



The Prevention Project
Organizing Against Violent Extremism

Panel on “Preventing Violent Extremism and Development Institutions: Challenges and Opportunities”

2018 World Bank Fragility Forum

5 March 2018 (4:00pm – 5:30pm)

Summary¹

Context

During the 2018 World Bank Fragility Forum, the Prevention Project, with support from the Swiss Development Cooperation Agency and the Women’s Alliance for Security Leadership, hosted a panel on “Preventing Violent Extremism and Development Institutions: Challenges and Opportunities.” The discussion took place against the backdrop of a growing awareness of how violent extremism can undermine progress on development and a growing body of contextualized research that highlights how overly centralized governance, state violence, inequality, lack of trust between the police and communities, and uneven resource allocation and service provision can lead to rising levels of violent extremism. In short, the linkages between security and development are as clear as ever, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected states.

As a result, a growing number of such national governments are asking development institutions to address violent extremism as part of their programs in those countries and international and national development agencies and peacebuilding and other non-governmental development actors, are rethinking their traditional development approach and how development tools and resources can be applied to prevent violent extremism

The panelists addressed some of the key questions and challenges confronting development actors, where answers and solutions are critical to maximizing the impact of development institutions in reducing violent extremism and thus securing development gains in fragile and conflict-affected states.

Key themes highlighted include:

- The comparative advantages of development institutions such as UNDP and World Bank when it comes to engagement in PVE are many, including with respect to research and data-collection on the drivers of violent extremism in different local contexts and addressing the structural drivers of violent extremism.
- If you do not address the issues of governance, grievances, human rights violations, corruption, and lack of education, you cannot successfully prevent recruitment and radicalization to violent extremism.
- Long-term, sustainable funding for community-led efforts are required to prevent violent extremism; local civil society actors should be viewed less as *implementers* of donor project and more as *agents of change*.

¹ The views expressed in this summary do not necessarily reflect those of the panelists or other participants in the Fragility Forum, or the World Bank.

- International development institutions like the Bank and UNDP need to do more to engage and support independent local civil society actors directly, in particular young people and women, directly.
- Development-driven PVE efforts should a) not be limited to those individuals most at risk of radicalization or recruitment to violent extremism, but include a broader focus on the community and community driver; and b) focus more attention on devising positive and realistic alternatives to violence for dealing with the structural injustices and human rights abuses of the marginalized and excluded.

Panelists

Gloria La Cava, a senior social scientist from the World Bank, spoke about the Bank's comparative advantages when it comes to PVE. In coordination with other development partners, she highlighted how the Bank can offer a) strong analytics for rigorous diagnostics; b) knowledge sharing and technical assistance, particularly for World Bank client countries which have PVE strategies in place; and c) sizable financing for potential investments at scale at country level. In some countries with more restrictive operating environments, but where the Bank has a well-established relationship with the host government and is seen as an "honest broker", the Bank may have additional comparative advantages in terms of access to decision makers and data collection, enabling it to undertake sensitive research on the drivers of and engage in policy dialogue around preventing violent extremism.

Bank interlocutors in this field include National PVE/CVE Coordinators in the Office of the President, Ministers of Finance, sub-national governments, and civil society. She said that Bank engagement with local civil society organizations (CSOs) includes a number of dimensions, for example, on "analytics" – or gaining a better understanding of the local context in which violent extremism can take root. In addition, the Bank engages operationally with international and local NGOs, either directly through available grant mechanisms or through government-managed programs.

La Cava briefly outlined some of the Bank's engagements on PVE in Central Asia, where it has launched in-depth analytic work identifying the drivers of violent extremism and appropriate development interventions, starting with Tajikistan, and the Western Balkans, where it is working in two municipalities in Kosovo on issues related to youth radicalization.

She said that although the Bank is positioning PVE squarely in the context of its development mandate, some client governments and Bank country-focused units have asked the Bank to reframe or broaden the rationale for Bank engagement beyond violent extremism and radicalization and include prevention more broadly, e.g., on different forms of extremism, domestic violence, school violence or recruitment into organized crime. In other contexts, the preference is for moving towards more palatable concepts such as youth exclusion or youth unemployment.

Alexander Avannesov, Global Programme Manager and Special Advisor on PVE at UNDP, noted that UNDP's comparative advantage lies in its nearly global field presence, working on the ground in more than 170 countries. He spoke of how the historical reluctance of development actors to engage in discussions let alone programs linked to PVE began to diminish when host governments began asking these actors to help them address rising levels of radicalization and recruitment to terrorism and violent extremism. The convergence of violence, conflict, and terrorism and violent extremism and the negative impact that a terrorist attack can have on an already struggling economy pushed UNDP to get involved. The 2016 UN Secretary-General's PVE Plan of Action, Avannesov said, was the UN's initial response to this wake-up call to

address this issue. In response to this increased demand, UNDP began to develop country-specific and soon thereafter regional programs in this area – it now has some 63 PVE-specific or PVE-relevant programs underway.

