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# INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO CVE PROGRAMMING

*INSIGHTS AND LESSONS FROM THE  
USAID OFFICE OF TRANSITION INITIATIVES  
LEBANON COMMUNITY RESILIENCE INITIATIVE  
(2014-2017)*

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# ACRONYMS

<b>AAB</b>	ABDULLAH AZZAM BRIGADES
<b>AQ</b>	AL-QAEDA
<b>BA</b>	BASMAT AMAL
<b>BET</b>	BAB EL-TEBBANEH
<b>CAVT</b>	COALITION AGAINST VIOLENCE IN TRIPOLI
<b>CBO(s)</b>	COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATION(S)
<b>CVE</b>	COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM
<b>FER(s)</b>	FINAL EVALUATION REPORT
<b>FGD(s)</b>	FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION(S)
<b>FO(s)</b>	FIELD OFFICER(S)
<b>GOL</b>	GOVERNMENT OF LEBANON
<b>INGO(s)</b>	INTERNATIONAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION(S)
<b>IP</b>	IMPLEMENTING PARTNER
<b>IS</b>	ISLAMIC STATE
<b>ISF</b>	INTERNAL SECURITY FORCES
<b>JAN</b>	JABHAT AL-NUSRA
<b>JM</b>	JABAL MOHSEN
<b>KII(s)</b>	KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW(S)
<b>LAF</b>	LEBANESE ARMED FORCES
<b>LARD</b>	LEBANESE ASSOCIATION FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT
<b>LCRI</b>	LEBANON COMMUNITY RESILIENCE INITIATIVE
<b>LCI</b>	LEBANON CIVIC INITIATIVE
<b>LCSI</b>	LEBANON CIVIC SUPPORT INITIATIVE

<b>M&amp;E</b>	MONITORING AND EVALUATION
<b>MEL</b>	MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING
<b>MEPI</b>	MIDDLE EAST PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE
<b>MSI</b>	MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS INTERNATIONAL
<b>MVE</b>	MITIGATE VIOLENT EXTREMISM
<b>NGO(s)</b>	NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION(S)
<b>OTI</b>	OFFICE OF TRANSITION INITIATIVES
<b>PDO(s)</b>	PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT OFFICER(S)
<b>PI</b>	PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
<b>PO(s)</b>	PROGRAM OBJECTIVE(S)
<b>PPR</b>	PROGRAM PERFORMANCE REVIEW
<b>PVE</b>	PREVENT VIOLENT EXTREMISM
<b>ROT(s)</b>	RULE(S) OF THUMB
<b>SO(s)</b>	SUB-OBJECTIVE(S)
<b>TOC(s)</b>	THEORY(IES) OF CHANGE
<b>TYC</b>	TEBBANEH YOUTH COUNCIL
<b>UN</b>	UNITED NATIONS
<b>UNDP</b>	UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM
<b>UNESCWA</b>	UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WEST ASIA
<b>USAID</b>	UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
<b>VE</b>	VIOLENT EXTREMISM OR VIOLENT EXTREMIST
<b>VEO(s)</b>	VIOLENT EXTREMIST ORGANIZATION(S)



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the Syrian crisis has deepened and diverse actors have been drawn into the conflict, instability across the region has intensified. Neighboring Lebanon has been affected heavily by the war, heightening its own long-running political and sectarian tensions. On the Fragile States Index, Lebanon shows extremely weak social cohesion rankings with high levels of group grievance and elite factionalization. Space for entrepreneurs peddling sectarian narratives, including Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs) has expanded, as has external intervention in the country's politics. These factors have weakened the state further and generated internal violence. Lebanese actors have engaged in activities supporting different sides in the Syrian war and many communities have been affected by the spillover of the conflict. The country now hosts a huge refugee burden, often imposing substantial costs on the communities least able to bear them. Certain regions and communities feel marginalized and abandoned by the state. Poor services, inequitable economic development, inadequate infrastructure, lack of opportunity, unemployment, and poverty have deepened feelings of alienation. Distrust of the security forces, political elites, and the state is pervasive in these parts of the country.

From 2014 to 2017, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) and Management Systems International implemented the Lebanon Community Resilience Initiative (LCRI). LCRI explored how to design, implement, and monitor approaches and activities in the nascent field of countering violent extremism (CVE), working through roughly 270 small civil society grants executed over a three-year period. Programming followed the Action Research Model typical of OTI projects, an approach based on learning while implementing. LCRI worked in areas of the country most affected by the Syrian crisis to strengthen the resilience of Lebanese communities to violent extremism (VE) while alleviating some of the pressure created by drivers of conflict. Specifically, it was designed to mitigate sectarian and host community-refugee tensions and the risk of radicalization and recruitment by VEOs. It was built around two program objectives (POs): "Mitigate Rising Sectarian and Host Community-Refugee Tensions" (PO1) and "Counter the Influence of Violent Extremist Groups" (PO2). Each of these POs contained three separate sub-objectives (SOs):

PO1: Mitigate rising sectarian tensions and host community-refugee tensions.

- SO1: Promote peaceful alternatives to violence.
- SO2: Reduce the marginalization and isolation of community groups.
- SO3: Strengthen moderate actors.

PO2: Counter the influence of VEOs.

- SO4: Strengthen youth empowerment and civic participation.
- SO5: Increase moderate space and strengthen moderate actors.
- SO6: Counter extremist messaging.

PO1 received the most emphasis at program outset, but, a year into LCRI, the focus shifted to PO2. Both SOs 4 and 5 received heavy investment. However, LCRI understood from its inception that the two POs were closely linked, particularly since sectarian tensions and VE can feed into and exacerbate each other. Consequently, it was understood that an activity categorized as falling under one PO could in fact have an effect on the other.

This case study explores the insights and lessons gained under LCRI. While the case study notes areas in which programming fell short, the majority of lessons reflect on the program's accomplishments, which look all the more remarkable when we consider: a) the intricacies of the Lebanese political environment in general, the complexity of its VE landscape in particular, and the massive challenges associated with trying to program against it; and b) how few CVE programs can point to credible evidence that they had a substantive positive impact. For a program that had limited resources and a short life-span, LCRI can claim accomplishments worthy of CVE practitioner study. It is hoped that others tasked with CVE programming can benefit from those lessons.

Lessons and insights are presented in eight separate sections. Some relate primarily to programming and design, while others focus more on effective implementation and management. Several sections discuss themes that have both programmatic and operational dimensions. Some of the most pertinent insights are discussed briefly in this Executive Summary. The full report need not be read sequentially from start to finish; rather readers can use the table of contents to search for those topics of most immediate relevance to their concerns.

## THE MERITS OF “TANGIBLES”

An effective tool for gaining and solidifying trust in communities is the provision of community goods or small-scale infrastructure projects, known in LCRI as “tangibles”. LCRI’s target communities were among those that felt abandoned by the state and the political class; promises to make improvements were often made and seldom kept. This deepening perception of marginalization made it difficult to solidify trust between the community and those hoping to work with it to mitigate conflict and VE. LCRI found that small-scale tangibles were an effective tool for entry into resistant and suspicious communities. Through quick-impact, high-visibility activities, communities were able to see the value of the work being done by the grantee. Tangibles strengthened grantee standing in and relationship with the community and gave them the ability to expand their efforts and draw more community members into softer CVE programming.

A key element in successfully providing tangibles in LCRI was ensuring that community members participated in needs assessment and in deciding which tangible project should be undertaken. By obtaining the input of the community, LCRI grantees demonstrated that the community’s sense of its own needs was paramount, while also strengthening the community’s ownership of the resulting improvement. These community projects were not an end in themselves; they helped strengthen relationships within the community, between participants and the community, and between the grantee and the community. The process was important for building resilience and a platform from which future programming could draw in more members of the community and realize greater CVE gains.

Youth found working on tangibles particularly attractive because of the visibility of both the improvements and their role in actualizing them. Successful provision of a tangible increased the status of participating youth in the community and improved their sense of efficacy and self-esteem, in part through the community recognition they received for their efforts. Tangibles became a vehicle to draw youth together within their own community and sometimes between antagonistic ones. The initial positive effects helped draw other youth into future activities and enhance the community’s confidence in local grantees. Impact was further enhanced through media outreach and public events, which included grantee branding, community events, festivals, and opening ceremonies to commemorate an activity’s completion. Target communities were accustomed to negative media portrayal and resented prejudicial labeling. Redirecting media as a tool to reshape the image of a community and the image it had of itself was powerful in amplifying the impact of an activity.

## LESSONS ON YOUTH PROGRAMMING

As is typical of CVE programming, youth were an important target group for LCRI. In LCRI’s troubled, conflict-affected areas, many youth dropped out of school early, engaged in drug use and petty crime, and held out little hope for the future. Many were seen in their communities as irresponsible troublemakers rather than forces for positive change. Social exclusion, perception of marginalization, idleness, boredom, isolation, and a lack of social mobility fed youth vulnerability to VEO recruitment.

Grantees often struggled to determine which youth were most at-risk of VE. This is a common problem in CVE programming where resources are slight and the potentially affected population large. There is no set formula for determining who is the most at-risk, especially since this often depends on the context of the individual community. Examining the kinds of youth targeted by VEOs, recruitment channels, and mechanisms used by VEOs to gain youth and community support can prove helpful in determining guidelines for recruiting truly at-risk youth for programming. Some grantees were able to pinpoint particular street locations or institutions within target towns or neighborhoods and solicit the engagement of youth in close proximity to those sites. Sometimes the youth most interested in participating in the initial community development or youth-oriented activities were not the most vulnerable; however, their sense of purpose and enthusiasm often proved infectious and enabled the grantee to draw in additional participants in later programs. Adults were often not keen on their children participating when they were unsure of the grantee or the value of the work, but the tangibles discussed above were important in winning over parental support. Grantee provision of safe spaces for activities, often outside the community, also proved important both to parental approval and youth participation. Youth were often grateful for activities held in settings that were not only secure but also provided an escape from the emotional burden of their grim everyday reality.

The LCRI experience recommends that explicit conversations about the recruitment process be held with grantees so that they understand how to determine vulnerability and what the expectations are for recruitment. Grantees who reached out to parents and community leaders early on had far more success in attracting youth to their activities. Once the activities were successfully completed, it was easier to draw in additional youth and to reach those who had initially been more skeptical or uninterested.

Successfully engaging youth in activities that cross sectarian divides, particularly when violence has occurred, can be difficult. LCRI found that it was often necessary to engage youth within their own community and sect first, to develop their capacity to engage with “the other,” and then bring the two sets of youth together. The preparatory work was critical to the success of the cross-sect activities. The initial activities gave youth the confidence they needed to be open in engaging youth from a rival community. LCRI also learned that care needs to be taken in grouping together youth of very different economic and educational backgrounds. Sometimes, this caused the less well-off youth to withdraw and reinforced their sense of isolation; sometimes it worked very well and each group had its perspective broadened. Elements critical to success appeared to be: 1) the capacity of the grantee, and 2) embedding opportunities to build up the capacity and voices of the less advantaged and ensure “equal time” in the program’s design.

While engaging youth in producing tangibles was both popular and successful, community improvement projects generally could not address the emotional or psychosocial drivers that contributed to youth vulnerability to VE. It is important to provide youth the opportunity for self-expression as an avenue for addressing these drivers; this is an area where the arts proved especially helpful. Photography, film, story-telling, dance, singing, and drama all served as activities to help youth escape from the negative feelings fostered by violence and marginalization while giving them a vehicle through which to “tell their stories”, release their frustration and anger through creative means, draw attention to their needs, and help the community understand the difficulties they faced and hopes they had. These activities had therapeutic benefits for participating Lebanese youth, while also attracting youth because of how rare opportunities for self-expression were in the target communities. Collaborative art activities, like theater and the production of documentaries, were effective in bringing together youth from different communities, as they realized how truly similar they were and then gave voice to those sentiments through their performances.

## LESSONS ON GRANTEES

In environments where CVE programming is necessary, the potential for negative consequences is considerable. As a result, selection of the face of programming, the grantee, is critical to achieving the program’s objectives. Some grantees had the capability but lacked the leverage to get into a suspicious community. Sometimes LCRI helped community groups to form so that they would have a knowledgeable and acceptable local partner with which to work. Capacity levels occasionally affected the extent to which a grantee could manage the CVE focus of the program. Most did not have a CVE mandate and they generally lacked an understanding of VE, a problem that sometimes surfaced in participant targeting. Substantial support and training, as well as oversight, from the Implementing Partner (IP) or donor is required for grantees expected to play a new and more complex role.

Creating new community groups to implement grants was often an effective method of accomplishing CVE goals by engaging members of the community and empowering moderate actors, despite the risks. Small in-kind grants helped minimize the perils associated with these new community groups, but simultaneously offered the incentive of future grants if the group implemented its first grant effectively. If a group was truly successful after implementing a number of grants, helping them officially register as an NGO helped cement their status as a moderate leader in the community, providing a trustworthy mechanism for community problem solving where few existed before. When the risks associated with forming a new community group outweigh the benefits, programmers may need to rely on a proven entity based in a different community, as long as it has a clear ability to engage key actors within the targeted neighborhood or town.

## MAGNIFYING PROGRAM IMPACT AND ENSURING LONGER-TERM RESULTS

The action research model used by LCRI is composed of many small, quick-impact grants meant to provide programmers with an opportunity to adjust the strategy throughout the life of the program as the context changes and new lessons are learned. The potential downside of this kind of programming is that even accumulated small grants may not produce a community resilient enough to withstand powerful “shocks”. These “shocks” can send communities backwards, unraveling at least some of the progress made towards CVE goals. One way to counteract this downside is through deliberate and thoughtful layering and sequencing of grants; another is through using one set of grant participants to reel in additional participants in an ever-widening circle. If programmers are deft enough to spot opportunities and conscious of the effects their grants and the processes by which they work are producing, they can layer or sequence grants so that they build on early successes and create a multiplier effect. The technique of first engaging youth within a community in one activity and then taking those youth, now more confident in their abilities, and combining them with youth from a rival community in the following activity to successfully bridge sectarian divides is an example of appropriate sequencing. The mingling of parents at their child’s performance or commemoration of an event is an example of a potential “reeling in” opportunity. While it can be difficult to capitalize on these opportunities because the IP cannot necessarily predict what successes a grant will have, it is important to plan grants in a way that makes this kind of sequencing, layering, and “reeling in” possible. As a result, communities may become more resilient to the pull of escalating tensions created by “shocks” and may recover faster after a “shock” has occurred.

## OPERATIONAL LESSONS

All program-related staff and grantees need an adequate understanding of VE dynamics and drivers, VE analytics, and CVE programming, as this is a new domain and experienced staff and grantees may be hard to identify. Significant training and follow-on refresher training should be provided and simple program guides applicable to the country setting developed.

Programmers should assume that others will try to claim credit for the work of grantees and participants. This happened repeatedly in LCRI's work. Municipal leaders, political elites, and others tried to claim credit, especially for tangibles. LCRI was attentive to this issue and ensured that grantee branding, media outreach, training for grantees in the use of social media, and public celebrations were extensive to ensure that credit went where credit was due. Nearly every grant had some kind of public relations component that was a critical part of the activity. OTI itself did not seek credit for USAID but preferred that the grantee, as a moderate actor in the community, obtained the praise that would favorably position it as a moderate resource in the community.

## LESSONS ON STRATEGY

When developing a strategy prior to implementing a program that learns by doing in a domain where not much is known, a delicate balance must be struck between a program that can quickly adapt to changes in context and lessons learned and a strategy founded on a strong analytic foundation. The dangers of going too far in either direction are either a strategy that is far too lean (in LCRI's case reduced to broad and abstract theories of change) and therefore likely to be misinterpreted and poorly implemented or a strategy that is so well developed that it takes on a life of its own, regardless of reality or learning, and cannot adapt to a changing context or increased understanding. This is especially true in CVE environments, where it is difficult to form an ironclad strategy because of the fluid and unstable context, as well as the variation in drivers and dynamics across target localities.

Investing in adequate research in order to understand VE drivers and their interactions and helping staff understand the implications of that research for programming is critical. Key elements of that research might include: VE dynamics and drivers; at-risk populations and areas; main processes and venues through which individuals and communities are drawn to VE views or recruited into VE activity; essential VE-related dynamics (for instance, those that relate to recruitment, strategic communications, VEO operations, and radicalization processes); and significant protective factors and resiliencies. Programming will not of course be able to address all of these factors, but only once the phenomenon is sufficiently understood can programmers identify which aspects of a problem can be tackled and which will likely be beyond its scope. Relevant in-depth analysis can also nurture a better grasp of what the strategy is and is not doing to address the VE problem.

## THE RESILIENCE AND SOCIAL COHESION (R&C) PROGRAMMING QUANDARY

R&C programming attempts to prevent the spread of VE by promoting higher levels of community resilience and social cohesion so communities can cope effectively with the destabilizing forces associated with VE activity and recruitment. Community resilience can be defined as the ability of a community and its members to deal with both internal and external sources of daily adversity and larger shocks without becoming vulnerable to the predatory narratives of VEOs. Social cohesion is the ability and desire of individuals or groups of a society, community, or set of communities to cooperate with each other to enhance overall well-being. Social cohesion itself can be a major source of community resilience.

