How do we translate, validate and document women's knowledge through M&E?
- How far should one compromise one's own values and world view for local sensitivities? In some cases, for example, researchers may want to conduct studies in a manner that meets values such as gender equality, but which may not be accepted by local populations.



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Ahmed, Laila. *Women and gender in Islam*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.

Sylvester, Christine. "**Empathetic Cooperation: A Feminist Method of IR.**" *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 23(2): 315-334.

## SESSION SUMMARY

**Using a gendered lens to analyse VE:** Too often gender is seen as a bolt-on to PVE programmes and involves targeting women as vulnerable groups. This is problematic, both because of the much more varied roles women play, and because it does not fully explore the gendered relations within VE groups: VE groups tend to be majority male, their ideology often draws strongly on masculinity and can include the subjugation and control of women. Using a gender lens asks, 'how does gender construct violence?' and reveals forms of violence that are not necessarily being recognised as such.

Using a gendered lens in Afghanistan raises the issue of 'bacha bazi' (the sexual abuse of boys) and the support that the Taliban gained from some communities by freeing these boys and outlawing the practice. This is an issue that government actors and donors have been very reluctant to address but a gendered approach shows the relevance of this issue for VE, and the reluctance to address it as potentially short-sighted to achieve PVE outcomes.

**Gendered methodologies of researching PVE:** For her PhD research on Anjem Choudary's Islamist group and radical right-wing groups in the UK, Elizabeth Pearson deliberately chose a feminist methodology, following Christine Sylvester's work on empathy. She empathises the need to evaluate your own role in the process of collecting data. You need to be aware of how you are perceived and the impact that that creates – for example, as a white, British, non-Muslim woman working for RUSI she was equated with the government and some of the participants in focus groups on CVE in Muslim communities could view the research and researchers with suspicion. In this case, both men and women objected to discussion groups being separate, so the groups were mixed. Pearson found the physical and gendered relationship with physical (particularly public) spaces was very important. Her approach exposed the gender-based violence in communities that made people feel that they have to act differently in public.

UN Women have conducted a study (Empowerment or Subjugation: an analysis of ISIL's gender messaging) looking at the English, French and Arabic journals used to recruit for IS and the differences with those given to IS members after recruitment, especially in relation to the role of women. The study shows that IS is utilising gender norms to recruit much more skilfully than PVE programmes are using them in their responses.

**M&E from a gender perspective:** Disaggregated data is necessary for a gendered approach to M&E but not sufficient; strong gendered analysis is needed, as are more people (other than only 'gender specialists') who are to be able to conduct it. Gendered M&E needs to be built into a project from the beginning and has to be included in every stage of design, including in terms of finance and logistics.

Understanding gender is particularly important in targeting an intervention correctly or getting representative research. In Mercy Corps' participatory mapping exercise, they addressed this by working separately with groups of men, women, boys and girls and then brought them all together. Gender also needs to be built into the design of M&E tools so that language in tools such as surveys is appropriate (particularly in a gendered language such as Arabic), and that tools administered in a gender sensitive manner (for example, household surveys routinely under-sample working-age men because of how and when they are conducted).

Melinda Holmes also raises the structural problem of working with women's organisations – they are knowledgeable and often have a good understanding of gender but they tend to be less well funded than other civil society groups, and therefore have less institutional capacity, and can find M&E difficult.

**Building capacity of local researchers:** It is often difficult for external researchers to conduct research on sensitive subjects such as gender and PVE. Moreover, there is often local hostility to research conducted by 'outsiders.' UN Women are addressing this by working to increase the capacity of local researchers on gender and PVE in Northern Africa. They are also running a parallel process of engagement with key stakeholders in order to advocate for action in response to the problems raised in the analysis.

**Labels and terminology:** Labels such as 'gender' do not have meaning for everyone or may be misinterpreted to mean only women. Labels such as 'feminism' can be intermediating and risk alienating people. Labels are not what is important; we should be flexible in using labels as long as we ensure that we keep gendered content.



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## PARALLEL SESSION 3.3: Big Data and Data Visualisation



### SPEAKERS

Tony QUINLAN,  
*Narrate*

Hannes ROOS,  
*The Hague Center for Strategic Studies*

Bahia HALAWI,  
*Data Aurora*



### HIGHLIGHTS

Big Data allows for the identification of patterns and trends, from perceptions and stories to automated event data on events and social, economic, demographic, political, environmental indicators.



### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Data requires triangulation, for example social media data should be combined with other data sources to verify and contextualise.
- Ensure that there is sufficient expertise in data analysis factored in when using big data (to ensure relevance to topic, time frame etc.).



### QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- How can we access open-source data for analysing internet language: Codes, acronyms, different language combinations (English, Arabic etc.)?
- How can we facilitate the analysis of the media/of hate speech in particular?



### REFERENCES

Narrate. SenseMaker tool  
Hague Centre for Strategic Studies Monitors. "[HCSS Monitors](#)", December 2016.