Avannesov pointed to UNDP’s growing body of PVE research and the implications of some its findings. For example, UNDP’s report, “[Journey to Extremism in Africa](#)”, found that a state’s “militaristic response” to addressing security challenges was often a tipping point for (mainly) young men joining violent extremist groups. He added that UNDP-sponsored research focused on Sudan and Kyrgyzstan also point out that issues of injustice, grievances, violations of human rights, corruption, lack of quality education and investment in basic services, and weak governance all contribute to radicalization and violent extremism. He underscored how these findings remind us of the need to complement a security approach with development measures. He added how UNDP’s research findings have provided the impetus for development institutions to focus more attention on addressing the structural drivers of violent extremism, not necessarily labeling their interventions as “PVE” but increasingly applying a PVE lens to the design and implementation of their programs.

Kimberly Brody Hart, Senior Manager for Global Affairs and Partnerships at Search for Common Ground (Search), an international peacebuilding organization, shared some of Search’s experiences working on PVE. She noted that Search has implemented PVE projects in more than 15 countries, with a focus on preventing recruitment, including among at-risk youth, promoting disengagement from violence;; working with governments to enhance the overall effectiveness of their response to violent extremist threats; and developing positive narratives as alternatives to those being put forward by violent extremist organizations.

She shared some of the challenges and lessons learned from Search in navigating the PVE space. These include a) maintaining impartiality and credibility, whether with governments or local communities; b) needing to work not only with those most at risk of radicalization or recruitment to violent extremism, but also with the relevant communities more broadly, as Search has done in both Indonesia and Nigeria – having a broader focus on the community and community drivers is a key part of PVE; c) focusing on constructive messaging that promotes alternatives to violence, and avoiding “anti” or “counter” messages; d) identifying credible actors and interlocutors who can engage most effectively with those most susceptible to violent extremism – these are often peers rather than established CSOs; and e) operating effectively in fragile and conflict affected contexts, which requires, *inter alia*, having local staff who have relationships and credibility with the relevant local community.

Ahlem Nasroui, the 23 year-old, Tunisian **founder of Young Leaders Entrepreneurs**, an association which has managed hackathons, boot-camps, and startups to support the Tunisian democratic transition – and a member of WASL – described some of her PVE work and shared her perspective on some of the PVE challenges in Tunisia.

Her association launched Unleash Tunisia Venture Bus in 2016. Touring the country, the bus provided a platform for youth to receive skills training in different topics such as management, social media, social entrepreneurship, and marketing, and to get to know each other and explore each other’s regions, share the visions they have and challenges they see for Tunisia, and talk about ways to realize and overcome them. “Social entrepreneurship is not only about creating jobs but it’s about providing [young people] a sense of belonging, hope, and space to dream,” she said.

She described her Peace Lab Project, an initiative to educate people on conflict resolution and ways to create peace in their communities. The approach focuses on creating grassroots-based structures to train and coach peace agents and peace advocates.

Nasroui lamented the lack of connectivity between international development institutions such as UNDP and the World Bank and the young people she works with on building resilience to violent extremism in localities across the country. She urged such organizations to broaden their focus beyond government actors and to prioritize collaboration with youth-led organization in Tunisia. She underscored how international development institutions and other donors need to invest more in locally-rooted initiatives in vulnerable regions aimed at building the capacity of young people to be change agents.

She also spoke of the connection between quality education (or lack thereof) and violent extremism in Tunisia, underscoring how the lack of quality (or any) schooling in parts of Tunisia and how a lack of alternatives rather than ideology has been a key reason why some young people have joined violent extremist organizations. She urged the Bank and UNDP to encourage her government to invest more in education systems across the country and in young people as critical partners in reducing levels of violent extremism in the country.

Nuruddeen Lemu, the Director of Research & Training, Da’wah Institute of Nigeria, Islamic Education Trust (IET), in Minna, Nigeria, noted that “violent extremism in Africa is like potholes on African roads... they may look alike but what causes each of them is different.” He shared how people on the ground in Africa have been tackling the issues related to violent extremism for a long-time, without necessarily labeling it “PVE” and how many live in the same conditions as those that become violent extremists, but have not themselves become violent. This underscores the need to gain a better understanding of why this is so.

Lemu spoke of the need to gain a deeper understanding of the local context before proposing policy or programmatic solutions to violent extremism. For example, looking at Boko Haram (BH), he noted that only 10% of BH members interviewed stated a clear religious motivation, another 30% mentioned some religious justification, but 57% “sought vengeance against acts committed by the government security forces responsible for CVE”. Thus, he argued, preventing recruitment to BH must include addressing injustices.