Perhaps the most powerful case for R&C programming is that it is grounded in a realistic understanding of what CVE programming can achieve in many VE environments. It recognizes that many of the most salient drivers of VE consist of intractable, systemic problems and complex dynamics that operate at the national and even transnational levels that lie beyond the ability of most stakeholders to affect. Consequently, it focuses on how communities can best be sheltered, at least partially, from these forces and on what can be done to mitigate some of those drivers where the likelihood of meaningful impact is greater: at the community level. R&C programming recognizes that, while it provides partial remedies to the VE threats, it can reduce both the stressors in target communities and the number and/or influence of VE actors in those communities. At the same time, it can help ensure that target communities do not add fuel to the VE or conflict fire when negative externalities occur; those communities may instead, be able to stay out of the problem or serve as a force for peace. The strengthening of more moderate actors and their influence in those communities may also have long term effects that can, where enough coverage is acquired, begin to shift political dynamics in a more positive direction.

The case for such an approach lies partly in the intractable nature of several of the macro-level forces that sustain VE. In the case of Lebanon, the state is weak, lacks capacity with regard to policy-making and implementation, and is captured by societal interests. For

all practical purposes, it is largely absent from many of the regions and towns that are most susceptible to VE. An attempt to confront head-on the higher-level drivers of VE would likely prove futile and could be destabilizing and counter-productive.

At the same time, programmers must recognize that building resilience and social cohesion in some number of communities may not make a major dent in the structural causes of VE. Questions to consider include: When is R&C programming the most practical and effective option to respond to pressing VE threats, particularly through quick-impact activities? Might core structural drivers become more powerful over time if not addressed directly by some entity or can R&C programming have some impact on them? Are others addressing these structural drivers? And if unaddressed drivers do indeed become harder to counter over time, is R&C programming buying the country time to heal itself or making some portion of the population less reactive to such drivers?

In the context of a broken political system, one could argue that the greater the level of community resilience and social cohesion, the more the country can circumvent dysfunctionality. In this scenario, the coping mechanisms provided by R&C can help individuals and communities alike to by-pass formal institutions and mechanisms of governance and develop their own survival strategies. However, in the long run, they might do so at the cost of allowing citizens to disengage from trying to reform their malfunctioning state. As citizens progressively give up on the state and formal politics, demands for accountability from public officials may decrease markedly. Before making strategic programming decisions, however, this line of reasoning should be contrasted with the argument that cohesion has the ability to enhance community strength and community resolve to put pressure on decision-makers to address governance-related problems that fuel VE. It can also make them more resistant to the ethno-sectarian appeals of politicians, appeals which raise the risks of conflict. There are no “right” answers to the many questions raised here, but R&C programming can be enriched by seriously considering them.

## LESSONS ON MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Adequate M&E is especially important when using an action research model to achieve CVE goals, since without M&E it would just be the action model. Unfortunately, it is common for M&E staff to be somewhat isolated from program conceptualization and divorced from an in-depth understanding of a program’s strategy. M&E staff should be included in the design and implementation of a program so they better understand the strategy being deployed when designing an M&E approach and can contribute to the iterative process of adjusting that strategy as learning progresses.

It is common in development assistance programs related to conflict, stabilization, and governance to under-staff the M&E role and to treat it as more of a formal accountability function than an interactive learning one meant to support adaptation. LCRI started out with one M&E officer and eventually moved to three M&E staff. Still as grants accumulated, the M&E staff found it difficult to keep up. In the case of programs like LCRI, where the period of an activity is very short and multiple grants are being managed and issued, it can be difficult to manage M&E-program design/implementation coordination. New grants are always in design while implementation proceeds on existing grants; it can be challenging for M&E staff to stay caught up and make their voices heard. At the same time, LCRI did have an important review mechanism in its periodic rolling assessments and strategy reviews, which provided platforms for staff to consider changes in the context and incorporate programming lessons.

## CONCLUSION

Remarkably, through some of the approaches summarized above and others found throughout this case study, LCRI was able to gain access to at-risk communities where other donors were not active – often because those donors were unable to find effective ways of entering them. It was no small achievement for a USG-funded implementer to establish a presence in, and credibility with, some of the difficult neighborhoods and towns in Tripoli and the Beqaa – let alone to build bridges and defuse the sectarian tensions across those towns and neighborhoods. Being able to operate in such communities and support effective grantees within them may look routine by May 2017, but it was a daunting task a short three years earlier.

Several other components of LCRI’s approach might serve as inspiration for CVE programmers elsewhere. Among them, some of the following stood out: the importance of thinking systematically about how to sequence and layer CVE activities so as to maximize their impact; recognizing the centrality of parents to the success of interventions directed at at-risk youth, including females; the criticality of addressing the psycho-social needs of youth (in particular their quest for empowerment, self-esteem, and public recognition, as well as their desire for self-expression and for a sense that their frustrations and hopes were being heard and validated by the community); the importance of trying to broaden the frame of reference of at-risk youth by creating experiences for them outside of their immediate community; the merits of activities that deliberately seek to alter negative perceptions of “the other” through cross-community youth engagement; and the critical contributions that social media and relevant training can make to CVE goals, whether in terms of expanding the public visibility of grantees and magnifying the impact of their activities or with regard to shifting negative perceptions of the other in general and of certain at-risk communities in particular.



# INTRODUCTION

This case study shares insights from the Lebanon Community Resilience Initiative (LCRI), a USAID/Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) program in operation from September 2014 to November 2017, on how to effectively design, implement, and monitor countering violent extremism (CVE) programming. These insights draw on the knowledge gained by the LCRI field team while implementing over 270 small grants. Both programming and operations recommendations are based on the significant achievements as well as the deficits of LCRI. They examine what to do, what not to do, and what to do differently in addition to identifying common challenges and potential solutions to those challenges in CVE programming.

We hope insights garnered from LCRI will be of use to those in the Agency tasked with CVE programming, whether they work for OTI, a Washington-based Bureau, or a Mission. The lessons below should also be helpful to USAID grantees, implementers, and those charged with overseeing their efforts. Only those lessons that show potential for use in other environments are included in this case study and most are applicable to any organization engaged in CVE (although a few are more relevant to OTI than to other entities, and vice versa). Similarly, while this case study pays particular attention to CVE programming that provides small-grants to civic organizations as a means of accomplishing its goals, many of the lessons it underscores apply to other approaches as well. This document assumes practitioners will value forewarning of a possible challenge or trade-off in programming more than the actual solution LCRI implemented or the side of the trade-off on which LCRI erred. It is useful to keep in mind that just because an approach produced useful results in Lebanon, there is no guarantee that it will do so in a different environment.

Lessons and insights are presented under eight separate sections. Some relate primarily to programming and design, while others focus more on effective implementation and management. Several sections discuss themes that have both programmatic and operational dimensions. Before findings are presented under each of these sections, the approach used by this study to investigate LCRI lessons is described briefly below.

**Section I** highlights the instrumental role that “tangibles” (grant-funded community improvement projects) can play in facilitating successful CVE programming. Drawing on LCRI’s experience, it discusses the forms these tangibles may take and how and why they can facilitate successful CVE programming. Section I also explains why relevant activities must be designed and implemented carefully while integrating appropriate safeguards.

**Section II** concentrates on lessons that relate to CVE-oriented youth programming. LCRI devoted considerable attention and resources to youth and its experience sheds light on the types of activities, approaches, and foci that may be effective in reducing vulnerability to VE activity for youth interventions.

**Section III** reflects on lessons and trade-offs that relate to the proper selection of grantees and partners, while also identifying some core principles that should guide engagement with and oversight of those grantees and partners.

**Section IV** zeroes in on methods of magnifying the impact of CVE interventions and ensuring that they generate longer-term results in the context of LCRI’s experience and OTI’s distinctive programming approach (i.e., its action research model).

**Section V** highlights other key operational lessons from LCRI’s experience (in addition to those already discussed in the previous sections).

**Sections VI and VII** are devoted to “big picture CVE programming questions” and to the difficult choices and predicaments that practitioners often confront in this area. In both instances, the focus is on what LCRI, broader characteristics of OTI programming, and Lebanon’s own experience reveal about those issues. **Section VI** concentrates on strategy-related lessons. It discusses the proper role of strategy in program design and implementation, recognizing that different units within USAID may weigh the merits and drawbacks of “strategy-heavy programming” differently. It points to the distinguishing characteristics of a strong CVE strategy and outlines a general framework for assessing VE environments prior to the onset of programming. **Section VII** engages in an even broader reflection on the merits of, but also the predicaments associated with, programming that works to strengthen community resilience and social cohesion in order to reduce vulnerability to VE. Finally, **Section VIII** summarizes lessons that relate to monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL).

In addition, a brief introduction to OTI's model of programming and some background on LCRI are offered to provide context for the observations made in this guide. Two additional resources are provided in the annex to further illuminate the findings and method of this report. **Annex 1** is a brief case study examining the factors contributing to a particularly successful approach to CVE programming implemented by grantee Basmat Amal in Tripoli. This case study is included to illustrate more completely the kinds of work done by grantees under LCRI and also to highlight the combination of CVE programming approaches used to create demonstrable changes through youth engagement. In **Annex 2** the interview guide used to collect a portion of the data for this report is provided.

## METHODOLOGY

The core team consisted of a principal investigator, lead analyst, and primary author (Dr. Guilain Denoeux); a Washington-based analyst and contributing author (Dr. Lynn Carter); a Beirut-based contributing analyst and investigator (Dr. Bassel Salloukh); and the LCRI's M&E officer (Mohammed Rouada), who was the main point of contact for all analysts, especially during fieldwork, and who supervised supplemental data collection.<sup>1</sup>

The approach entailed four steps. The first, beginning in April 2017, involved a thorough desk review of project documents (e.g., activities summaries, work plans, assessments, and evaluations), a portion of which were related to priority objectives and locations and coded using MaxQDA software. Background research also included an analysis of VE-related dynamics and broader political developments in Lebanon in the past five years. During the second phase (May 17-May 30), the principal investigator travelled to Lebanon to conduct an initial round of field interviews. He was joined by the Beirut-based contributing analyst and both benefited from the insights and logistical support provided by LCRI's M&E officer. They conducted interviews with OTI and LCRI staff, as well as with grantees and community leaders in Tripoli, the Beqaa and Northern Lebanon. During this second phase, preparations were also made for ARK, a Beirut-based consultancy, to conduct key informant interviews (KIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) with three categories of respondents: beneficiaries (individuals who took part in LCRI activities); individuals with a close personal relationship to beneficiaries (mostly parents, but in some instances siblings or friends); and members of the community who had been exposed to, or impacted by, an LCRI activity. During a meeting in Beirut on May 29, the principle investigator provided ARK with an interview guide (with questions for each category of respondents);<sup>2</sup> discussed lines of inquiry to follow during FGDs and KIs; and finalized a research plan for data collection. During the second half of June, ARK collected the data, which was submitted to the core research team on July 10. The fourth phase involved finalizing this study, which was completed in draft form in early August. Subsequent consultations with OTI and LCRI staff led to revisions and a final draft in early September. This case study, therefore, draws on a multiplicity of sources: the collective knowledge developed by the LCRI team; detailed project documentation review, analysis and coding; research into VE-related dynamics and developments in Lebanon; extensive field interviews with key stakeholders; and further data collection by a research firm.

## THE USAID/OTI PROGRAMMING MODEL

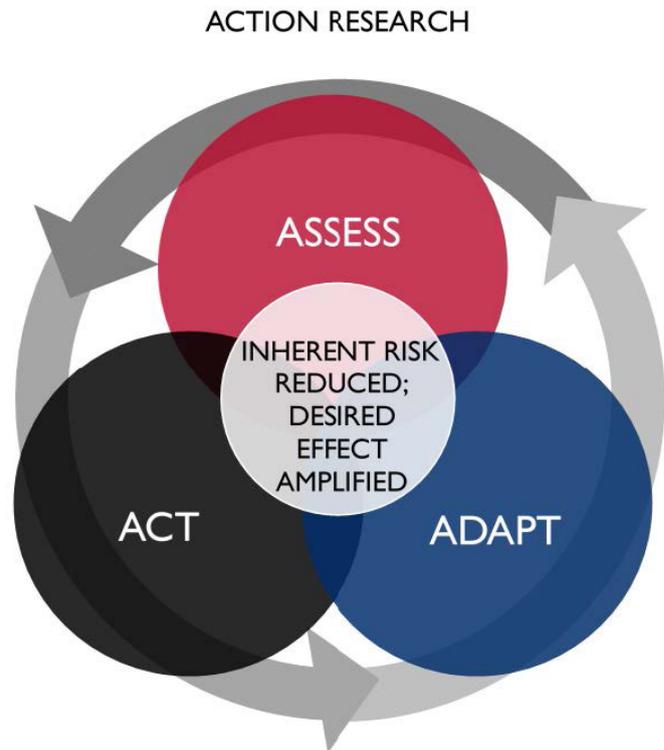
OTI specializes in short-term political programming in countries emerging from democratic transitions and instability; that programming is intended to lay the foundation for longer-term development programming. The operating environment for OTI programs is generally unpredictable, requiring OTI and its implementing partners (IPs) to design and adapt their program strategy and activities with limited data. OTI has developed an action research model to accommodate volatile and uncertain environments, enabling its programs to adapt quickly to both the changing context and learning for implementation.

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Bathon and Gary Glass of MSI supported the coding of qualitative data.  
<sup>2</sup> The English-language version of the interview guide can be found in Annex 2.

## ACTION RESEARCH MODEL

The OTI action research model encourages programs to learn by doing. Programs use small actions based on initial, imperfect information to test the environment and then assess what was learned through those actions to inform program strategy. This process is repeated again and again to find the most effective modus operandi in the given environment. Because OTI works through a series of small interventions or activities, each action presents a relatively small risk while offering significant opportunity to adapt approaches and design new activities based on observed outcomes. This approach can be simplified into three steps – Act, Assess, Adapt. Step one involves designing an initial strategy and implementing activities based on initial information and a preliminary theory of change. Through step two, programs evaluate the context, key drivers, and results of the initial activities. And finally, in step three, using the new information obtained on the implementing activities through step two, programs adjust their strategy, activities, and theory of change.



## USING GRANT ACTIVITIES

The crux of OTI's action research model relies on appropriate and effective grant activity design. OTI programs do not develop a long-term work plan with target numbers and benchmarks. Instead, programs utilize various activities to test partners, communities, and systems and enhance the understanding of the context. In short, OTI uses small grant activities to identify and address immediate needs to stabilize an environment, thereby fostering an atmosphere suitable for longer-term projects to address sustainability and development goals.

The makeup of an OTI program's grant activity portfolio is eclectic, with each activity informing the program's strategy and approach. Activities typically fall into one or more of the following categories:

- Catalyst – Laying the foundation for a particular effort to be implemented by other partners.
- Experiment – Testing of strategy assumptions and partner abilities to implement large initiatives.
- Model – Provide proof of concept activities to show other development actors what type of programming is possible in target areas.
- Entry – Designed to gain a better understanding of the operating environment and build relationships with local actors.
- Research – Produce actionable analysis that can inform programming efforts.
- Resolution – Address a discreet problem set.
- Follow-on – Building on previous grant activities to amplify impact or expand to new areas.

## DYNAMIC PROGRAM DESIGN

Due to the iterative programming approach, each of OTI's program strategies and objectives evolve over the life of the program. At the onset of a program, OTI defines general programmatic objectives and identifies initial target areas. As staff and leadership gain a better understanding of the operating environment, the programs will adjust and refine the strategy and objectives accordingly. This process is conducted in real-time and also formalized through quarterly rolling assessments where all staff meet to discuss the direction of a program. Through this process, OTI ensures that programs are taking advantage of emerging windows of opportunity and address the most relevant issues impacting an environment.

## LCRI: AN OVERVIEW

The Lebanon Community Resilience Initiative (LCRI) was a three-year USAID OTI program. It was launched in September 2014, ended in November 2017, and was implemented by Management Systems International (MSI).<sup>3</sup> The program’s goal was to strengthen resilience in Lebanese communities to help them cope with destabilizing factors related to the Syrian crisis. When LCRI began programming, nearly one million Syrian refugees had already fled to Lebanon. Two years later, Syrian refugees made up nearly a quarter of Lebanon’s population at 1.5 million (including refugees not registered with UN agencies).<sup>4</sup> LCRI must be viewed in that context and against the backdrop of USAID/OTI’s longstanding mission in Lebanon, which has sought to promote stability, peace and prosperity by relying on agile programming, taking advantage of emerging windows of opportunity, and catalyzing local initiatives.

LCRI aimed to increase resilience and stability in the areas of the country most affected by the Syrian crisis. Specifically, it was designed to mitigate the exacerbation of long-standing sectarian tensions (as well as strains between host communities and refugees) and increased radicalization and recruitment by violent extremist organizations (VEOs). It was built around two program objectives (POs): “Mitigate Rising Sectarian and Host Community-Refugee Tensions” (PO1) and “Counter the Influence of Violent Extremist Groups” (PO2). Each of these POs contained three separate sub-objectives (SOs):

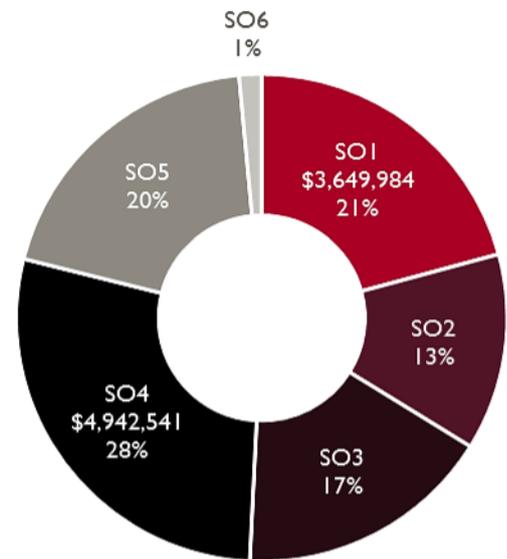
PO1: Mitigate rising sectarian tensions and host community-refugee tensions.

