AFP CVE Working Group – OTI Presentation

March 23, 2018

Highlights and key points of interest for CSPB/CoVE-MENA from the notes:

1. They are seeking out actors (INGOs) that they don't typically work with, at least to exchange information and learning with.
2. Ability to do small grants, especially IKGs, and to do them quickly and well is key for working with OTI.
3. Ability to hire local and highly connected and qualified staff is a priority for them. They made it a point to mention several times that they look at the implementing organization as their partner, that local implementing staff assume ownership over the project and are able to make changes to objectives and approach without the need for COR approval (but through coordination with their OTI program POCs); co-creation model.
4. Importance of action research and learning by doing; they want programs that act first (and again, quickly), learn, and then adapt.
5. While listening to this meeting, I was reminded several times of what we are doing in CoVE-MENA, especially Sharekna. They are "OTI-light" so to speak; CoVE-MENA has a huge pilot component through which we are testing different approaches/methodologies on a smaller scale, and Sharekna with its approach focused on community-led identification of issues and solutions, its small grant component, and its focus on learning and adaptation, including through the quarterly review meetings with our local partners and USAID.
6. Points they wanted to hear from INGOs on:
   a. Interested in learning how to communicate and make sure research they have/assessments they do are useful for local partners and field-based people.
   b. What would INGOs be interested in hearing about in an OTI presentation during the AFP conference?
   c. What are proxy indicators that can be used in M&E of CVE programs?
   d. They are interested in being part of discussions and events around CVE and the topics brought up in the discussion.

Notes:

- Framing of the event:
  - came out from the CVE working group at AFP (NGOs, academics, etc.) meant to look at policy and advocacy around CVE programming, what's working and what's not, how we measure impact. From time to time government representatives speak to the group.
  - Purpose: introduce the OTI CVE Toolkit and get questions.
  - This toolkit began on their knowledge management platform as a "who's who in the zoo" document, and then they started thinking about how to use this information to generate cross-program learning. The toolkit is the response to that. Used it to facilitate conversations with internal OTI offices and then with their implementers. See it as a living document, and will be updated. They now want to share with the INGO community more widely.
- OTI introduction (additional details are in the PPT slides and the factsheet):

- Mission: USG foreign policy priority areas, local initiatives to build on, adaptive/flexible approach or model.
- Created after the fall of the berlin wall when there was a need for a model/agency that can act quickly and within complex/changing environments.
- Before 2 – 3 year programs, but now their programs are mostly 3-4.
- Primarily though small grants or activities – 100 grants/year/program but varies by program, and most of them are In Kind Grants.
    - Value of IKGs: it means that we can work with a lot of organizations who wouldn't be typical partners, since cash grants have many more requirements. It allows them to work with the "unusual suspects".
- In Washington 150 – 180 staff. In programs in the field there are ~2 American staff + 1 local staff from the embassy. Implementing partners manage the majority of work and have many more staff in country.
- Business model:
    - IQC or IDIQ that allows them to tart programs quickly. 9 contractors that have prequalified to implement an OTI program. when they want to start a program, this shortlist of contractors are eligible to bid on them and get a shorter amount of time to bid on them. This allows them to start programs more quickly.
        - In addition to these SWIFT (the mechanism) partners, they also work through IOM.
    - Do an initial country assessment that allows them to figure out if the country meets their engagement criteria; their assessment is meant to answer questions such as: can we work there, is there a window of opportunity, etc. they don't do a full assessment, log frame and so on.
    - Grants are usually small grant 40-50,000 USD 3-6 months, modest in terms of individual change that is expected; they have done multi-year multi-million activities, but those are an exception.
    - Approving and completing activities every week, which is an opportunity to learn and apply to new programs.
    - Rely on implementing partners who are smart about places they're working, who have connections and context knowledge. OTI and their partners tend to be the only people working in certain area and/or doing that type of work, so staff need to have a strong background that facilitates that. The staff inform the strategy and supports local ownership. Although decisions might be made by OTI/HQ people at time, it is informed by implementing partner staff.
    - 6 programming principles:
        - Most important is action research and it informs how they approach their programming. Learning by doing. Get on the ground and start a program with a limited understanding of what is it they need to do, and how they should address a problem. They don't do baselines or assessments. They determine the best approach based on what they know, and then start applying and learning by doing, and adapting as they go.