## SESSION SUMMARY

**Narrative research:** Tony Quinlan presented the approach that Narrate uses to narrative research. Narrate uses their SenseMaker tool to collect short stories of people (“what happened that was significant to you?”) and make sense of patterns amongst them. Thousands of short stories can be collected and then participants are asked to place them on triangle diagram (that has been developed beforehand) showing three core concepts. It is important that people code their own stories; the approach deliberately avoids using an algorithm to analyse words. This allows for the identification of patterns of perceptions in different localities, to define a dominant narrative (such as of radicalisation; of conflict) to which that one would be able to adapt and tailor conflict sensitive programming.<sup>12</sup> This is an entry point for the development of approaches/theories of change and helps to see where action might be best placed and most effective.

**Large data sets can contribute to early warning if used to analyse conflict or radicalisation dynamics.** For example, The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies has developed the Conflict Risk Assessment Monitor which uses machine learning on open source online data to model the risk of conflict in the next 1,6 or 12 months at a national or sub-national level. They are using data in three categories: conflict history (past year or so), automated event data (computer-generated data on events happening on the ground- can be updated every 15min); structural indicators from social, economic, demographic, political, environmental domains. However, other sources and methods are needed to triangulate and explain data. The monitor relies on there being data available on conflicts.

In another example, Data Aurora are looking at social media and the online press in order to retrieve dynamics around conflict. In Sudan, Data Aurora retrieved the main terms used around extremism; monitoring on a day-to-day basis what was being said by different parts of the population. Integrating all these data sources gives a sense of triggers of activism in a specific context, which can again be turned into policy.

### Challenges identified:

- The need for specialists on board, for instance to identify which terms to search (e.g. on Sudan), cannot catch random data if no starting point.
- Results from social media analysis alone are never enough, they need to be complemented with other data sources.
- The lack of open source toolkits for different languages.
- Siloed approaches – data scientists are often not involved in PVE conversations.

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## PARALLEL SESSION 3.4:

### Maximising the PVE outcomes of development programmes

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#### **SPEAKER**

Fulco VAN DEVENTER,  
*Co-founder and Deputy Director, Human Security Collective*



#### **HIGHLIGHTS**

The development sector slowly evolved from targeting the most marginalised to a systemic approach. When PVE emerged, the sector started talking about youth at risk, leaving out the systemic factors and making PVE potentially incompatible with the development approach.



#### **QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

Do development programmes with other objectives than PVE still have a role to contribute to prevention in VE contexts?



#### **REFERENCES**

Human Security Collective and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. PVE Toolkit: Building the links between development cooperation and preventing violent extremism, (Forthcoming)

## SESSION SUMMARY

The development sector did not welcome the PVE discourse in its early years. Seen as instrumentalised for political aims, the PVE agenda was not an immediate fit into development policies. This began to change in 2015, when UNDP was asked for an assessment of the programmes in its development portfolio from a PVE lens. While these programmes seemed highly relevant, there was no clear evidence that development contributed to PVE outcomes.

**Dutch MFA toolkit:** In response to the political climate in The Netherlands, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) embarked on a quest to make development programming PVE-relevant, asking the question: ‘When can you say that a development programme contributed to PVE, or that it was relevant to PVE?’

While the MFA is committed to ensuring conflict sensitivity of all programmes it supports, it was not clear what additional levels of analysis were needed when violent extremism was part of the conflict. The Human Security Collective worked with the MFA to develop a toolkit that can be used to tweak existing programmes or build new PVE-relevant development programmes.

The toolkit offers a step-by-step guide on re-thinking development programmes in a context where violent extremism is an issue. Methodology or references to existing toolkits are available at each step of the analysis, allowing programme staff to go deeper in the analysis. The tool is useful to inform the design of any programme and ensure Do No Harm in a VE context.

Implementers need to identify VE-related risks such as risk of terrorist financing, being a target, being instrumentalised/co-opted, and physical risk to the programme staff and assets. As a minimum, the analysis can help implementers identify ways to mitigate risk in a VE environment. Optimally, development programmes can be adjusted to contribute more towards prevention without changing their developmental objectives.

**Challenges to using development for PVE outcomes:** There can be a challenge in trying to serve both a developmental and a security purpose, especially when the VE threat is not imminent. A further challenge is in approaching violent extremism from a broader conflict analysis perspective. VE can be defined differently by local actors and donor agencies, and therefore a deep conflict analysis needs to be done early on in the design process. In order to be PVE relevant, programmes need to assess the perceptions of people at risk. Development practitioners should seek to understand both the push factors and the recruitment strategies that led people to joining armed groups.

**Ethical considerations:** There are instances where it is important to continue employment programmes in a VE context, but not to turn them into PVE programmes. The reframing of employment or education programmes into PVE-relevant programmes brings in ethical questions and risks to local partners and implementers. Targeting communities for prevention and reporting outcomes of employment and education programmes as PVE outcomes can have unintended consequences. Specifically, when outcomes shared with the public are quality of life outcomes, but internally implementers report a decrease in the number and severity of incidents, the ethics, credibility and conflict sensitivity of the intervention are at risk.