- SO1: Promote peaceful alternatives to violence.<sup>5</sup>
- SO2: Reduce the marginalization and isolation of community groups.<sup>6</sup>
- SO3: Strengthen moderate actors.<sup>7</sup>

PO2: Counter the influence of VEOs.

- SO4: Strengthen youth empowerment and civic participation.
- SO5: Increase moderate space and strengthen moderate actors.
- SO6: Counter extremist messaging.

While an approximately equal number of grants were awarded under POs 1 and 2, \$1.3 million more was spent on PO1. During the first two years, the vast majority of interventions were dedicated to SO4, under PO2, though from early 2016 onward more and more emphasis was placed on SO5. Relatively few activities were done under SO6. It was understood from the onset that the two POs were closely linked, particularly since sectarian tensions (addressed by PO1) and VE (addressed by PO2) feed into each other. Consequently, it was taken for granted that in many instances it might be difficult to determine whether a given activity might be more relevant to one or the other PO.



GRANT MONEY BY SUB-OBJECTIVE (TOTALING \$17,074,799)

LCRI activities were implemented primarily in the Beqaa Valley, Tripoli, and Northern Lebanon (the Akkar region). From July 2015 to October 2016 a pilot phase was conducted in Beirut, but due to resource constraints, LCRI decided not to continue programming beyond the end of the existing grants in April 2017. Programming revolved around grants to community-based organizations (CBOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), coalitions, and “proto-groups” (groups not yet formally constituted, but which LCRI sometimes helped coalesce and sometimes register as formal organizations). Awards were made to support quick-impact projects involving highly visible activities and resulting in tangible improvements in the community. The emphasis placed on rapid, noticeable, and concrete impact was intended to build program and partner credibility and gain the community’s trust so as to enable gains in central spheres of VE dynamics that are far less visible and relate to individual and community perceptions; outlooks; and feelings of agency, efficacy, empowerment and self-worth.

3. LCRI succeeded two other OTI projects in Lebanon: the Lebanon Civic Initiative (LCI), which ran from September 2007 through early 2010, and the Lebanon Civic Support Initiative (LCSI), which began in January 2010 and continued through January 2015. Both LCI and LCSI were implemented by Chemonics; focused on youth, particularly in marginalized and conflict-prone areas; and relied on small, in-kind grants and short-term technical assistance. For a few months (September 2014-January 2015), LCRI overlapped with the LCSI. In 2007, LCI began working with a wide range of CSOs, seeking to foster leadership and advocacy skills among youth, encourage their participation in the political process, and strengthen their ability to operate as agents of reform and peace. LCSI built on that work, expanded programming to northern Lebanon, and strove to increase space for constructive civic activism. It worked to mitigate tensions by supporting grassroots initiatives and inter-communal dialogue and by creating avenues for joint action between rival communities. By 2013, LCSI deepened its involvement in areas that were witnessing increased tensions due to the spillover effects of the Syrian conflict.

4. These figures mean that by 2016 Lebanon had absorbed more Syrian refugees per capita than any other country in the region, including Turkey and Jordan.

5. Activities under this SO aimed to increase positive interaction within and between communities and to provide non-violent methods and skills for resolving grievances and community-based problems.

6. This SO was meant to mitigate two related trends: a) increasing polarization of communities, along sectarian as well as host-refugee lines; and b) the tendency of some communities (e.g., Aarsal) to feel unfairly demonized and narrowly identified with VEOs, leading to their physical and mental separation from their surrounding environment and other communities. Activities under this SO sought to address this perceived and actual isolation and marginalization by pushing back against stereotyping of certain communities and creating opportunities for them to link up with others through positive, collaborative endeavors.

7. This SO was added in 2015, partly to reflect the overlap between PO1 and PO2. See discussion of SO5 below.

Grants and activities were typically included in “clusters,” with a given cluster containing a series of interventions implemented to advance one or more program SO(s) in a specific geographic area. Activities within a particular cluster were expected to support and magnify each other’s impact so as to create synergies and multiplier effects in a target community or a set of neighboring communities.

As the brief description above suggests, LCRI was designed as a stabilization initiative, not as an initiative intended to contribute to a broader political transition. In that regard, while it was able to tap into OTI’s previous experience and network of partners in Lebanon since 2007, it also broke with work conducted under LCI and LCSI, which was primarily focused on political transition.

This guide’s lessons are derived from an analysis of approaches and interventions carried out under SO4 and SO5 (though some of the work carried out under PO1 in Aarsal and the Beqaa was also examined since it did have potential CVE effects). SO4 tried to reduce vulnerability to VEO recruitment by providing opportunities for youth to constructively engage with each other and with their communities. SO4 activities often involved youth working to make tangible contributions to their communities through collaborative activities that cut across sectarian divides. SO5 sought to push back on VE presence in, or control of, public space; to help moderate actors reclaim that space; to protect other arenas from encroachment by VEOs; and to strengthen moderate actors so that more people would rally behind them and see the benefits of their empowerment.



## SECTION I: THE MERITS OF “TANGIBLES”

“Tangibles” refer to community goods or small-scale infrastructure and other community-improvement projects funded by OTI grants and carried out by local partners.<sup>8</sup> When trying to enter new communities and gain their trust, LCRI often relied heavily on providing such “tangibles,” which generally met a deeply felt need in communities that felt ignored, marginalized, and lacking in basic development assets. This approach is common in CVE, conflict mitigation and stabilization programs. Overall, it proved to be an effective approach. Examples of tangibles that LCRI funded include:

1. Rehabilitation of marketplaces. For instance, in Tripoli, an LCRI grantee, the Tebbaneh Youth Council (TYC), rehabilitated the clothing market, while another, the Coalition against Violence in Tripoli (CAVT), spearheaded the infrastructure upgrades that helped revitalize a major economic center in the Bab el-Tebbaneh (BeT) neighborhood.
2. Cleanup of streets and cemeteries, street lighting, refurbishment of schools, and repairs to public buildings, streets, clock towers, and iconic statues.
3. Rehabilitation of cultural sites.
4. Establishment of, or improvements to, facilities such as gyms, youth or community centers, and soccer fields.<sup>9</sup>
5. Beautification projects, such as setting up flower beds and improving parks.

### LESSON I

## TANGIBLES MAY BE REQUIRED TO GAIN ACCESS TO TARGETED COMMUNITIES AND EARN THEIR TRUST.

Tangibles may be the key to successful entry into a new community, especially in impoverished and long-neglected areas, which are often the most important to reach from a CVE perspective and the most difficult for donors to establish a foothold in. Those communities generally have profound needs, which, if ignored by CVE programmers on the grounds that they do not fit with the program's purpose, programmers will reinforce among community members the idea that no one cares about them or values their needs. Tangibles, then, matter for two key reasons: 1) because they communicate that the donor, the IP, and/or grantee are listening to the community<sup>10</sup>; and 2) because the communities can see immediately the value of the activities. For that reason, tangibles tend to be an effective way of bringing the broader community into programming, not just vulnerable youth, who often are implementing the work.

These observations should be placed in a broader context. There often exists at the grassroots level considerable and justified skepticism (and often outright cynicism) towards projects nominally intended to benefit the community, whether they originate with government institutions, CSOs, or donors. Too often those actors made promises on which they failed to deliver or with anticipated benefits that never materialized. Given that legacy, it can be extremely difficult for a donor, IP, or new project to demonstrate that it is different. And it is in that regard that quick-impact, high-visibility activities valued by the community can be instrumental in establishing trust. It is revealing that, in a number of locations targeted by LCRI, community residents initially proved unwilling or reluctant to participate in the activities proposed by grantees; in some instances, parents actively discouraged their children from taking part. However, after that grantee demonstrated the legitimacy of its intentions by delivering something of real benefit to the community and participants, enthusiasm for the project increased noticeably and participation expanded. A concrete example of the utility of building trust between the grantee and the community is provided in Annex I.

8. What this guide refers to as “physical space” for positive interaction (e.g., community or youth centers) can be approached as a “tangible” as well. The next section discusses the central contribution that the provision of such physical space can make to youth-focused CVE programming.

9. This particular type of deliverable can be viewed as falling under the separate but related category of “physical space” discussed below.

10. Many of LCRI's early interventions were un-branded and, therefore, were perceived as coming from the local grantee. In such cases, the community was likely unaware of the donor or IP funding the grantee, suggesting that credit for the activities accrued entirely to the grantee and participants in the activity.

For similar reasons, tangibles can help capture the attention of grantees, and build their grassroots credibility to draw other population subsets into program-related activities. The trust and goodwill that tangibles create may provide USAID, the IP, and the grantee alike with opportunities for deeper engagement with the community. For reasons discussed in the next section, community improvement or infrastructure projects often constitute a particularly attractive hook for youth.

## **LESSON 2**

**WHEN RELYING ON TANGIBLES, PROVIDE THE GRANTEE AND PARTICIPANTS WITH SIGNIFICANT AUTONOMY TO DETERMINE PRIORITIES AND SUPPORT THE COMMUNITY TANGIBLE BEGINNING WITH SELECTION, WORKING THROUGH DESIGN AND EXECUTION, AND ENDING WITH CELEBRATION.**

LCRI pursued this practice of granting significant autonomy as a matter of course. Both autonomy and a participatory process guaranteed ownership and responsibility, while ensuring that the community good selected for implementation met a felt community need and would garner praise and attention. This practice also ensured that the grantee, as a moderate community actor, saw its standing and leverage increase in the community, allowing it to expand efforts, become engaged in community decision-making and serve as a force for good.

## **LESSON 3**

**TANGIBLES CAN HELP ENHANCE SOCIAL COHESION AND REDUCE INDIVIDUAL ISOLATION, THUS LESSENING VULNERABILITY TO VE.**

The collaborative process through which an infrastructure or works project is completed can create opportunities for transcending, or at least mitigating, the sectarian and community-based rivalries that VEOs strive to tap into and exacerbate. The positive, collaborative experience those involved in that process have (for instance, youth from different sects, neighborhoods, or towns) may result in a broader beneficial impact on their respective communities.

In addition to building bridges across communities and helping overcome attendant sectarian divides, tangibles can have more indirect, less visible, but often equally significant positive effects on communities' cohesion and self-perception. That can prove critical to these communities' ability to resist VEO efforts, which prey on residents' sense of isolation and take advantage of the perceived stigma and demonization to which they feel subjected. For instance, FGDs and KIs in such different localities as Aarsal (a Sunni town in the Beqaa) and Jabal Mohsen (JM, an Alawite neighborhood in Tripoli) revealed how effective even simple beautification projects could be at changing attitudes in the community and creating a greater sense of unity within it. In JM, a former LCRI participant observed that once residents were able to see the improvements brought about by the project, they not only became more likely to stop littering and help keep streets clean, but also developed a greater sense of pride in, and attachment to, the neighborhood. Similarly, in Wadi Khaled, a village in the Akkar long viewed as one of the most marginalized areas in Lebanon, participants in the activities of an LCRI grantee, the Lebanese Association for Rural Development (LARD), were keen to showcase the improvements brought about by an LCRI-funded project to counter the stigmatization of their community. Through social media campaigns, participants in LCRI-funded activities strove to improve Wadi Khaled's image and reputation. This included the perception of Wadi Khaled residents by the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), which was in the habit of approaching Wadi Khaled and neighboring communities solely as security threats. Community improvement projects, and efforts to publicize their results, can have positive CVE implications, since the negative portrayal and feelings of resentment directed at one's own community reinforce grievances and act as a driver of VE.

## LESSON 4

# THE RECLAIMING OF COMMON SPACES FOR INTERACTION MAY BE A PARTICULARLY VALUABLE TANGIBLE IN CONTESTED ENVIRONMENTS.

Conflict-affected areas often end up with few common spaces in which residents can interact. Streets and marketplaces where people used to congregate freely may have suffered significant damage. These spaces may have degraded markedly due to persistent tensions and conflict between communities. Or they may have fallen under the influence of one of the protagonists in earlier fighting. In all instances, the lack of common spaces may further reduce already limited opportunities for recreational activity in socioeconomically depressed environments.

Reclaiming and reviving these common spaces can make a significant difference in the quality of residents' daily life by creating opportunities for positive social interaction and nurturing dynamics that enhance social cohesion and overall well-being. These spaces and their positive effects can help shelter at-risk populations from the appeal of VEOs that seek to exploit social friction and the grind of daily life in vulnerable neighborhoods. An example that illustrates this lesson follows:

An LCRI grantee rehabilitated the street linking Tebbaneh's vegetable market to Ahram Street and then held a series of public events in this space. During the renovations, youth volunteers resisted intimidation and demands to stop work from local militia leaders affiliated with Jabhat Al Nusra (JAN). The final public event inaugurating the renovated area drew around 1,200 people, demonstrating a high level of community support not only for the moderate actor overseeing the work, but also for reclaiming that space from the influence of the JAN-affiliated militia.

In a related development under the same grant, a group of youth from Jabal Mohsen affiliated with the Arab Democratic Party, which was involved in armed clashes with Tebbaneh, threw stones at attendees at the final event. The Lebanese Armed Forces quickly contained the incident. A group of volunteers from LCRI's partner organization, together with some Alawite participants in the event, then went to Jabal Mohsen and discussed the issue with local leaders, who convinced the youth to stop their aggressive acts. Subsequently, local leaders from Jabal Mohsen and Tebbaneh conducted a joint visit to the rehabilitated space to demonstrate to both communities that the violence had not tarnished the foundation of an amiable relationship. These leaders continued to meet with each other after grant closeout and attended public events that brought Sunnis and Alawites together in order to protect moderate space and moderate actors from intimidation and violence.

Recreational activities that offer opportunities for interaction among different communities or individuals from varied backgrounds can be viewed as another form of claiming or reclaiming common space. That is particularly true in conflict-affected areas, where such events are few and far between. A number of LCRI grantees organized fairs and festivals with activities designed for different age groups, including children. As discussed in Annex 1, Basmat Amal used these activities to bring together members of two antagonistic communities at one event to hear the stories of their youth. These events helped claim common space, helped boost the visibility and credibility of grantees (sometimes nascent youth groups), while also bridging the gap between both sectarian and generational divides.<sup>11</sup>

11. When organizing such public events with rival communities attending, it is important to ensure that moderate leaders from both communities will be present (and stay through the entire event) to help prevent arguments that could lead to violence.

## LESSON 5

### TANGIBLES CAN HELP ENSURE THAT ASSISTANCE IS BOTH PERCEIVED TO BE AND IS BALANCED AMONG RIVAL GROUPS OR COMMUNITIES.

In conflict-prone environments, inter- and intra-community rivalries can easily lead to the perception that one group is receiving more assistance from the donor and/or the IP than another. In such settings, it is particularly important to ensure both balance and the perception of balance in support provided to rival groups. If there are compelling reasons for working more with one particular group or community, the provision of tangibles to the other(s) can compensate for this imbalance by ensuring the continued flow of valued benefits to all.

## LESSON 6

### ENSURE THAT TANGIBLES ARE ACCOMPANIED BY ADEQUATE MEDIA OUTREACH AND PUBLIC EVENTS.

Grantee branding, including such elements as work uniforms and project signboards, is important from activity inception, through execution, and to commemoration.<sup>12</sup> LCRI grantees engaged in rigorous media outreach. To celebrate the rehabilitation of infrastructure and amplify the impact of the grant that made it possible, they scheduled community events, including festivals and fairs, invited the press, and occasionally conducted press tours. In some cases, these efforts garnered national media attention. Positive coverage sometimes triggered shifts in the public perceptions of conflict-affected areas; in the case of the Old Souks in Tripoli, long viewed as an extremist bastion, customers returned to the market. Also in Tripoli, a special Christmas event challenged the perception that the city did not welcome Christians.<sup>13</sup>

Opening ceremonies should always be scheduled to celebrate project completion and the event should be planned by the community to increase its sense of ownership over the activity. The ceremony should be approached as an opportunity to celebrate those who contributed to the improvement, not just the improvement itself. The design of these events should also consider ways to attract youth. Where youth played a critical role in the improvement, the public event should showcase them and their achievements. If the event is entirely dominated by adults, it can undermine the positive effects of these activities on youth empowerment. In addition, LCRI grantees were able to occasionally use security considerations at these events to advance CVE goals. For instance, in areas with a known presence of or influence by VEOs, the LAF played a key role in helping maintain security. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that collaboration between the LAF and those organizing the event may have improved relations between security agencies and the community by giving them a sense of common purpose and achievement.

#### HOW PUBLIC EVENTS COMPLEMENTED TANGIBLES IN AN AKKAR COMMUNITY

The purpose of this grant was to empower youth while imbuing them with civic participation skills and improving their relationship with adults in the community through community projects. At every point prior to implementing the community projects, including youth recruitment, the community was included to ensure that the three selected projects met a high priority community need and gave the community ownership over the activities. The projects were so successful that the head of the municipality committed to undertake additional rehabilitation work to complement youth efforts.

Two public events that celebrated youth efforts were particularly noteworthy. The first was a children’s event attended by 2,000 community members. This event solidified positive community support of the activities and drew a clear link between youth and the positive improvements to the community. Following completion of the community projects, the youth also organized a closing public event attended by their families, local leaders, community members, and representatives of different political factions. The youth representative made a speech highlighting the role that the youth played, the aspirations they had for their community, and the hope that youth could be engaged in additional community development work. The event allowed youth to reflect on their successes and receive praise from the community. It was also a way to help break the perception that youth could not contribute to positive change in the community.

<sup>12.</sup> In a few cases grantees ignored LCRI’s request not to use USAID branding and marked their materials with the USAID logo, perhaps in the hope that it would strengthen their credibility through their connection with a major donor.  
<sup>13.</sup> Some events, particularly in Tripoli, drew in hundreds of participants; one even reached an estimated 1,300 participants.