- Intentionality: clear about what they're trying to achieve in activities and what their program is doing.
- Experimentation: willing to take risks, unproven Theory of change, and untested assumptions; only failure is the failure to learn. Small grant model enables that. Experimenting in a $40,000 activity is reasonable and allows them to learn, rather than doing a multi-million program that is unproven and fails.
- TOC – each program has a TOC that includes the outcomes expected and explains how the thousands of individual activities get them to their objectives.
- Local ownership: local partners inform strategy, and should feel ownership over it. OTI means by "we" the program, OTI and their implementing partners. Co-creation model. Deeply involved with partners and approving every single activity, but they aren't entirely directive, they are building a program together, with roles and responsibilities for each.
  - Act, assess, adapt – their hands-on management and monitoring approach. They have limited info, so they act first which allows them to assess and evaluate what works, and use these lessons in order to adapt.
  - Program Performance Management system: set of tools that allow them to manage programs in a complex environment with no fixed objectives or workplan, where they need to respond to learning and changes in context. 1st year is a bit prescribed, and then it depends on the nature of the context. Country assessment first, issue an award with a start-up event with the partner in DC, rolling assessment, and strategy review sessions periodically throughout the life of the program (2-3 days with OTI and partner staff to figure out if we are on the right track). The field team can change the objectives, without any action from the contracting officer, and this is largely through the rolling assessment and SRSs. There's an external final evaluation, and lately external mid-term evaluations.
  - Intensive management "one team approach"; 4 corners (OTI DC, OTI field, implementing partner DC, implementing partner field).
    - Interested in learning how to communicate and make sure research they have/assessments they do are useful for local partners.
- OTI CVE Toolkit
  - 6 TOCs: common approaches, and not examples of everything they do.
  - Key lessons:
    - No silver bullet: opportunity to try, and not one answer.
    - Clustering, layering, sequencing:
      - clustering the Nigeria program – started with government repressiveness first, and then started CVE, and clustered activities on 6 themes and started doing cluster evaluations; as they learned more, this informed the 3rd iteration of the program. government effectiveness cluster showed that it wasn't the right approach at that time.

- Layering Mali transition initiative – process to build relationship and how they were engaging over time, started with personal relationships to enter the community, and then layered interventions.
  - Sustained engagement is key
  - Social bonds are important
  - CVE is resource intensive: there might be tons of developmental issues that need to be addressed, but OTI is focusing on CVE problem set, so there's a challenge on not addressing other urgent needs.
  - Plan early for what comes next
- Common approaches:
  - Alternative messaging: support local entities to be alternatives
  - Reducing marginalization
  - Youth engagement
  - Improving government effectiveness
    - Whether through government presence in activities or other ways to help them demonstrate their effectiveness/services in the community.
    - Small infrastructure activities can have a bigger impact in rural contexts than urban ones.
    - Activities should be attributed to government if we're addressing government effectiveness.
    - Importance of security: if people don't feel safe, it's difficult to engage them. There might not be open conflict, but there might be a high level of violence. However, overreliance on the security approach could be problematic. Ensuring that people feel secure is important. Without access, they are limited in their ability to engage.
    - Nigeria example where ISIS is positioning themselves as an alternative to the state in providing services.
  - Addressing economic drivers of extremism
    - Vocational training doesn't necessarily lead to employment since opportunities might not be there, so it isn't always effective for improving economic conditions. However, vocational training and skills-building can be used as a "hook", and help address other issues related to CVE.
    - Sense of relative deprivation as a driver of extremism (mentioned Mercy Corps study).
  - Supporting change
- M&E:
  - Traditional sense: achieving impact, seeing political or security change that they want to see in the target area.
  - Lessons that we can provide to other programs, embassy or mission on useful approaches. Others could pick up approaches or lines of efforts that OTI was working on.