He also highlighted how many ideologically-motivated violent extremists view themselves as “social reformists, freedom fighters, and activists who have lost hope in the existing peaceful routes to dealing with social injustices and abuses of basic human freedoms and rights.” To earn greater credibility, he argued, PVE efforts, including those involving religious actors, need to focus more attention on devising positive and realistic alternatives to violence for dealing with the structural injustices and human rights abuses of the marginalized and excluded.

He also shared how, while the international community tends to focus on the role of social media in facilitating recruitment and radicalization globally, this emphasis is misplaced when it comes to BH, which recruits primarily through booklets, lectures, and debates. It is for this reason that Lemu’s organization has focused on distribution of relevant literature and audio material, and training of religious leaders and actors in faith-based critical thinking tools through a “train the trainers” approach, as essential elements of PVE.

Commenting on the relationship between development and other donors, Lemu cautioned against them providing funds to local CSOs and asking them to implement projects or otherwise conduct activities in a way that may erode the CSO’s trust with the very community the donor is trying to reach.

Violent extremism, he underscored, is not new to the history of any religion and has been effectively addressed in other contexts. He reminded the audience to learn from those other experiences, particularly in terms of what alternative messages and opportunities have proved effective in stemming the tide of

violent extremism. One key lesson is that if a government or donor wants to support a local group as it seeks to push back against violent extremism in its community, “don’t invite them or tell them to come to you, but go to them.”

Discussion

Following the panelists’ presentations, the questions and comments elevated a number of important issues.

- Given the similarity among PVE and traditional peacebuilding and governance work, some wondered why it was necessary for donors to use the term “PVE” and risk stigmatizing target communities and alienating individuals. In response, panelists highlighted the different “theories of change” associated with and populations being targeted by PVE as opposed to traditional development programs, the importance of understanding the conceptual difference between the two types of programs, and the need for transparency with the implementers and beneficiaries of a targeted program designed to reduce radicalization and recruitment to violent extremism vice a broader one with a traditional development objective.
- Audience members underscored the need for the Bank and UNDP to engage more regularly with local CSOs and individuals at the community-level, moving beyond the traditional emphasis on national governments. The point was made that without involving community-based organizations and actors in their programs, one cannot achieve positive results in PVE. It was noted that UNDP is increasingly involving youth, women, and other, community-based organizations and actors, for example, in Mali, Kenya, and Kosovo, in its PVE engagements, and that UNDP and other development agencies should advocate among national governments, donors, and multilateral bodies the need to invest more resources in support of civil society-led PVE projects. Moving beyond short-term, project-based funding, participants advocated for long-term, sustainable funding for community-led PVE efforts and viewing CSOs more as “change agents” rather than simply as “implementers”.
- The related point was made much of the discussion around CSOs and PVE has centered on their role as implementers of donor-funded projects rather than on as contributors to or partners in the policymaking or strategy development process. Development actors were encouraged to place greater emphasis on facilitating involvement of CSOs in policy discussions around PVE, with a particular focus on how to incorporate the perspectives of young people working at the community-level to prevent violent extremism into national policy and strategies.
- Increasing the involvement of the private sector, particularly in terms of providing tangible opportunities to young people in communities where perceptions of marginalization or exclusion run high, was highlighted as a priority for development actors.
- Participants discussed how a community of practice is developing to better inform PVE programming, with development actors as active members of the community. It was noted how some have criticized PVE programming for not sufficiently testing assumptions with scientific and empirically based research and the need for more rigor in the design, monitoring, and evaluation of PVE programs. Audience members highlighted some recent progress in closing this gap, with the UNDP having just developed a [toolkit](#) in this area, with the UK and EU have recently released ones as well.

- The challenge of demonstrating and then communicating results from supporting local, CSO-led PVE interventions was highlighted, particularly when the projects are looking to change perceptions and attitudes toward violence or “the other”.
- Participants spoke of the impact that the change in the OECD DAC [Guidelines](#) – to allow for PVE to be included as Official Development Assistance – is starting to have in some donor capitals in terms of increased funding for PVE. However, it was also noted that the overly-broad PVE guidelines may require refinement in order to increase their impact and influence in development ministries. This is particularly so given the lingering political sensitivities around the PVE agenda among many traditional development actors.
- Pointing to Afghanistan, participants highlighted the challenge development institutions face in addressing the needs and grievances of the local population rather than continuing to rely on unresponsive and weak central governments. It was noted that some Afghans are turning to religious institutions, with some espousing extremist beliefs, to provide basic services in the absence of a responsive government.