**LESSON 7**

## WHEN RELYING ON TANGIBLES, PROGRAMMING SHOULD BE SENSITIVE TO THE LIMITATIONS INHERENT IN SUCH EFFORTS.

First and foremost, it is critical to remember that tangibles are only a means to a CVE end. They should neither obscure nor replace the CVE objectives to which they are expected to contribute. Nor should they distract the grantee (let alone the IP or USAID) from pursuing those objectives. From a CVE perspective, what matters is not so much the physical product (e.g., the facility that was built or rehabilitated), but the collaborative process through which it came about – and specifically the expected transformation of outlooks and attitudes that the process is supposed to have fostered. As the 2016 LCRI Program Performance Review (PPR) put it, “the process is the project.” Therefore, a danger inherent in relying on the provision of tangibles includes: the grantee becoming too focused on the deliverable itself, and insufficiently attuned to the VE mitigation benefits that the process behind the deliverable is supposed to produce. Building time, space and funding into the grant to require attention to CVE aspects may help mitigate that risk.

In addition, while provision of a tangible benefit may generate tangential CVE-related gains, the intervention itself may not serve as the most robust form of CVE programming. In order to prevent the overuse and misinterpretation of the value of providing tangibles in CVE programming, it is important to ensure that the provision of a tangible does not become synonymous with CVE. For example, providing street lights for public stairways where VEOs were known to operate in Tripoli, or on the perimeter of a town that experienced a terrorist attack as in Qaa may well generate CVE benefits in the form of reclaiming public space for citizen use and improving public safety, but without the inclusion and strengthening of moderate actors in the planning, execution and maintenance of that recovered space – and ensuring that those actors receive credit for the improvement – some CVE benefits that could accrue from the investment might be lost.

By their very nature, tangibles do not provide much knowledge about VE dynamics and those populations that are most at risk. Consequently, if a central purpose of an initial grant is to try to learn more about the community in which one is working, something “concrete” may not achieve that objective.

Politicians, political parties, and/or the municipal council may seek to manipulate grantees and youth in ways that are at best inconsistent with, and possibly antithetical to, CVE objectives. They may come to view participating youth and the project that the assistance makes possible merely as a means of improving public space and may even seek to take credit for it. It is important to be alert to that risk and plan accordingly.

Programming should aim to maximize the involvement of local workers, merchants and IPs in procuring the material and labor needed for infrastructure and other community-improvement projects. LCRI wisely used that approach, which generated valuable community goodwill toward grantees, the program, and OTI. Failure to rely on local sources for procuring goods and labor may generate resentment in the target community.

One limitation of infrastructure projects (which was underscored during the fieldwork by members of al-Hadatha, an LCRI grantee in Akkar) is that they are not as effective as other forms of programming at addressing some of the key emotional and psycho-sociological drivers of VE. Specifically, they generally are not a means through which anger, frustration, and the desire for voice and personal self-expression can be communicated in a powerful way. As discussed later in this guide, performance art activities such as theater and music are usually more suited to such ends.

11. When organizing such public events with rival communities attending, it is important to ensure that moderate leaders from both communities will be present (and stay through the entire event) to help prevent arguments that could lead to violence.



## SECTION II: LESSONS ON YOUTH PROGRAMMING

Activities directed at youth form an important part of overall CVE programming. Such activities generally seek to address youth-specific vulnerabilities (e.g., social exclusion and feelings of marginalization, idleness and boredom, a sense of isolation, a lack of social mobility, or the propensity to engage in petty crime), prevent recruitment of youth by VEOs, and establish positive social networks and trajectories for young people. Furthermore, youth are more malleable than adults and, as a result, are often more open to “trying new things” and making connections. For a donor or IP seeking to gain access to a new community, they may represent a particularly logical target group. LCRI’s significant experience with youth programming points to several lessons.

### LESSON I

## PROVIDING SEPARATE PHYSICAL SPACE FOR POSITIVE INTERACTION AMONG AT-RISK YOUTH MAY BE IMPORTANT TO CVE GAINS, BUT MUST BE APPROACHED CAREFULLY.

LCRI quickly discovered that in some settings safety concerns could limit youth participation and therefore off-site venues could be vital to engaging youth from different communities. A recurrent theme during interviews with grantees was the importance of LCRI covering the cost to make the establishment of a neutral physical space or facility possible, a space where at-risk youth felt comfortable gathering, discussing the problems they face, expressing their views and aspirations, playing sports, performing a play, learning photography, receiving vocational training, or taking part in workshops that focused on conflict resolution techniques, communication or interpersonal skills. Often, the space was outside their troubled neighborhood. It might be, for instance, a youth center, a playground, a gym, a soccer field, or a modest sports complex that integrated several of the above entities (e.g., a gym, playground and soccer field, as the research team observed in Ras Baalbeck).

For such a facility to contribute to CVE objectives, however, it must satisfy several core requirements. First and foremost, it must be a place where at-risk youth feel at ease and offer activities that respond to their expressed needs or demands. As importantly, parents need to feel comfortable sending their sons and/or daughters to it. They must view it as both a safe space and a better alternative than where their children might normally spend their time. Parents should also see the site as a place that will not be instrumentalized by particular political or personal interests and a venue where children can be exposed to positive experiences and influences. Youth themselves need to view that facility as “safe” – not just in the security sense of the term, but as a safe haven from the political interests and narrow perspectives that often prevail in their immediate community. The research team was struck by the eagerness of youth (at-risk or not) to escape the perceived hegemony, even at the local level, of political parties and the particular sectarian, family or tribal interests these parties represent and seek to advance. To break away from this domination, even if partially and temporarily, youth need to be able to “find refuge” in a physical space that they can make their own.

USAID should invest in the establishment of a permanent facility only if there is evidence that youth themselves are likely to contribute time and effort towards it and its maintenance over time. That cannot be determined beforehand, since it will depend, in large part, on whether youth end up feeling that they have a stake in the space, its success and permanence. But indicators that this sense of ownership will materialize should be identified and considered by USAID and the implementer when making the initial decision to proceed with the establishment of such a facility.<sup>14</sup> If and when the facility is in place, the association behind it should be provided with targeted training on how to maintain it beyond the life of the program (for instance, by exploring options for renting it for events; through proper engagement with the municipal authorities; and by being able to identify and tap other potential sources of financing).

The importance of even a modest shared space that meets the criteria above can be critical to the achievement of CVE objectives. During interviews, grantees repeatedly emphasized several inter-related reasons for the centrality of physical space:

12. For example, evidence of heavy and expanding use of the center, user efforts to plan additional activities, user discussion of what they might need to do to sustain the effort, pursuit of alternate or additional funding sources or in-kind support, proposed formation of a joint committee for management, etc.

1. It provides both implementer and grantee with an access point to the community in general and to at-risk youth in particular.
2. It constitutes a critical venue through which new outlooks and personal relationships that cut across sectarian and other divides can be actualized; through which it becomes much easier logistically to organize the specific interventions that are designed to encourage those attitudes and relationships; and through which at-risk youth can develop a sense of ownership in something they come to view as their own.
3. It may come to operate as the central place where at-risk youth are presented with an escape both from the boredom and idleness that otherwise characterize their lives (and are known to encourage negative behavior, including criminality, drug use and VE), and from the unappealing, ghettoized environment in which they normally live. Without such a space, it becomes much harder for youth to engage in positive activities that stimulate their minds, release their energy, and/or allow them to express their individuality and humanity.
4. It may become a lasting platform for recitals, tournaments, festivals, and plays, thereby increasing the likelihood that such events will endure after the end of programming, while continuing to “reel” parents and others into programming through those activities.<sup>15</sup> During interviews, grantees repeatedly stated that interventions should not be planned without providing the infrastructure that make them possible, maximize their impact, and allow them to be sustained over time. They consistently went back to the sustainability argument to justify investing in physical space. They underscored that, because such facilities outlast the end of donor funding, they provide the vital mechanisms through which the personal relationships, new behavior, outlooks and ways of relating to the other that developed through the program can be maintained beyond it. Conversely, they insisted that without such facilities, the durability of the changes brought about by programming become far less certain. Drawing on an actual experience, a grantee observed that if a facility makes it possible for a band to form and rehearse, that band might be invited to play for even modest compensation at particular events (which reinforces the feeling of accomplishment and sense of efficacy that programming may have sought to encourage, as was true of LCRI). Another grantee noted that a play which had been performed in a school was so successful that the actors were invited to other schools and offered a modest fee for performing.
5. Finally, vital contributions to CVE objectives can be made by maintaining physical space and defending it against those that seek to appropriate it or view it as a threat (as would be the case for VEOs and those whose interests are best served by individuals thinking along narrow sectarian and/or political lines). Preserving the quality and integrity of the space can help cement the new personal relationships and attitudes that have been created through it. Meanwhile, efforts to protect that space may constitute a rare instance of what is being presented as CVE actually being CVE: not just preventing VE, or mitigating it, but directly countering it by enabling at-risk populations to push back against radical elements that seek to encroach on the “safe space” that at-risk youth have carved for themselves.

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14. When organizing such public events with rival communities attending, it is important to ensure that moderate leaders from both communities will be present (and stay through the entire event) to help prevent arguments that could lead to violence.

15. On “reeling in” effects, please refer to Section IV.

## LESSON 2

### INCLUDE PROGRAMMING SPECIFICALLY DESIGNED TO ADDRESS THE PSYCHO-SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF VE.

LCRI demonstrated a keen understanding of the central role that psycho-social forces play in pushing or pulling at-risk populations into VE activity and it found creative and effective ways of confronting them. It is all too easy for programs to neglect the deep emotional dynamics that sustain VE and to concentrate instead on more “concrete” causes that revolve around governance gaps or socioeconomic deprivation. LCRI, instead, deliberately endeavored to tackle critical “micro-level” drivers among at-risk youth, including the lack of self-esteem, quest for personal significance, and perception of powerlessness and neglect by both the community and those with influence. The project made those drivers, which are notoriously challenging to combat, a priority and found creative ways of tackling them.

The two lessons that follow specifically illustrate approaches LCRI deftly employed to wrestle with some of the known emotional forces that sustain VE. One valuable activity is providing venues for at-risk youth to “tell their stories.” These venues may range from informal and relatively intimate small-group discussions to more public events, such as plays, taking place in the kind of physical space discussed earlier. Irrespective of how this particular objective is pursued, it is critical to recognize the centrality of the need for self-expression among vulnerable youth – how emotionally important it is for them to feel that they can openly discuss their fears, frustrations, and hopes and believe that they are being heard and acknowledged.

FGDs and KIs confirmed this finding. Participants in LCRI programming noted that, in addition to greater self-confidence and improved self-esteem, one of the most substantive benefits was the outlet for self-expression gained through their participation in grant activities. In Tripoli, for instance, youth participating in grants implemented by Basmat Amal (a CSO headquartered in the predominantly Sunni, marginalized neighborhood of Mankoubin) noted that LCRI-funded activities increased their readiness and capacity to share their thoughts, apprehensions, and aspirations with community members, not just with parents and other relatives.<sup>16</sup>

## LESSON 3

### TANGIBLES CAN PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN BRINGING YOUTH INTO PROJECT ACTIVITIES, AND THEN IN BOOSTING THEIR PSYCHO-SOCIAL RESILIENCE TO VE NARRATIVES.

Community improvement projects can be particularly attractive to youth because they can see the immediate benefits provided to their communities through these kinds of activities. Endeavors that produce concrete, visible results in the community are more likely to draw in youth than “softer programming,” such as training activities or the organization of social events. Tangibles, therefore, can help at-risk youth come together, first in their own community, and then sometimes across community lines. It may become easier to involve youth in “softer” activities once they have been pulled into programming through tangibles-related interventions.

Tangibles also provide a way of improving vulnerable youth’s sense of efficacy and self-esteem. When the community visibly benefits from the successful provision of a tangible, youth who participated in the project may come to be perceived as effective and their status in the community may increase accordingly. At that point, significant CVE benefits may materialize:

1. Participating youth’s sense of empowerment, pride, and self-respect may increase. Their vulnerability to VE ideas, behavior, and/or recruitment may decrease, since VEOs benefit from feelings of low self-esteem, marginalization, and inability to effect positive, meaningful change.
2. When participating youth and the grantee see their community standing improve, they may begin to inspire other youth and broader community segments to engage in similar civic activities that nurture feelings of efficacy and belonging and provide alternatives to negative behavior. Demonstration effects may create a virtuous cycle in which higher self-confidence and sense of agency lead to greater readiness to engage in positive, collaborative behavior, even across community lines.
3. The community’s confidence in CSOs and the propensity of its members, especially youth, to engage in civic engagement may increase as well, further diminishing the ability of VEOs to prey on youth’s sense of disenfranchisement and alienation.

<sup>16</sup>. See the case study in Annex 1 for a more in-depth analysis.

## LESSON 4

### MAKE USE OF THE ARTS TO ATTRACT YOUTH, MAINTAIN THEIR ENGAGEMENT, AND ADDRESS SOME KEY PSYCHO-SOCIAL DRIVERS OF VE.

Across programming sites, LCRI heavily employed the arts – photography, film, story-telling, dance, singing, and drama – to attract youth, sustain their engagement across different types of activities, develop their connection to their own communities, help break down barriers between rival communities, and address emotional drivers of VE. During the fieldwork, grantees repeatedly drew on their experience, underscoring the critical contribution art-related interventions can make to CVE objectives.

Activities that engaged vulnerable youth in some form of art proved to be particularly attractive precisely because opportunities for meaningful self-expression were so limited in target communities. The arts provided therapeutic benefits to youth who felt trapped by their environment and who were looking for a chance to retreat, at least for a while, from their grim, everyday reality. Theater and other forms of performance art seemed to have a particularly powerful cathartic effect. They made it possible for at-risk youth to release their frustration and anger through creative (as opposed to destructive) means and to satisfy their desire to voice and gain public acknowledgment of their hardships and aspirations. As a Tripoli PDO commented to the research team, “they [at-risk youth who feel disenfranchised and alienated from their environment] really want to talk ... they really want to get these things out of them.”

Art also proved successful in drawing public attention to the hopes and needs of youth and in enhancing the broader community's understanding of their situation and perspectives. It provided ways for youth to develop meaningful relationships with each other, which sometimes facilitated collaborative endeavors to address issues prevalent in the community. Finally, art not only made it easier for youth to come together within their own, respective communities, but in some instances, it also created opportunities for youth from rival ones to take part in joint projects and discover (typically to their great surprise) how much they really had in common when it came to their hopes, needs, and sources of frustration. Basmat Amal was particularly successful at harnessing art's productive capacity, as discussed in more detail in Annex I.

## LESSON 5

### BROADEN THE FRAME OF REFERENCE OF AT-RISK YOUTH THROUGH TARGETED EXPERIENCES OUTSIDE THEIR IMMEDIATE COMMUNITY.

A recurrent theme during interviews with grantees was the importance of creating regular opportunities for youth to escape, even briefly, the stifling insularity of their immediate community by attending festivals, recitals, or summer camps in other localities. Grantees who made such opportunities possible repeatedly emphasized how instrumental these activities were in broadening participants' frame of reference and enabling them to reassess the way they think about other communities, their own, the sectarian other, the world more generally, and options available to them that do not involve VE behavior, criminality, or drugs. Several grantees stated that they did not initially expect these often relatively brief experiences to trigger the marked positive differences they observed in the participants' outlook.

Where youth literally feel trapped by their environment and where that sense of physical as well as psychological confinement plays an important role in fueling the frustration and alienation that sustains VE, programming must strive to create periodic opportunities for them to escape. It is important to show that the impoverished enclave in which they live is not the world and that the other is not the enemy – let alone a heretic – but often someone with whom they share similar perceptions and aspirations.

**LESSON 6**

## SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS SHOULD BE DONE CAREFULLY, WITH A NECESSARY FOCUS ON INCLUDING AT-RISK YOUTH AND CAREFUL CONSIDERATION OF WHAT IMPLICATIONS AN ACTIVITY'S MAKE-UP WILL HAVE ON ACHIEVING INTENDED RESULTS. OVERSIGHT OF GRANTEE TARGETING SHOULD BE PARTICULARLY CLOSE.

While it is possible to identify geographic areas, institutions and broad categories of populations that seem particularly vulnerable to VE, we do not yet know how to isolate or pinpoint those individuals who are most at risk even in hot-spot zones or institutions. The small number of youth that can be engaged on training and civic engagement programs makes selection of participants particularly important. Typically CVE programmers would like to engage those individuals who are most at-risk. Youth who self-select to participate, however, may not be the most vulnerable. Those who are particularly at risk may have little interest in participating in grantee activities, especially at the initiation of such activities in a community. They may be wary, suspicious or simply not drawn to the activity. Unsurprisingly then, LCRI grantees had trouble at times identifying the most vulnerable youth and filling slots for activities accordingly. Sometimes, selected participants were older than the desired age group or differed from the preferred profile. Grantees sometimes recruited youth from prominent families because selecting them gave community sanction to the activity and granted access to community leaders for problem solving, particularly for initial activities. While these latter advantages are valuable assets and while it can easily be the case that privileged youth are as much at risk as less privileged youth, the trade-offs in including participants who may not be particularly at-risk should be thought through and compromises made with full knowledge.<sup>17</sup>

In determining risk levels, programmers can attempt to unpack the particular targets of VEO appeals and recruitment, where local radicalized VE actors are originating (e.g., particular institutions, neighborhoods or even streets and cafes), and their pathways to VE. Social network analysis of local VE actors, to the extent that networks can be determined, can also be used to pinpoint the more vulnerable, who would rest in close contiguity to those in the network. Particular attention should be paid to family, clan, peer groups and gender in doing this analysis. One grantee in Middle Dreib Akkar relied on local informants who gave information on where VE recruitment took place, such as on specific streets. The grantee then was able through family, neighbor or friendship connections to directly solicit the participation of individuals who frequented those locations.