- Ideal model of measuring before and after and having a control group, is often not possible or reasonable (control groups for example could cause frustration). Use complexity aware M&E).
- Achievement of results is through clustering interventions around a problem. Here are activity outcomes, how did those get them to the achievement of their objectives. Cluster evaluations. Creative in approaching assessing outcomes, so you have to have proxies when you can't ask directly about VE. List experiment for example was used as a tool in Nigeria (rather than directly asking about their support to extremist views, you have them answer questions that express support to certain extremism views). Within a cluster, they try to identify what activities did and did not work.
- Questions:
  - Programs done in the past to ensure secure spaces for local partners and beneficiaries to participate, especially in CVE programs where you can't announce the objective.
    - Presence of security personnel
    - Planning activities (time, and location)
    - Ensuring that everyone who has a stake is present/engaged, so less likelihood of someone being outside and disrupting.
    - The use of art/theater activities as a way to create spaces for discussion (to bring people together, rehabilitated a space for it, etc.)
  - What are examples of things that OTI do specifically and when they come in versus others in the USG.
    - When OTI was invited, niche is working on complex places where they don't know what works, and where there is ongoing violence.
    - They are doing the very local community level work in areas others can't reach. Working in complex contexts in environments that are very difficult to navigate.
    - Try to be incorporated as much as possible in the embassies where they exist.
    - Can do almost anything as a program, and that flexibility and ability to adapt is what makes OTI different.
    - A lot of people in a lot of places, the staffing footprint is bigger than other USG.
    - OTI operates in a specific period after which it hands off programming to others (USAID).
  - CVE doesn't lend itself to quick solutions. How do you adapt the OTI model to work on the longer-term?
    - they are continually working on how to ensure long-term engagement happens. They work on these issues especially when they are leaving a country; it is something that they struggle with, and how they transition their own programs to missions. **Do they focus on the INGO community to share lessons and make that transfer rather than focusing on USG agencies?**
  - what local partners have been doing is CVE, but now it's called something different. How do they approach capacity building to local partners?
    - There are organizations that get mature in the context of an OTI program and they consider that as a win.

- Sometime there are networks that they build, WEMADA(?) Network a local community network in Diffa and are an effective partner.
- In Lebanon, program for 10+ years, they would bring their partners together to network them together, and created a directory of local organizations and what they specialize in, fair at the embassy to connect them to other sources of funding.
- In certain places they invest in capacity building in organizations that have unique access or skill and want to work with them over time.
- On M&E they have supported local partners on the M&E side.
- Partners are part of the legacy of an OTI program, and so are partner staff.
  - Given how OTI does assessments and development process, how do you ensure that the outcomes are based on local concerns rather than national security concerns.
    - Co-creation and activities are developed with local partners; struggle is how to translate research and information in a useful way to local partners.
  - OTI questions:
    - Interested in continuing this discussion, they received AFP invitation to submit proposals, what would INGOs would be interested in hearing about?
      - Liz mentioned how does OTI define and measure impact.
      - SFCG – how do you tell the story from all the different pieces?
      - Maria(?) interested in the layering, clustering, sequencing approach.
      - more comprehensive evaluation of CVE efforts (across different agencies) including military and security efforts.
        - OTI response: they are aware of the negative role that military can play – UNDP report on Africa – and there's a receptivity to discussing the issue within the military and within different agencies.
    - What are proxy indicators that can be used in M&E of CVE programs?
      - International Alert released a report that includes a long list of indicators on PVE.
      - Next month, AFP will be finalizing a report on TOCs, and will be tackling proxy indicators there.
      - George Mason have ideas on proxy indicators.
      - USIP or peacelabz have also done some work on this.
- Over the course of the next year, they are planning for more steps to engage INGOs. OTI are interested in being part of discussions and events around CVE and the topics brought up above.