**Targeting youth:** PVE outcomes of development interventions tend to target youth at risk. This approach overlooks the systemic factors for violent extremism, marking a regression for development programmes which have evolved from targeting the most marginalised to a systemic approach. Many development organisations see the approach as incompatible with development, and donor-driven.



## Plenary 4:

Researching on/in the online space  
and measuring online interventions

## PLENARY 4

### Researching on/in the online space and measuring online interventions



#### SPEAKERS FROM PLENARY AND PARALLEL SESSION

Sheldon HIMELFARB,  
*President and CEO, PeaceTech Lab*

Ayman MHANNA,  
*Executive Director, Samir Kassir Foundation*



#### HIGHLIGHTS

The role of youth in PVE and their vulnerability to radicalization, combined with their use of social media and the internet in general, makes the online space a pivotal tool to understand, measure and address violent extremism. Yet, strategic communication campaigns have had limited impact, often due to the perceived credibility of the messenger or consistency of the message. While effectiveness of counter narratives is disputed, approaches focusing on media literacy aim to protect the users from disinformation and potential radicalization.



#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Invest in research on how messages by different actors are perceived by different audiences in order to find entry points for deconstructing narratives and building counter narratives.
- Involve local trusted influencers in online campaigns to more effectively reach out to target audiences.
- Grow the evidence base on the impact of counter-narratives and explore the extent to which building resilience to false information is impactful for PVE.



#### UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

- How can we draw a line between tracking behaviours and respecting privacy, and still fully use the potential of the media as a data source?
- How can we facilitate the analysis of the media, and of hate speech in particular, in the absence of open-source toolkits tailored to the analysis of internet language (codes, acronyms, adapted to different languages and transliterations)?



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World Leadership Alliance - Club de Madrid. [PVE: Leaders telling a different story: outcome document](#). Madrid; Club de Madrid, 2017.

[The Journalism Trust Initiative](#), led by Reporters Without Border.



## SESSION SUMMARY

**Communication in the online space:** Campaigns aimed to counter violent extremism have had limited impact. Research by Samir Kassir Foundation in Lebanon, Tunisia and Nigeria revealed that counter campaigns are almost unanimously rejected due to lack of trust in the messenger and lack of consistency of the message. For example, a web series against violence was broadcasted alongside news items praising the army, which, some people believed, was torturing detainees.

Counter-messaging comes with several challenges. First, the identity of the messenger; whereas it is usually state actors that conduct counter-messaging efforts, it is also the state that is trusted less among the population. The lack of trust in political institutions is deep-rooted and using political actors as messengers can backfire and even strengthen VE actors. Even good projects with good reach can have limited impact if they use the wrong messenger.

The channels that counter-messaging projects use are not always the most effective ones. People might come across ideas on Facebook, but they usually retrieve relevant messages from neighbourhood networks and rely on face-to-face relationships. This makes the identity of the messenger (that is doing the counter messaging) even more relevant. Programmes need to define relevant channels for the information including involving locally respected stakeholders to:

- Increase the reach of the message,
- Avoid the “political face” of the messenger,
- Increase the legitimacy of the message and the programme.

Efforts need to be made not only in counter-messaging, but also to strengthen resilience among vulnerable target groups. Counter-messaging provides an alternative to wrong information, whereas early stage awareness about fake news/misinformation would help to decrease the reach of this information. Thus, individuals need to be equipped to validate information that they find in the media. On a broader scale, initiatives such as the “Journalism Trust Initiative” are developing sets of indicators related to the trustworthiness of information, that search engines could potentially incorporate into their algorithms.

In this context, counter-messaging should apply to quality standards – one needs to make sure to use trust-worthy sources and to provide information of high standards and quality; credibility of information backs up efforts and is important for the integrity of the messenger/the programme.

The online space offers opportunities for (civil society) initiatives to counter radicalisation. Peace Tech Lab facilitates the exchange of good practices between organisation with a focus on how to use the internet (Whatsapp, Facebook, etc.) with a low budget and in low band environment to do PVE work.

Applications such as Ushindi for money transfers and KoboToolbox for research and data storage offer opportunities to organisations working on PVE. Specific applications have also been developed as tech solutions to PVE-related problems. In Pakistan, a company developed a platform for matching youth with job opportunities. In Nigeria, a company develop an app to match youth migrating to the city with affordable safe housing and prevent potential radicalization in the slums.

Ayman Mhanna also pointed to the risks of technological support in PVE. Security agencies, which receive complex software from foreign donors to track terrorist activity, often end up using it to suppress activism in the online space. It is important to consider that social media implies a bias, since the access to the internet is not equal (rural-urban, gender). Thus, programmes might fail to target relevant parts of the target groups, data collection might miss relevant groups, analysis would lead to false/biased conclusions, and counter-messaging would not reach those who retrieve messages and information from other sources.

## ENDNOTES

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- 4 Venhaus, John M. **Why Youth Join al-Qaida**. Washington DC: USIP, 2010.
- 5 See Institute for Economics and Peace. **Global Terrorism Index 2018: Measuring the impact of terrorism**. Sydney: Institute for Economics and Peace, 2018.
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