In some communities that are significantly radicalized, perhaps due to major unaddressed grievances; the relationships they have with other population groups, the political system and/or the government; or the worldviews they share, it may be fair to conclude that VE risk is relatively evenly spread. Then, criteria other than individual risk might also come into play, including selecting those who are most enthusiastic about participating and most able to stand as role models, those who are connected to or are influencers in the community, and those who have broad social networks. In other words, paying attention to targeting participants who can serve as force multipliers in the community can be a good approach, not just in radicalized communities, but also in those where the risk is less. So perhaps the targeting frame can be broadened and participants can be selected not just for their risk level, but for their ability to have a positive impact on the community and affect the ideas and behaviors of other youth and adults.

One factor that should be considered in targeting is the degree of social diversity and its implications within a given group of participants. In Mina (the city adjoining Tripoli that acts as a harbor for the entire region), youth taking part in a training workshop had quite varied educational levels and came from different socio-economic backgrounds, religious sects, and age brackets (16-35 according to the selection criteria).<sup>18</sup> Predictably, the group was difficult to manage: some of its members were engaged in discussion and interacted well with the trainer, while others remained passive. Part of the problem could be linked to the decision to lump the better off and more educated together with the poorer and less educated in a single group, which resulted in the latter feeling ill at ease and somewhat inadequate. That, in turn reinforced their sense of marginalization, instead of diminishing it. As a result, the training unfortunately had some counter-productive effects.

In contrast, another program run by the Muslim Scouts appears to have successfully combined idle, out-of-school youth viewed generally as "trouble-makers" with youth from conservative religious backgrounds. The Scouts ensured that decision-making was distributed evenly across the two groups and that efforts to ensure equality of treatment and participation effectively motivated youth dubbed as "troublemakers" who rose to the challenge. Relations between the two groups improved, community projects were accomplished, and the stigma attached to the school drop-out group disappeared by the end of the program.

17. In the particular example given, the grantee should think through the possible negative community perception of an activity that benefits an already privileged group.

These examples suggest that there is no simple solution for determining how much diversity in participants' profiles a program can handle, but they also demonstrate that programmers should recognize the risks in advance and plan accordingly. Training content should be adjusted to reflect the capacity of participants, an adjustment that may be difficult to make if participants have significantly varied levels of education. Grantee capability clearly matters as well.

Helping overcome sectarian divisions by bringing together youth from different sects was an important and difficult program objective. LCRI developed a successful approach to this challenge, having grantees first work with youth of the same sect before assembling youth of multiple sects into a single group and/or behind a shared effort. This sequencing proved critical. It provided the space and time needed to shift attitudes, improve youth skills, and allow groups within given sects to become more coherent and confident, often because they could already claim some concrete accomplishments. At that point, it typically became much easier for youth of different sects to interact with each other in a positive and constructive manner. This phased approach might be useful with respect to differences in socio-economic status or even gender; though a group that is significantly disadvantaged or less prepared for this kind of cooperative endeavor will typically require greater investment.

Because the individual profile of a grant's beneficiaries and the composition of groups through which activities are carried out are critical to achieving intended CVE objectives, it is crucial that the implementer have explicit conversations with grantees about which youth are being targeted. It is equally essential that there is proper oversight of grantees in this area. This topic will be discussed further in Section III, which is devoted to grantees.

### **CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF "THE OTHER" IN THE RIVAL TOWNS OF LABOUEH AND AARSAL**

One of the main challenges in executing certain LCRI grants was combating the negative perceptions youth had of each other. In one grant, 17-year-old Fatima Issa from Laboueh was initially afraid to participate with Aarsal youth in the activities due to preconceived ideas fueled by the political context and media portrayals of Aarsalis as Sunni VEO supporters. After meeting the youth from Aarsal, however, Fatima said she felt safe because she could identify with them, a sentiment expressed by many participants in many other grants. For the Aarsali youth, the event was an opportunity to "make new friends" and to "show others that Aarsalis are not terrorists but are just like other youth." In another grant, 19-year-old Laboueh youth participant Ali Mohamad Rabah said, "Many of my friends didn't want to come and join the workshop. They don't want to participate in something with people who are believed to be ISIS supporters, but I don't believe what people say. I want to meet my neighbor from Aarsal and I want to make friends with them. We all are Lebanese." praise from the community. It was also a way to help break the perception that youth could not contribute to positive change in the community.

18. As discussed in the next section, that diversity was due to an inability to attract sufficient youth from the neighborhoods originally targeted, which prompted the grantee to fill the empty slots with youth from better-off neighborhoods with which it was more familiar.

## LESSON 7

### ENGAGE YOUTH OF DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES WITH EACH OTHER TO REDUCE MISPERCEPTIONS AND STIGMA.

Through community projects, vocational training, the arts, and sports, LCRI made a systematic effort to bring together youth from rival communities, neighborhoods, and sects so as to diminish sectarian prejudice, fears, and tensions. Overall, the effects of relevant activities were very positive, with youth developing relationships across communities and sectarian boundaries. Sometimes, as noted previously, it was necessary to work separately with youth from each community and then combine them in a structured activity. Greater acceptance of different communities and the disappearance of an earlier inclination to vilify other sects undermined the stigmas, close-mindedness, and propensity for rejecting the other that VEOs take advantage of.

## LESSON 8

### USE YOUTH PARTICIPANTS TO RECRUIT MORE YOUTH AND EXPAND REACH INTO VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES.

The first batch of youth participants often played a critical role in bringing more youth into subsequent phases of programming, especially in areas affected by conflict and security concerns and where suspicion limited youth involvement in the initial activities. That was particularly true when the initial interventions were visible to the community and had a quick and positive impact. Early youth participants frequently became enthusiastic advocates for the program.

## LESSON 9

### DESIGN TRAINING TO REFLECT TARGET GROUP AGE AND EDUCATIONAL LEVEL AND MAKE IT ENTERTAINING BY USING MIXED MEDIA AND DRAMA.

Youth often found conflict mitigation trainings too advanced, “heavy,” somewhat abstract, and hard to relate to. This problem was likely linked, at least in part, to the low educational levels of many youth from marginalized, poor neighborhoods. While this indicates that such activities targeted the right profile of participants, some grantees suggested that in order to keep at-risk youth engaged, traditional training workshops should be replaced with documentary screenings or short films that relay messages in a more entertaining way and more directly connect the realities of conflict and violence to the daily lives of targeted youth. Grantees and youth participants also underscored the value of guest appearances by public figures, media experts, and well-known actors. Such appearances usually increased the interest and motivation of participants in both activities and training and drew more public attention to the activities.

**LESSON 10**

**EXPECT AND PLAN FOR INITIAL ADULT SKEPTICISM OF, AND SOMETIMES OPEN HOSTILITY TO, YOUTH COMMUNITY-BASED ACTIVITIES.**

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In the initial stages of programming, adult skepticism of youth community-based efforts was widespread. Sometimes, particularly with regard to activities that aimed at bridging sectarian divides among youth, parents discouraged their children from taking part in activities. LCRI tried to address this problem through early and systematic outreach to parents and community leaders, achieving significant success. However, it was often necessary to endure skepticism until youth completed the activity and demonstrated the value of both their efforts and the program itself. As the youth demonstrated their ability to accomplish things of value to the community, respect and support grew among the sceptics. More adults volunteered to assist and more youth expressed eagerness to take part in program activities. As discussed further in Section IV, youth proved to be an effective spearhead into the community

**LESSON 11**

**CONSIDER STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF SCHOOLS IN THE LIVES OF YOUTH.**

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LCRI had some success in strengthening school-youth as well as school-parent connections. Relevant grants improved teacher pedagogy and their ability to relate to youth, provided tutoring to students, connected talented teachers to challenging students, and encouraged schools to nurture and support youth civic engagement via summer camps and civic projects. During KIs and FGDs, school personnel and parents repeatedly commented on the positive effects these efforts had on student behavior, confidence, and on keeping them in school.



## SECTION III: LESSONS ON GRANTEES

When programming revolves around awards to CSOs, CBOs, and informal groups, the caliber of those grantees is critical to success. They must be capable, share an authentic commitment to program objectives, be willing to reach higher than the lowest-hanging fruit, and have access to and credibility with targeted populations. These criteria always matter in development assistance, but nowhere more so than in the complex and sensitive field of CVE programming, where capable partners are harder to identify, the potential for unintended consequences is greater, and any backlash may have far-reaching consequences for the USG and perhaps even more so for partners. As a result, careful vetting of grantees or the decision to create a new entity to carry out a particular activity takes on even greater importance. During interviews, senior staff at both OTI/Lebanon and the LCRI IP pointed to a clear causal relationship between, on the one hand, the strength of grantees and the degree and quality of both the scrutiny to which grantees were subjected and the support they were provided, and, on the other hand, program successes or shortcomings.

Readers unfamiliar with OTI's work should be aware that OTI often creates new community groups or works with informal ones that may never evolve into formal entities. That is usually the case in target communities where civil society is absent, or compromised, and where political actors hold substantial influence, but show little interest in the community's welfare. In such settings, OTI may help establish a community-based entity or assist a pre-existing informal group in developing their organizational structure and then rely on it to help realize the grant goals.<sup>19</sup> If performance is reasonably successful, one small in-kind grant may lead to others as the group establishes its reputation within the target community. Over time, if a given group jells, OTI may even help it move toward registration. This approach applied by LCRI in certain Tripoli neighborhoods, including Jabal Mohsen (JM) and Tebbaneh, proved effective in expanding civil society and providing mechanisms for community problem solving.

### LESSON I

## IN NON-COMPETITIVE SELECTION PROCESSES,<sup>20</sup> THE VETTING PROCESS FOR GRANTEES SHOULD BALANCE THE NEED FOR RIGOR WITH THE IMPERATIVE OF QUICK-RESPONSE.

Senior staff at both OTI/Lebanon and the IP underscored the importance of carefully vetting grantees. They noted that the grantees that went through particularly meticulous vetting were often those that made the greatest contributions to the program. It is instructive that the LCRI achieved some of its greatest accomplishments in the Northern Beqaa, where the selection process for partners was especially rigorous. This, however, was also a location where LCRI did not work with nascent partners to the same degree that it did in Tripoli.

Partners should be carefully vetted so as to minimize unintended consequences, precisely because so much hinges on the strength, credibility, and integrity of partners. USAID and the IP should agree on a standard vetting process and specify the necessary "background checks" grantees should be subjected to. While this process will not eliminate the risks inherent in grantee selection, it will contain them and will prove to be well worth the effort if it can prevent even one particularly negative experience. The IP should be responsible for conducting this process and it should be able to provide supporting evidence to ensure due diligence. It is important that the vetting process be standardized to prevent excessive discretion by IP staff in the choice of grantees.

At the same time, the vetting process should not be so cumbersome that it limits the program's ability to respond quickly to emerging challenges and windows of opportunity in at-risk communities. That would be self-defeating and undermine the very nature and core contributions of OTI programming. Experience around the world demonstrates that when the vetting process becomes too extensive, the IP often ends up losing face with the community, making it harder for it to identify reliable and willing partners and losing opportunities to make a difference. In short, programming must aim for vetting that is rigorous enough to minimize the risks and discretion discussed above, but not so burdensome that it undercuts the imperative of a fast response. This is a difficult balancing act that should be explicitly discussed between OTI and the IP.

<sup>19.</sup> This method is usually employed when there is only one or a few grants.

<sup>20.</sup> USAID's competitive grants processes generally have strict vetting requirements and are seldom quick response due to the requirements of competition.

## LESSON 2

### THREE KEY VARIABLES SHAPE A GRANTEE'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO PROGRAM OBJECTIVES: THE LEAD PERSON(S) IN THE ORGANIZATION; THE EXTENT TO WHICH THAT ORGANIZATION IS EMBEDDED AND ENJOYS BROAD CREDIBILITY IN THE COMMUNITY; AND ITS ADDED CVE VALUE.

The importance of the first criteria is generally well understood in the assistance community: an organization is only as effective and committed as its key staff, especially its leadership. Consequently, an implementer's priority should be to evaluate the organization's senior management, both indirectly through informal reference checks and directly through face-to-face interactions before a contractual commitment to an organization is made. The IP should be reassured that the leadership is committed to "sticking with" the organization.<sup>21</sup> The second criteria – the degree to which an organization is embedded and respected in the community targeted by programming – was underscored repeatedly by LCRI and OTI staff, as well as by the grantees themselves. As for the "added CVE value" of an organization, it can take many forms: can the organization provide the IP with entry points to at-risk populations that are otherwise difficult to reach? Can it be the driving force behind interventions that will have a synergic effect (across partners and/or at-risk groups)? More generally, which assets does a grantee have to offer when it comes to core program goals that others do not?

When embedded and respected groups cannot be identified in a given community, the IP may be able to rely on a proven entity based in a different community, as long as it has a clear ability to engage key actors within the targeted neighborhood or town. If that option does not exist, it may be necessary to facilitate the formation of a community-based entity so that the IP can rely on it to implement one or more grants. As discussed elsewhere, LCRI (and its predecessors, the LCI and the LCSJ) did so on numerous occasions in areas subject to a dearth of civil-society organizations. In general, that approach was effective, particularly in light of constraints imposed by the environment.

## LESSON 3

### CONSIDER CAREFULLY THE RESPECTIVE MERITS, RISKS AND TRADE-OFFS ASSOCIATED WITH THE FOLLOWING THREE OPTIONS:

1. Engaging with longstanding partners that have proven themselves and have access to at-risk communities, but are not necessarily CVE-focused;
2. Relying on groups that may be less well-known and have not been tested by USAID, but whose work seems more directly relevant to CVE objectives; and
3. Creating new entities or working with informal groups that may or may not become formal entities and are relied upon only for the purpose of one or a couple of grants.

When LCRI programming began in October 2014, OTI had already been operating in Lebanon for seven years. They worked in tandem with the U.S. State Department's Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) and a broad range of civic organizations to address issues related to youth, the mitigation of sectarian conflict, women's empowerment, livelihood skills, vocational training, municipal capacity building, and CSO-municipalities bridge building.

Several of the CSOs OTI previously engaged stood out in terms of dedication, capacity, and close connections to communities that might be targeted by CVE programming. However, the profile of these organizations – their *raison d'être*, original mission, and prior expertise – was not CVE-centric. In these situations, any donor would naturally be tempted by the obvious advantages of relying on such organizations. Since they are entities that have influence in communities targeted by CVE programming, why not seek to harness their access, dedication, and know-how and refocus them in a CVE direction? There is a case to be made for such an approach, though

21. One of the chronic problems faced by civil society in Lebanon has been the propensity of capable and committed associational leaders to leave their original association after being recruited by INGOs or donor organizations.

its success will hinge very heavily around delivering the necessary guidance and training and putting in place the proper safeguards. But there are also very real dangers associated with refocusing, particularly when one considers the following five factors:

1. It is hard to change how organizations and the individuals that drive them approach their work and think of their core mission. “Refocusing” or “redirecting” an association in a more CVE-focused trajectory might be easier said than done.
2. There is a high risk that the CSO in question will simply take activities that are, at best, only tangentially related to CVE objectives and rebrand them as CVE activities.
3. The donor and the IP may not have the staff and/or other resources to provide the required guidance and training necessary to successfully redirect their activities.
4. Adding a new mandate to a CSO may unduly tax its abilities, leading it to perform poorly at both the new work and its existing activities. The organization may be weakened as a result of being pulled from its core mandate.
5. Prior engagement and “feeling comfortable” with an organization and its leadership can be a double-edged sword: it can save a lot of time and facilitate progress toward program objectives, but it may also breed complacency and translate into less direct pressure on the grantee to deliver. While longstanding personal relationships between USAID or IP staff and the grantee may create valuable mutual trust and social capital, it may also take the form of an excessive “coziness” that translates into lower performance.

This line of reasoning underscores the merits of options 2) and 3) above. When selecting partners from among existing entities on the ground, priority should be given to those that seem naturally suited to CVE work in light of their mission, how they approach their work, and their prior activities. The decisive factor in partner selection should not be the perceived overall capacities of a possible partner, but its potential to perform through a purely CVE lens. But the IP must be particularly diligent when conveying expectations to an untested partner. Furthermore, engagement should proceed carefully at first to give this new grantee an opportunity to prove itself (or to provide justification for why it does not deserve further investments). The same logic applies to entities created to implement a given grant.

## LESSON 4

### THE IP SHOULD ENSURE THAT INDIVIDUAL GRANTEEES UNDERSTAND THE PROGRAM’S OVERALL STRATEGY, THE LOGIC BEHIND IT, AND THEIR OWN CONTRIBUTIONS TO IT.

This guiding principle is not meant to suggest that the IP should try to turn grantees into CVE experts. Grantees should understand what CVE work is and is not, as well as what the goals of the program are and how to accomplish them. CVE programming may be undertaken with partners that do not truly comprehend what CVE work actually involves and what CVE activities should entail in the context of their own communities. Grantees may also seek to re-label activities that they feel comfortable doing (and, in some cases, that they do very effectively, but that do not truly constitute CVE work) as “CVE.” The IP should be in a position to reassure USAID that that is not taking place. To do so, it must be able to convey a clear understanding of what constitutes CVE work, as well as related expectations, to the grantee. To adequately communicate that knowledge and those expectations to the grantee, IP staff must themselves be properly trained in CVE approaches and tools (see Section V). It was clear from interviews with grantees<sup>22</sup> that not all of them understood that tangibles were only a means to an end, with the latter revolving around CVE-supportive transformations in attitudes and outlooks.<sup>23</sup>

The IP should clearly convey the logic behind the program and should create opportunities for grantees to “digest” the strategy in addition to making it possible for grantees to familiarize themselves with the nature of CVE work.<sup>24</sup> The burden of proof should be on the grantee to demonstrate to the implementer that it “gets” the CVE objective behind the activities for which it receives support. For one, such understanding will increase the odds that the grantee will continue to work toward CVE objectives after OTI activities have come to an end. Therefore, grantees must demonstrate at least a degree of strategic vision that aligns with CVE program objectives. That typically does not occur naturally and requires proper coaching or mentoring by the IP.

22. The April 2016 Program Performance Review (PPR) reached similar conclusions.

23. As the PPR notes, “Program staff within the main office in Beirut demonstrates a strong understanding of the theories of change. This changes and becomes more obscure when talking with local partners ... there is variation in the level of partner comprehension of strategy and TOC between regions ... In Tripoli, two or three of the five nascent groups conveyed a strong understanding of TOC. However, outside of the BeT and Jabal Mohsen red zone, in calmer Mina and within the Old City, partners had less comprehension of program objectives and they also reported less concern with instability or VE. Further north in Akkar, partners did not relate a strong understanding of either program objectives or TOC, and did not communicate a strategy beyond community development for the purpose of addressing the boundless needs of underdeveloped infrastructure or service delivery shortcomings” (pp. 21-22). The PPR contains numerous examples of partners describing their work as community development, with inadequate attention to CVE or tensions mitigation objectives.

This lesson may be challenging to implement in environments where CVE is so sensitive that the program must be publicly framed in a different manner to operate effectively; for example, the program might proclaim that it is promoting social cohesion or empowering youth. While this may be necessary to engage partners and communities and to keep partners and IP staff safe, it may be suboptimal from the standpoint of ensuring all activities align with what is at heart a CVE purpose.

## LESSON 5

### ENSURE GRANTEES HAVE ROBUST OUTREACH STRATEGIES AT START UP, DURING ACTIVITIES, AND AFTER COMPLETION.

In several instances, LCRI witnessed local government officials, political parties, and civil society organizations that were not involved with the program claim credit for its successes when, in fact, the community activity was carried out by an OTI partner. Attempts to usurp community gratitude occurred on multiple occasions, particularly on projects involving visible community improvements, such as the refurbishment of a public square and gate leading to a Tripoli market. Unfortunately, this phenomenon is rather common and has been noticed in other development and CVE settings as well.<sup>24</sup> It is all the more problematic since the central purpose of many of these activities is to ensure that a moderate organization, such as a local NGO or youth group, receives credit so that that actor can improve its standing within the community and, as a result, become better able to help a community resist VEO influence. Therefore, ensuring that the grantee itself and their participants, not individual staff members or other parties, receives credit is vital to achieving CVE goals in these environments.

It is possible to mitigate against the risk discussed above in two related ways: 1) by ensuring adequate outreach and advertising during and after the intervention, so that the community understands which groups or individuals deserve the credit for any tangibles provided or public events held; and 2) by continuing to monitor after completing the activity in order to determine whether other parties are claiming credit. In the absence of quality outreach and advertising, residents may not recall who did the work or what exactly was accomplished. In BeT, where LCRI was trying to strengthen a nascent youth coalition, those interviewed by the research team had very scant recall of the relevant activities, for similar reasons. As a result, branding should be carefully considered. Banners, logos, posters, brochures, and media events can all contribute. Outreach and advertising efforts are particularly important for nascent groups and efforts led by youth, whose contributions and potential to advance the well-being of the community can be all too easily dismissed in many settings.

Even with good outreach, other actors may still try to claim credit. In that case, additional efforts may be necessary to ensure that credit goes to the grantees and the community members who made the project possible. But the IP should be aware that this could create some pushback from powerful actors and plan accordingly.

Finally, LCRI experienced at least one problem of grantees trying to undercut each other on shared work, with one trying to claim all the credit. Programmers need to ensure that cooperative work leads to cooperative branding. It is also worth noting that after two years of building trust with grantees and communities, LCRI and USAID were able to begin branding their contribution to the work they sponsored. Given the subject of programming, this is a remarkable achievement.

<sup>24.</sup> One Program Development Officer noted to the research team that LCRI could have been more explicit and effective in this area.

<sup>25.</sup> For instance, it occurred during USG stabilization efforts in Sadr City, Baghdad. Similarly, in Taliban-dominated areas of Afghanistan, the Taliban were sometimes given credit for allowing aid projects to go forward, rather than blocking them.

## LESSON 6

### KEEP CHECKING THAT GRANTEES ARE ENGAGING THE RIGHT POPULATIONS.

This imperative already has been discussed, but it is worth emphasizing again in the context of this section's broader focus on grantees. One example of this occurred in Mina, where LCRI initially engaged with a credible association (the Mina Youth Committee) with a track record of accomplishments in the community. It seemed to make sense: the association had proven itself, it enjoyed grassroots credibility, and it operated in an area that contained "tough neighborhoods" and at-risk populations. Upon closer scrutiny, however, it turned out that the LCRI-supported activities in which the association was engaged did not draw all participants from the most vulnerable populations in Mina, including individuals from relatively better-off neighborhoods in programming. The cause was noted earlier<sup>26</sup>, but the broader lesson seems clear: never take for granted that even a credible, proven partner that operates in a generally at-risk area is actually engaging the specific populations CVE programming should be targeting. A related lesson is that both the IP and the grantee need to be very clear through regular and explicit discussions about how vulnerable the populations being engaged through programming should be.

## LESSON 7

### RELY ON A BROAD RANGE OF PARTNERS AND ENCOURAGE COLLABORATION AND NETWORKING AMONG THEM.

A multiplicity of grantees allows for the hedging of USAID's and an IP's bets, particularly in an area as sensitive as CVE where the "above all, do no harm" principle should inform all decisions. It diminishes the many risks involved in excessive dependency on a handful of groups, one or more of whom could become a liability. It also makes it easier for the IP to test each partner's commitment and capacities, as well as the extent to which its agenda and mode of operation align with the program's strategic priorities. By relying on many partners, especially initially, one spreads out the risk and allows for incrementally greater reliance on those partners that, over time, prove themselves to be more valuable assets for the program.

Choosing multiple partners with that objective in mind may provide different points of access to the targeted community(ies) and will make it difficult to accuse the program of favoring a handful of players at the expense of others. Furthermore, relying on many grantees and making it clear to them that they are expected to cooperate with each other toward program objectives may create checks and balances as well positive working relationships. Networking and coordination among them should be encouraged, especially when grantees work with similar populations or in neighboring communities.<sup>27</sup> LCRI successfully fostered grantee collaboration, particularly when it would help meet the objective of bringing rival communities together or when it would ensure more seamless support for a given target population.<sup>28</sup> Multiplicity of grantees allows for several small investments to amount to more than their sum, again provided that coalitions and networking among partners is built into and nurtured by the strategy.

One objection to relying on many partners is the danger of diminishing overall impact by spreading precious USAID resources too thinly. However, that risk pales in comparison to the dire consequences – in terms of impact on USG credibility and program objectives – of having invested too heavily in a single partner that becomes a serious liability. Furthermore, the spreading-too-thinly problem has to be balanced against the benefits of involving a broad range of grantees, each of whom has its own distinct contributions to make, and its own access to particular segments of the targeted population.<sup>29</sup>

26. The Mina Youth Committee was unable to attract enough youth from the target neighborhoods so they filled the remaining vacancies with youth from neighborhoods it was more familiar with.

27. Basmat Anfal was able to work with the TYC and several other organizations to increase participation of at-risk youth in its first program. This program's success strengthened all the organizations that participated, making their future endeavors more likely to succeed. See Annex 1 for more information.

28. In the case of one activity involving youth from eight villages in the Beqaa, a youth steering committee was set up with youth representatives from each village. The committee was tasked with interacting with and guiding the grantee.

29. To make that benefit materialize, grantees must be selected, in part, with an eye to complementarity.

## **LESSON 8**

### TRUST, BUT VERIFY. VERIFY, BUT TRUST.

Even after partners have been vetted and selected, regular program reviews should pay special attention to whether grantees are truly delivering on their obligations and are meeting the IP's initial expectations ("Trust, but verify"). At the same time, one of the greatest strengths of LCRI was that it very deliberately sought to empower grantees and did not go into communities imposing its own projects and approaches ("Verify, but trust"). Instead, the program allowed grantees to suggest what paths they thought would best resonate with and benefit their respective communities in pursuit of key program objectives. During the fieldwork, grantees consistently expressed the value of that approach and underscored how it enabled them to design projects that responded to the concrete, expressed needs of their respective communities. They also explicitly contrasted that mode of operation with that of other donors who, they pointed out, would usually come into their communities with predetermined ideas about the projects they wanted to carry out irrespective of whether these projects actually matched their communities' own priorities.

## **LESSON 9**

### KEEP REASSESSING PARTNER CHOICES, AS WELL AS TARGETED AREAS AND POPULATIONS, AND FORMALIZE THE PROCESS THAT WILL ENSURE THAT THIS REVIEW TAKES PLACE AT REGULAR INTERVALS.

To avoid the ever-present dangers of programming inertia and "feeling comfortable" with certain grantees based on past relationships, it is essential that USAID and the IP ask themselves some basic questions at regular intervals. For LCRI this happened every six months; the periodicity should depend on the volatility of the environment. Two of the most important questions are:

1. Keeping in mind the program objectives, target population, overall environment, and the evolution of context since the initial selection of partners, does it still make sense to work with the current cast of grantees?
2. In light of a threat that may rapidly shift which locations are considered the most vulnerable, are we still targeting the right areas?

This necessarily introspective process will take place only if the procedure to ensure that it occurs regularly is in place. Before the onset of programming, USAID and the IP should also agree on the frequency of such reassessments, on whom will take part in the relevant discussions, and what information those discussions should focus on (M&E senior staff should have a seat at that table).



## SECTION IV: MAGNIFYING IMPACT AND ENSURING LONGER-TERM RESULTS

### LESSON I

#### THINK CAREFULLY ABOUT SEQUENCING, LAYERING, AND “REELING OPPORTUNITIES.”

One of the distinctive features of OTI programming is that it revolves around a multiplicity of small investments, each of which begins and ends over a short period of time. The goal is for each intervention to generate a quick impact so that the aggregate of interventions can help stabilize a fragile situation or at least prevent further deterioration. OTI's very nature and mission means that its horizons are not long-term ones.

There are clear advantages to OTI's incremental approach in the CVE domain, where it is all-too-easy to be mired in a large investment. When that happens, it may be difficult to reorient programming and cut one's losses. While this risk is ever-present in assistance work, it is particularly elevated in the CVE area where key drivers are often hard to address, vulnerable populations can be difficult to reach, approaches are uncertain, the potential for unintended consequences is high, and outcomes can be unintended. In such environments, “incrementalism” allows a donor to test uncertain terrain, find its way around the swamp, gauge what works and which approaches are less effective, and design or adjust future interventions accordingly. It provides the flexibility required in dynamic and fluid situations.

Small, incremental investments also allow the donor and implementer to take advantage of opportunities as they arise, and/or to terminate interventions when the context becomes too hostile. In the case of LCRI, for instance, the municipal elections of May 2016 elected some representatives to local councils who were more willing to engage partners that worked on reducing sectarian tensions within or between communities.

There are equally evident downsides to incrementalism. One is that even where short-term investments help hold the line, they may be unable to withstand a series of major shocks (e.g., in the case of Lebanon, consecutive suicide bombings, the assassination of a prominent sectarian-political figure, or the impact on internal political dynamics of a sudden and marked escalation in regional tensions). Such shocks may quickly reignite sectarian antagonisms, dissipate the goodwill established through programming, and provide opportunities for VEOs. Furthermore, in an environment that is more likely to deteriorate than to improve in any significant, lasting way, how many of the gains generated by small investments are likely to persist once the funding comes to an end? One might legitimately fear that, in such settings, incrementalism amounts to a series of interventions that cannot aggregate into the critical mass necessary to create impact resilient enough to withstand substantial shocks to the system.

There are ways of partially hedging against those risks. For example, as discussed earlier, the provision of well-targeted facilities may increase significantly the likelihood that gains achieved through program-related activities will endure. Similarly, potential disjointedness in programming and the critical mass challenge can be mitigated if programmers think early on and systematically throughout programming about how short-term, relatively modest interventions can be sequenced and layered so as to build on each other and pave the way to the desired CVE outcome. In many instances, there will be clear benefits to repeat activities with the same grantee or grantees, provided they have been adequately tested through prior experience.

The imperative of thinking strategically about sequencing is related to other lessons discussed in this document. For instance, establishing a soccer field with a small, adjacent building where youth can gather may create opportunities for them to cooperate toward community development objectives. If and when that happens, the initial “sports hook” will have generated developmental gains (one grantee referred to this approach as “sports for development”). In turn, the developmental projects may solidify relationships among youth and contribute to further behavioral and attitudinal changes that can be harnessed toward CVE objectives. For that to happen, the logic behind such an approach would ideally be articulated carefully beforehand and the series of incremental interventions would be designed and sequenced accordingly. However, that may not always be possible. For one, it is hard to determine in advance what the impact of the initial intervention will be, which opportunities it will create or what unexpected constraints it will reveal. Indeed, an understanding of that reality constitutes, in part, the empirically strong logic behind OTI's “learn as you do” approach. Still, one should look for interventions that build on the achievements of and opportunities created by previous ones. That may not initially involve a

detailed roadmap, but that is just as well since many development and CVE practitioners have learned the hard way that circumstances have a bad habit of shredding the best laid plans. In fact, the need for flexibility and adapting to changing conditions can work at cross-purposes with plans for layering to enlarge and secure impact.

LCRI demonstrated a keen understanding of the need for proper sequencing. For instance, as noted earlier, activities that aimed to link Sunni and Shia youth from different communities often were preceded by interventions that engaged youth from within each of these communities and sects. Before youth could cooperate across sectarian and community divides, they first had to be brought together within their own sect and community to improve their capacity for cross-sectarian and inter-community cooperative endeavors. The next phase of interventions was then designed to take into account the results of that initial engagement.

Planning also should actively seek opportunities to “reel in” parents through youth programming. Parents always should be a main focus of attention for two reasons: first, they must be convinced to allow their children to take part in interventions; second, the overall CVE impact will be greater if parents also form bonds with each other as they attend their children’s soccer tournament, watch their recital or play, attend a dinner or party following a youth event, or interact positively in some other way through the CVE programming that targets their sons and/or daughters. The underlying strategic approach might entail a progression through three steps:

1. Reach out to at-risk youth (primarily) and their parents (to make them comfortable with their children taking part in the interventions);
2. Once youth activities are under way, harness them to reel in parents and families; and
3. Through the involvement of parents and families, seek to maximize the impact on the broader community.

When designing both strategy and concrete interventions aimed at youth, it may be useful to keep in mind the significant potential benefits of working from youth out to family, and then to community.

One of the strengths of LCRI was that it deliberately aimed to bring parents and, through parents, the broader community into youth programming in a generally effective effort. That is no small achievement, since youth programming is often insufficiently sensitive to the multiplier or amplifier effects associated with such an approach. CVE programming that focuses exclusively on at-risk youth and ignores their families may fail to gain traction and miss opportunities for broader impact. In many instances, it may even backfire by engendering suspicions and hostilities.

In addition to parents, other youth can also be “reeled in” by former or current youth participants, as was noted earlier. Youth involved in the initial programming first must consolidate into a functional, capable entity. Then they must prove their ability to deliver visible community improvements or organize quality activities that appeal to a broad audience. At that point, the odds that other youth might be drawn into the original intervention or similar ones increase significantly. LCRI’s experience demonstrates that when youth-initiated and youth-led activities result in tangible benefits for the community, participating youth often gain public recognition and their standing in the community can be significantly enhanced. If and when that happens, these youth may become successful in drawing some of their peers into the program or related, follow-up projects. Interestingly, while the VE literature highlights the critical role that peer groups play in VE recruitment and radicalization processes, evidence from LCRI suggests that peer influences – especially through the completion of successful community projects – can also play a role in mitigating VE and promoting civic behavior.

Sequencing benefits and “reeling in” effects can also amplify the impacts of each other, creating virtuous cycles. Programming should look to create those opportunities. For instance, as noted above, the rehabilitation of a soccer field (as occurred in Fakehe, a mixed Sunni-Shia town) provided the initial hook through which youth engaged with each other and created their own space away from political and sectarian pressures. The bonds thereby established may become a basis for collaborating toward even modest development projects which may bring families closer together. The development projects, in turn, may produce tangible benefits to the broader community, potentially elevating the status of youth and giving them a greater sense of empowerment and self-worth. Meanwhile, parents may feel vindicated for having allowed their children to take part in the initial activity. This type of virtuous cycle may or may not occur, but when designing strategy and activities, practitioners should bear in mind the phased approach and reeling in logic it reflects.

**LESSON 2**

## HELPING NASCENT OR “PROTO-GROUPS” GET ORGANIZED AND SOMETIMES EVEN REGISTERED CAN MAKE A LASTING DIFFERENCE.

The donor-driven nature of much of what passes for “civil society” in many assistance-recipient countries, and the attendant “professional civil-society activist syndrome” have generated deserved concern. All too often, CSOs in transition countries are established first and foremost to access donor funding and lack an organic connection to the community or constituencies they claim to serve or represent. Instead, they react to and are driven by the priorities of donors. Being largely creations of donors, and kept alive by them, such CSOs often display artificial and unauthentic features.

This problem, which plagues civil society assistance, should not detract from the merits of USAID helping a “proto-group” get organized more formally as a CBO or CSO. That may be particularly true in the CVE sector, considering that in the most impoverished, vulnerable communities there may be no pre-existing entity with which USAID can engage. OTI’s emphasis on small, in-kind grants meant that formal registration was not a barrier to accessing at-risk communities via informal community groups. LCRI sometimes encouraged CVE-relevant “proto-groups” to coalesce, become registered, and receive basic training and equipment. It did so to provide the modicum of formal structure necessary to first initiate and then expand interventions in the at-risk areas it wanted to reach.

In Tripoli’s Jabal Mohsen (Alawite Shia) neighborhood, the leader of an association (Spirit of Youth) formed through that process underscored to the research team the long-term benefits of LCRI’s assistance. LCRI helped his association come together and, subsequently, secure registration from the authorities. It had provided vital support for obtaining the necessary facilities, training, and equipment. As a result, he insisted that, despite the end of OTI funding, a formal structure and, as importantly, the human resources and experience around it were in place to enable interventions and progress toward CVE objectives to continue in the future. In his view, the establishment of a formal entity and the provision of that entity with relevant skills and resources was critical to ensuring that program gains could be sustained beyond the life of the project.

For the approach described in this section to have a chance at success, some conditions must be met. The most important is initial evidence of a “proto-group”: individuals who show the commitment and dedication that can be harnessed toward CVE objectives. In addition, USAID should gain a sound understanding of the community’s micro-dynamics and political economy before devoting resources and effort to establishing a formal structure in a given community. It should then proceed carefully and give the new group not just the support it needs to succeed, but also an opportunity to demonstrate it deserves that assistance. Prior grantees may continue to be relied upon as facilitators and intermediaries with USAID, but more direct connections with the new entity should also be established to avoid fostering clientelistic relationships between those prior grantees and the new organization.

Finally, it is important to recognize that a trade-off likely exists in choosing to work with a proto-group to gain credible access to a community – sophisticated CVE capabilities should not be expected from such a group and more intense IP (or other grantee) support will be required to ensure that the hoped-for attention to CVE objectives is gained.

## LESSON 3

# SUSTAINABILITY OBJECTIVES CAN BE INTEGRATED INTO QUICK-IMPACT INTERVENTIONS.

OTI's work revolves around quick-impact interventions carried out over a short period of time with limited funds. One of the main potential criticisms of this approach is that, while it can be critical to stabilizing a precarious situation and might make a tangible, immediate positive difference in the life of those who benefit from it (individuals, communities, and/or associations), the gains it generates may not outlast funding. That indeed is a risk, and one that OTI consciously assumes, but this document also points to ways in which the odds of sustainable gains can be increased if certain programming considerations are given attention. Specifically, this report noted at different junctures how sustainability can be enhanced through the provision of physical space and by:

- Thinking rigorously early on about how to sequence interventions so as to create a critical mass of visible results that may draw public recognition and, in the process, generate attention from potential donors.
- Helping organizations coalesce or become officially registered.
- Encouraging networking among grantees as well as between grantees and those who might help them secure access to funding after USAID programming ends. Building networking of course takes staff and monetary resources, significant time, and expertise and must be built into planning. Care needs to be taken that the IP not make itself the hub of any networking it promotes.
- Making sure that relevant sustainability-focused skills (including outreach to diasporas and lobbying of municipalities) are integrated into the training delivered to grantees.<sup>30</sup>

It may be helpful to encourage grantees to consider both zero-based budgeting and “zero budget funding” (i.e., how will they sustain some of their key activities once external funding ends?) early on.

We do not want to overstate the argument that short-term interventions which target only a limited number of individuals, NGOs, and communities are unlikely to have a lasting impact. Nor should we underestimate the potential legacy of well-crafted interventions that change the perspectives of a few key members of or influencers in the community. That may be particularly true of CVE work and especially likely to occur if a critical mass of such individuals can be created.

30. For example, after the end of the grant that made it possible for solar lights to be installed on the road connecting Labweh to Aarsal, five batteries were stolen. The grantee was able to lobby the municipality successfully to ensure that those batteries were replaced.



## SECTION V: OPERATIONAL LESSONS

### LESSON 1

#### COUNTRY-SPECIFIC AND GENERIC CVE TRAINING SHOULD BE MADE AVAILABLE TO IP AND USAID STAFF IN THE FIELD.

Those tasked with program design, implementation, course corrections, and M&E should be conversant with VE analysis and CVE programming. Training opportunities should be provided to ensure that that is the case and that core staff are exposed to knowledge developments in the field. The training should include both generic components and others devoted to VE dynamics in the country. The extent and content of the training provided should reflect the prior knowledge and experience of the staff, ensuring that senior USAID and implementing staff have been exposed to the following:

1. Key concepts and modes of analysis used by the CVE community, as well as debates within that community that are directly relevant to programming strategies and trade-offs.<sup>31</sup>
2. How to conduct an analysis of the VE environment (i.e., what to look for and how to gather the required information).
3. How to move from analysis to strategy and from strategy to program design.
4. How to monitor impact and adjust programming accordingly. It is important that all implementing staff – not just the M&E team – be educated about what constitutes positive, meaningful CVE impact, since such understanding should shape program design, revisions, and activity implementation.<sup>32</sup>
5. The distinctive features of VE-related phenomena in the country in which programming takes place.

While in recent years OTI has developed a greater understanding of how necessary training its staff in context analysis is, VE analysis and CVE programming require specialized expertise. In addition, since VE research is accumulating rapidly and improving in its sophistication, ensuring that staff remain on top of new findings is a challenge for everyone programming in this arena.

### LESSON 2

#### CONSIDER APPROACHES WHICH COULD INCREASE FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN PROGRAMS.

Programming should include components that help protect and expand the rights and access that women have gained, particularly since VEOs seek to narrow opportunities and agency for women in public space as well as in the household. LCRI's experience, however, confirmed that it can be difficult to involve female youth. Sometimes, young women were afraid to take part in program interventions and were often discouraged from doing so by their parents and communities. Safety concerns related to program activity venues—including how to get to and from them—were significant. LCRI's experience suggests that programming should consider the following ways of boosting female participation:

1. Plan for early outreach to families (prior to the onset of activities) and sustain communication with parents throughout the activity to keep them informed about what is happening during and through the program more generally. Proactive and sustained communication with parents may be essential to generating and sustaining female participation.
2. The casting of and channels used to advertise to and draw young women into program activities may need to vary from those used for male youth.

31. For example, after the end of the grant that made it possible for solar lights to be installed on the road connecting Labweh to Aarsal, five batteries were stolen. The grantee was able to lobby the municipality successfully to ensure that those batteries were replaced.

32. This imperative is developed further in Lesson VIII.

3. Explore “reeling in opportunities” created through female participants of program activities that translate into visible, tangible community improvements. To recruit more females, LCRI used an initial batch of young women who had a positive experience with a project that generated benefits noticed in the community.
4. Schedule activities at appropriate times (during LCRI programming, some families were understandably averse to sending their daughters to evening sessions).
5. Even in more permissive environments, consideration should be given to training females separately from males.<sup>33</sup>
6. Provide transportation to and from activity venues.
7. Invite older female relatives and parents to join some activities.
8. Grants can also offer some benefits to parents to encourage their children to take part.

When setting targets for female participation, the cultural, logistical and security barriers to their involvement in program activities should be taken into consideration. The IP or the grantee should be given time to build a reputation for providing a positive and safe experience for women. The nature of the activities should not conflict with responsibilities or commitments that women may not be able to avoid.<sup>34</sup>

## LESSON 3

# REMAIN ALERT TO BOTH OPPORTUNITIES FOR, AND DANGERS IN, GRANTEE-LOCAL GOVERNMENT ENGAGEMENT ON CVE ISSUES.

CVE grantees may see benefits to engaging with local governments or municipalities in a position to facilitate their work. However, municipalities tend to value tangibles for their own sake, not for the CVE benefits to which these tangibles<sup>35</sup> are supposed to be a means of achieving. A CVE grantee, therefore, runs the risk of being instrumentalized by the municipality, which could use it—and the donor which funds it—to provide the public services that the municipality should deliver. An Akkar-based LCRI grantee observed that this risk materialized repeatedly. Drawing on her own experience, she argued that there typically is a disconnect between, on the one hand, the activities or projects that are most appealing to youth and for which they often express an explicit desire and, on the other hand, what typically is of interest to municipalities. Municipalities, she continued, “always push just for infrastructure projects” and “always seek to get the credit [for what has been accomplished].” The principal investigator’s interview with a mayor in the Northern Beqaa three days earlier raised similar suspicions.

USAID, the implementer, and the grantee alike should remain alert to the above risk, which is all the more significant in light of the power imbalance that may exist between the savvy municipal leadership and a relatively small and inexperienced association. Means of hedging against that risk include proceeding carefully when it comes to cooperative endeavors between a municipality and a grantee to test the intentions and modus operandi of the municipal leadership. However, if the planned activity involves a tangible public good of some sort, it generally is not possible or wise to avoid the municipality. Approvals and permits will be required, and municipal staff and officials can become spoilers if they feel excluded. Often, LCRI did start with some kind of soft activity, such as a participatory needs assessment, so that it could focus on the grantee itself and gain an understanding of community dynamics, and only then moved into tangible goods. This phased approach improves the odds that the initial power imbalance between the two types of actors (municipality and CSO grantee) will be partially redressed

### THEATRE AS A TOOL FOR CHALLENGING PREJUDICE

The goal of the play “Love and War on the Rooftop” was to provide a wide-reaching platform for Alawite and Sunni youth from Tripoli’s conflict zones to express their common aspirations and challenge prevailing perceptions of their communities as pro-VEOs. The wide media coverage of the play, noted in Lesson 4, provided youth with a platform to voice their common aspirations and challenges. The coverage centered on the activity as a conflict resolution initiative and as a step towards reconciliation in an area that is unfairly negatively portrayed in the media. Examples of press comments are:

“Young people from two warring districts in the Lebanese city of Tripoli are taking to the stage in a comedy inspired by their lives, trying to turn their backs on old rivalries inflamed by Syria’s civil war.”

–Reuters

“The Theatre Production brought together former militiamen from Sunni and Alawite communities of the norther port city of Tripoli. It was a rare effort at reconciliation in Lebanon, a nation whose social and political fabric has been stretched to breaking point by the war in its larger neighbor Syria.”

–The Guardian

33. In one location where LCRI was active, female trainees explained they were not comfortable speaking in front of males. The grantee offered them separate training, which made a significant difference in their participation and broader involvement.

34. For example, a grantee in Aarsal recruited females for first responder/first aid training without considering that family responsibilities may render women unavailable when their skills are in demand.

35. In such areas as waste management, water, the rehabilitation of marketplaces and streets, cleanup campaigns, and public lighting.

## LESSON 4

### FILMS, PLAYS, AND PRESS BRIEFINGS CAN BE USED TO SHIFT NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF AN AREA.

Residents of impoverished and marginalized areas that have experienced violence and/or significant levels of VE activity often resent what they feel is the tendency for broader society to only view them through the lens of violence and extremism. VEOs can exploit the sense of alienation, isolation, and anger created by that situation, which then creates a vicious cycle: greater VEO influence translates into more violence and extremism which, in turn, reinforces negative perceptions of the area.

LCRI and its grantees in Tripoli and Aarsal made clever use of films, press briefings and plays, often produced by or with youth, to begin shifting negative perceptions of those areas – and, more specifically, to reduce both the tendency of the outside world to vilify them and the propensity of residents to feel stigmatized. Youth in Aarsal set up a Facebook page which provided Beirut-based media with a different perspective on events in Aarsal. One Beirut-based pan-Arab TV station even considered recruiting members of the youth media team in Aarsal to provide periodic news on the town. Other members were hired for occasional media work.

Some productions (such as the Tripoli play “Love and War on the Rooftop”) and related efforts generated national-level attention and even some discussion in the international media (see text box). Similar initiatives in Aarsal helped address the community’s fear that negative outside perceptions of the town would hurt its traditional industries. While a single grant will not change pervasive stereotypes, successive grants that build on each other can begin the process of “re-humanizing” an area’s residents. The Tripoli Film Festival projected to the broader Lebanese public a positive image of marginalized, conflict-affected neighborhoods. It received significant national media coverage and also gave residents an upbeat topic for conversation that nurtured a more encouraging view of their and their area’s future.

Negative perceptions are unlikely to shift permanently as a result of one or two productions, particularly since negative externalities can influence a return to a prior preconception. Therefore, trying to ensure a flow of positive communications is important.

## LESSON 5

### ANTICIPATE AND PLAN FOR THE PERCEPTION OF ASSISTANCE-RELATED INEQUITIES WHEN WORKING WITH RIVAL OR NEIGHBORING COMMUNITIES.

In marginalized regions that receive little help from government and civil society, grantee assistance to one community can be perceived negatively by another community, even when the latter also receives assistance. In several instances, LCRI assistance to one community was perceived as less than another community’s, generating resentment. Programmers should get ahead of this problem by assuming it will happen and planning strategies in advance to mitigate it. Transparency about activities and communication with communities about the nature of and rationale for work in neighboring areas are two mitigation approaches.

#### **YOUTH CHANGE PERCEPTIONS OF AARSAL WITH DOCUMENTARIES**

Sixteen youth in Aarsal were tasked with completing eight documentaries after being trained in journalism, reporting, film-making, and editing. These youth were motivated by a desire to counter the negative stereotypes associated with them and their neighborhood. After completing grant activities, these youth continued their work, employing their new skills to produce three documentaries on their own time. One was a video about a soldier killed in Aarsal during the August 2014 battle between ISIS and the Lebanese Army that resulted in the kidnapping of 25 Lebanese servicemen. In that video, the youth from the media team interviewed the soldier’s family in an attempt to show that Aarsalis lost loved ones during the battle and to counter the popular preconception that the community supported ISIS. The video was uploaded, shared by the youth coalition, and viewed by 3,600 people in a matter of hours. Most of the video’s comments expressed sympathy for the deceased and his family, and others called the slain Aarsali a “Lebanese hero” and said that his death brought “honor” to Aarsal. The outpouring of sympathy underscored the video’s impact.

**LESSON 6****SOCIAL MEDIA TRAINING SHOULD BE INCLUDED FOR GRANTEES WHO LACK THIS SKILL SET.**

This case study has featured numerous examples of the vital contributions that social media can make to a grantee's ability to meet its activity-related objectives, improve public perceptions of a particular community, increase female participation in program interventions, advertise impact to magnify empowerment effects through community recognition, and ensure that credit is not usurped by others. It is important to recognize, however, that nascent groups are likely to lack social media skills. Therefore, when engaging them, providing training should be a priority. Social media training is likely to be received well by youth, who are naturally drawn to social media and eager to become more adept at designing related content. Consequently, the training can also serve as a tool for recruiting youth or sustaining their involvement in other program activities. The training should take into account the overall skill set of the targeted group and remain alert to the significant obstacles that illiteracy and a lack of basic computer knowledge may generate.



## SECTION VI: LESSONS ON STRATEGY

### LESSON 1

#### BE DELIBERATE AND SELF-AWARE ABOUT THE DEGREE OF EMPHASIS PLACED ON STRATEGY IN PROGRAM DESIGN.

The extent to which a program should be “strategy heavy” should reflect the mission and mode of operation of the organization responsible for it. While strategic thinking is always beneficial, we also need to recognize that – especially in the CVE field – there is value to work that relies primarily on experimentation and adaptation imbued with a healthy degree of skepticism towards its ability to alter reality through an ironclad strategy that may not reflect the true nature of the problem or may not hold in the face of rapidly evolving conditions on the ground. In environments where not much is known, contextual complexities can be revealed through incremental programming that aims to some degree to “test the water.” Such programming may shed light on unanticipated consequences (good and bad) of particular types of interventions and increase understanding of stakeholders’ interests and strategies. That knowledge can then be integrated into and used to strengthen subsequent programming.

OTI largely operates according to that logic. Its action learning approach recognizes that in complex and fluid environments it is difficult to develop a full understanding of community and conflict dynamics without engaging them. Due to the crisis- and transition-oriented nature of its programming, OTI generally wants to begin issuing grants quickly in order to build trust and alleviate grievances in troubled communities. In the process, it also develops a better understanding of those communities and how to begin tackling VE dynamics. However, the emphasis on quick action reduces the amount of time available for more rigorous up-front analysis. In its initial efforts and throughout its programming cycle, OTI often relies heavily on knowledgeable staff as informants and on periodic assessments to examine how the context is changing and lessons programming can benefit from. Programming efforts start with a Theory of Change (TOC), which it periodically reviews to ensure it still holds (and, if not, to determine how it should be modified). This approach has great merit in unstable and rapidly changing contexts.

### LESSON 2

#### EVEN ACTION-LEARNING PROGRAMS IN VOLATILE ENVIRONMENTS SHOULD BE UNDERPINNED BY ROBUST ANALYTICS AND A DEGREE OF STRATEGIC THINKING THAT RESPONDS TO THE ANALYSIS.

Even recognizing the value of flexible and fast-paced programming that allows for exploring uncertain terrain, achieving quick impact, and making timely course corrections, we should acknowledge the dangers of an approach insufficiently grounded in analysis and strategic thinking. There are trade-offs, to be sure, but strong analysis and a little strategy can go far towards making quick-impact programming more effective. Without firm analytical foundations, there is significant risk of missing the mark, doing harm, or achieving less than what is possible. Targeted and timely investments in preliminary and on-going analytical work will typically pay dividends down the road. At the very least, such investments will provide USAID staff with a broader frame of reference for assessing their own strategy and how it relates to other CVE efforts within the USG while also allowing for systematic adaptation.

While TOCs are helpful as a short-hand to remind programmers and grantees about the objectives being pursued and the main hypotheses on causality, they seem too abbreviated to serve as an adequate substitute for a better developed strategy that explains the problem(s) being addressed, how the selected interventions might produce results and interrupt the dynamics and system producing VE, and the risks and assumptions being made. Particularly given the nature of the abstract terminology used in TOCs in the conflict and VE domains, the more skeletal the strategy, the greater the risk of staff and grantees developing a different understanding of what the project is trying to accomplish. As this guide has documented, LCRI can boast very significant accomplishments, which are even

more impressive considering the unusually challenging nature of the environment and the relatively short life of the program (less than three years). These successes were achieved despite some broad TOCs that were often not fleshed out, quite high-level in formulation, and often built around concepts (e.g., “moderate actors” or “moderate space”) that were not clearly defined, making them vulnerable to conflicting interpretations. It is possible that the scope of LCRI’s successes might have been greater if the program had been better informed by firm analytical foundations and more strategically driven and if the TOCs had been more fully elaborated.

A review of LCRI records reveals that the strategy documents tended to be more abbreviated and analytically stronger in some cases than in others. The IP was not tasked with developing a robust analysis and strategy at the start of the project, likely because the program was seen largely, at that point, as a continuation of a prior project that was implemented by a different IP and, as a result, there was a desire to continue the fast pace of field activities. With the benefit of hindsight, senior OTI/Lebanon and IP staff suggested in May 2017 that when programming pivoted to a CVE focus in 2015, more attention should have been paid to establishing more robust analytical foundations. Conducting some analytical and strategic groundwork need not have been a cumbersome, lengthy, or a resource-draining process and need not have come at the expense of LCRI’s very identity as an action-learning, quick-impact program.

LCRI documents say little about the specifics of VE recruitment in Lebanon.<sup>36</sup> They also do not acknowledge, or mention only in passing, some of the most critical drivers of VE in the country, perhaps because they were deemed to be beyond the program’s manageable interests.<sup>37</sup> That is problematic not because programming should have sought to address those drivers (in many instances, it could not), but because it raises the following questions:

1. Was the salience of these factors properly understood by those tasked with strategy design?
2. Might LCRI have been able to work on at least the periphery of some of these drivers or address them indirectly had it been sufficiently attuned to them?
3. Was sufficient consideration given to how factors not addressed by programming may have related to and affected factors that program interventions did endeavor to affect?

We should emphasize that we are not suggesting the need for or utility of a full, carried out to the nth-degree, heavily codified strategy of cascading cause and effect results, especially in volatile environments. First of all, we know too little about cause and effect in the CVE domain, hence the advantages of an action-learning approach. Second of all, causality is seldom linear and straightforward. In addition, the process of developing such strategies is generally cumbersome and takes so long that valuable time and opportunities may be lost. Often these rigid superstructures end up embedded in procurement vehicles and somewhat slavishly adhered to, whether they are useful or not. It can then be difficult to change them in the face of failure or altered circumstances.

## LESSON 3 ENSURE THAT PROGRAM DESIGN CAREFULLY APPROACHES THE COMMISSIONING OF VE RESEARCH.

LCRI commissioned VE related analytical work one year into the contract, at a time when the program’s emphasis was shifting from sectarian conflict to CVE. Unfortunately, the quality of that research, which consisted of two studies, was lackluster for the following three reasons:

- Knowledge of how to investigate VE drivers and dynamics is still in its infancy and approaches are still experimental.
- Local specialized research institutions often have limited experience with this kind of rigorous social science research and the particular organization that was used seemed unable to access sophisticated data collectors or exert adequate quality control. Unfortunately, capacity for high quality quantitative and qualitative research is weak in many of the environments in which OTI works.
- LCRI itself lacked the internal capacity and staff skills to structure and manage the research and it therefore relied heavily on the expertise of the selected research institutions.

36. This limitation was noted by the April 2016 Lebanon Program Performance Review, which recommended “conduct[ing] research and pilot[ing] activity to better understand how recruitment by violent extremists take place in Lebanon” and “instrumentalizing these new understandings into new activities” (Lebanon Program Performance Review, pp. 4-5).

37. Those drivers, discussed more explicitly in the following section, include the feeling among many Sunnis that their sect is being marginalized, discriminated against, and sidelined politically; that it is bereft of effective, credible political and religious leadership; that Shia influence continues to grow in the country at large and within key state institutions (especially the army and the security agencies) in particular; and that Saudi Arabia has disengaged from Lebanon (thus undermining Sunni clout) and “conceded Lebanon to Iran” (or, more specifically, to its proxy, Hezbollah). The anxieties and feelings of existential threat that these views create and the concomitant steady rise of a victimization narrative in the Sunni community in general, and among its more impoverished segments in particular, are essential to understanding VE in Lebanon. Another important piece is the presence of transnational Salafi networks, including some with ties to Al-Qaeda, and the manner in which regional and geostrategic rivalries can affect the politics of even small Lebanese localities.

Two lessons can be derived from that experience:

1. All CVE projects should include an active research and learning component because:
  - Our state of knowledge is still nascent.
  - VE actors are quick to shift their rhetoric, strategies, foci, and mode of operation. Programming must keep up with them, but can do so only if it is informed by up-to-date monitoring and analysis of VE developments.
  - When VE occurs in conflict-affected environments, the context is likely to be particularly volatile. Staying abreast of changes in the context will be a particularly important task of programmers.
  - Tracking how national level or structural factors relate to the local level, where most programming is likely to occur, will be critical to understand how the VE landscape is shifting.
  - Host government responses also may shift quickly and the interaction between those responses and VE activity must be tracked and its impact understood.
2. The IP should hire the expert talent for research (expatriate if required), particularly in settings where local research institutions are weak and the VE landscape complex. This can be of benefit to local research institutions if it is accompanied by some capacity development in conducting VE-related research. In addition, staff skills in conducting action-oriented research can be improved via 1) ensuring that hiring focuses on achieving a mix of skills, including applied research; 2) providing training to staff on ways to investigate VE; and 3) establishing a systematic framework for conducting KIs or other forms of research in new regions and institutions as they are added.

## LESSON 4

### WHEN A FULL-FLEDGED STRATEGY IS DEEMED NECESSARY, ITS FORMULATION SHOULD PAY PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO FIVE KEY AREAS.

#### **I. The strategy should be built on a solid assessment of the ve environment and be demonstratively consistent with it.**

That assessment, in turn, should reflect a granular understanding of the following:

- Country-specific features that relate to and shape VE dynamics.
- Drivers of VE. It may be helpful here to differentiate between first- and second-order drivers, as well as between internal and external ones. The strategy should explicitly state how these drivers relate to and feed into one another in a way that accounts for the more consequential or distinctive features of VE phenomena in the country.<sup>38</sup>
- At-risk populations and areas.
- Main processes and venues through which individuals and communities are drawn to VE views or recruited into VE activity.
- Essential VE-related dynamics (for instance, those that relate to recruitment, strategic communications, VEO operations, and radicalization processes).
- Significant protective factors and resiliencies.

To underscore that the strategy should reflect a grasp of the above factors is not to imply that it should seek to address all, or even most, of them. That is rarely possible. But that is precisely the point: only after in-depth understanding of the VE phenomenon in the targeted country has been established can programmers truly decide what aspects of a problem can be tackled and what will likely be beyond its scope. Relevant in-depth analysis also allows for a better grasp of what the strategy is doing and not doing to address the VE problem. Finally, solid analytical foundational documents can help reassure anyone assigned to evaluate or draw lessons from a CVE program that certain key drivers or at-risk areas were not addressed specifically because a deliberate decision was made on other grounds to not engage them (e.g., security and other operational considerations or resources constraints). LCRI staff did assess the state of macro level political and socio-economic drivers at its six month Strategic Review Sessions and considered how those drivers were playing out generally and in vulnerable localities, but by and large did not feel able to tackle them directly.

38. A chart or diagram is usually particularly helpful in conveying that information.

## 2. KEY CONCEPTS AND OBJECTIVES THAT LIE AT THE HEART OF THE STRATEGY SHOULD BE DEFINED CLEARLY.

LCRI strategy documents were not always sufficiently sensitive to this straightforward, and critical, imperative. For instance, what constitutes a “moderate actor” or “moderate space” sometimes was more implied than explicitly stated – even though “strengthen moderate actors and increase moderate space” (SO4) was one of three sub-objectives under PO2 (“Counter the influence of VE groups”).

When reviewing LCRI documentation, the reader is sometimes left with the impression that a space or an actor is “moderate” simply because it is being “strengthened” by program interventions and is not a member of a VEO or lies in a VEO influenced neighborhood. The cluster review of SO4 defines moderate actors as “individuals, groups and organizations that are non-partisan and espouse civic values.” At the very least, the implied association between moderation and absence of partisan affiliation (or between extremism and partisanship) is problematic. For instance, an actor or group can be unaffiliated with a political party and hold extreme and/or violent views, while partisan affiliation does not necessarily translate into a lack of moderation. As for the suggestion that moderation amounts to an embrace of civic values, it begs the question of what constitutes “civic values” (and of the extent to which such values can be defined as “moderate views”).

Similarly, the cluster review defines “moderate space” as “physical space that is open, accessible and safe” adding that “in the context of LCRI, this often refers to physical space that was previously controlled by extremists but is being reclaimed by civic actors.” Such definitions raise more questions than they answer. They are too vague (“open, accessible and safe”) and often inconsistent with what actually occurred through program interventions: with a few exceptions, such as the post-conflict rehabilitation of Tripoli’s Bab el-Tebbaneh’s vegetable market area, most of the spaces the program engaged do not appear to have been genuinely “reclaimed [from extremists] by civic actors.” In the end, the reader is left wondering: is a moderate space one of peaceful coexistence among different sectarian groups? Is it, as the relevant TOC states, “[an] open, diverse space in which people can freely associate and express themselves” (in which case the exact relationship of such space to VE and CVE is unclear)? Is it a space of civic participation? Is it a place where community problems are addressed through projects that require cross-sectarian cooperation? Is it several of the above and, if so, are some dimensions more crucial than others? Is it, more modestly, a space of dialogue and concertation through which community tensions can be defused? Is it primarily a space for the dissemination of positive messaging or for civic engagement? This list of questions could go on, but the broader lesson should be clear: the meaning of concepts that are central to the strategy and programming should not be left ambiguous or open to several interpretations, some consistent with each other, others less so.

These observations should be placed in a broader context: the CVE literature often relies on concepts that are vague, open to different interpretations, and used differently by the authors and practitioners. That is problematic from both an analytical and an implementation perspective. If what one is trying to minimize (e.g., “radical voices” or “extremist ideas”) or, alternatively, strengthen (e.g., “moderate actors”) is not well defined or if the objective itself is open to different conceptualizations, then different IP staff, to say nothing of various grantees, may develop very different understandings of what programming is intended to achieve. High staff turnover will compound this problem. The resulting programming may be far less coherent than desired, both at any given moment and over time.

## 3. THE STRATEGY SHOULD REFLECT A KEEN AWARENESS OF SENSITIVITIES ASSOCIATED WITH BALANCED TREATMENT OF IDENTITY GROUPS.

Most importantly, it should take extra care to avoid raising suspicions that the areas or populations targeted by CVE programming are being stigmatized while others are given a “free pass” to engage in what the targeted populations may perceive as “VE” behavior. For instance, when Western analysts speak of the “VE risk” in Lebanon, they usually refer specifically to VE among Sunnis. The focus tends to be on Salafi jihadi activity in the country, on the flow of radical Salafists to the Syrian battlefield, and/or the danger posed by returning fighters. Programming, then, usually concentrates on at-risk Sunni areas and populations. However, many Sunnis are likely to denounce that approach as imbalanced and unfair to their community since it glosses over manifestations of Shia VE, including in the form of Hezbollah fighters fighting in Syria to buttress what Sunnis regard as a regime that slaughters innocent Sunnis.

It is important that programming be very alert to such perceptions and that interventions be designed accordingly (for instance, in both Tripoli and the northern Beqaa, LCRI wisely engaged Shia villages, neighborhoods and populations). Otherwise, programming will fail to gain traction with the populations it targets; the USG likely will be viewed as taking sides in a sectarian conflict and as stigmatizing one community, which may have far-reaching diplomatic repercussions; and interventions could actually end up worsening the VE problem, since the perception of Shia ascendancy and Sunni victimization are key drivers of VE. When the Internal Security Forces (ISF) and the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) routinely arrest Sunni youth on security grounds while Shia youth fighters affiliated with Hezbollah can travel to Syria unhindered, programming must be very aware of the danger, through its foci populations and areas, that it may play into an extremist narrative that there is a double-standard when it comes to what constitutes “VE” behavior.

32. A chart or diagram is usually particularly helpful in conveying that information.

By engaging Shia communities and youth through interventions that bridge the Sunni-Shia divide, LCRI programming managed to avoid this pitfall. While doing so, it also challenged negative stereotypes of the sectarian “other”, thereby defusing one of the key forces that sustain VE. One lesson that can be derived from this approach is that in a country marked by deep sectarian and ethnic fault lines, addressing VE in the community deemed most vulnerable may necessitate bringing other communities into relevant programming. That approach may be justified on three separate, yet equally compelling, grounds: 1) it preserves perceptions of USG, IP and grantee impartiality; 2) it enables programming to gain traction (and, indeed, avoid the potential for backlash) with the most directly targeted population; and 3) it creates opportunities for that population to cooperate with others across sectarian and/or ethnic divides, which in turn constitutes one of the most effective ways of pushing back against the appeal of VE narratives.

#### **4. GRANT APPROVAL CRITERIA SHOULD BE SPECIFIED.**

In the case of a grant-making agency, such as OTI, strategy documents should include well-defined criteria that explain which kinds of projects will be strong candidates for receiving an award and which will likely be denied. Some of these documents should address explicitly what constitutes a “good project” from the strategy’s perspective.

#### **5. CRITERIA FOR GAUGING THE FIT BETWEEN ACTIVITIES AND OBJECTIVE(S) SHOULD BE SPECIFIED.**

Strategy documents should specify how progress toward program objectives will be evaluated. Both this guideline and the previous one necessitate that careful attention to M&E considerations be paid during strategy design and M&E staff be involved in that process. Section VIII discusses this issue in greater detail.

Insufficient attention to the guidelines above during the strategy design phase may create the following program vulnerabilities:

- It may make the process of approving some activities and denying others far more subjective than should be the case. That is because the “mother of all criteria” for approving a grant should be the extent to which a sound case can be made that it will advance the strategy. The same reasoning applies to how grantees should be selected. In the absence of a clearly articulated strategy and attendant, specific guidelines, criteria, and personal factors – such as the clout of the person on the program team advocating for an activity or a particular grantee – may play an outsized role in the selection of interventions and beneficiaries.
- The sketchier the strategy and the included activity-related guidelines, the more likely it is that the content of programming will be overly dependent on the personal preferences and influence of senior implementing staff (e.g., in the case of the LCRI and OTI programs more generally, the Program Development Officers covering specific regions), as opposed to what is required by the actual situation. In the absence of a preexisting strategy, individual staff preferences and inclinations may shape the strategy. That will be far less of a liability when the staff is capable and has strong CVE-related instincts than when the opposite situation prevails. But it is always problematic for three reasons: 1) because, as a core principle, programming should reflect VE-relevant dynamics, not the programming preferences of USAID or IP staff; 2) because it will make the quality of programming excessively dependent on the caliber of key staff (and, therefore, vulnerable to their departure or rotation);<sup>39</sup> and 3) because if that situation prevails and the composition of the senior management team changes, the strategy likely will change as well, irrespective of whether such alterations are warranted by the evolution of the context.<sup>40</sup> It is notable that the LCRI met with some of its greatest achievements in the Northern Beqaa, where, particularly in its final two years, it was more deliberate about articulating a strategy; it developed more durable working relationships with competent, tested partners; it specifically endeavored to layer activities so as to create positive momentum for change; and it paid more attention to the need for regular impact monitoring.

39. When the strategic foundations behind programming are insufficiently articulated, frequent changes in program leadership will have an even more detrimental impact on the quality of programming, since incoming senior staff will lack the clear guidance that a detailed strategy provide.

40. According to interviews conducted in May 2017, that specific scenario did manifest itself during the life of the LCRI project.

**LESSON 5****ALWAYS BE CLEAR ABOUT THE NATURE OF THE WORK BEING CONDUCTED. DOES THAT WORK TARGET PREVENTION OR MITIGATION AND HOW DOES IT DO SO?**

While CVE and sometimes now PVE (Preventing VE) have become the acronyms of choice in addressing extremism, in most cases development assistance programs are trying to mitigate the strength of the drivers and dynamics of VE or prevent them, and not openly attempting to counter or confront VEOs (i.e., disrupt their recruitment or operations) or engage with VEs themselves (e.g., Lebanese fighters who have returned from battle in Syria). In some cases development assistance can directly counter VEOs (for example, by working with government entities to reduce forms of corruption that enable VEOs to operate). LCRI was predominantly trying to mitigate VE, aiming to make the problem less severe, narrow its scope, and reduce the awfulness of the situation it creates. Even with the benefit of this understanding, programmers should reflect on the actual logic behind the interventions they undertake. The three sets of most relevant questions are as follows:

**1. IS USAID TRYING TO FILL A VACUUM THAT IT FEARS VES MIGHT EXPLOIT?**

That vacuum's sources may include a paucity of arenas for constructive social interaction among youth, the absence of economic opportunities, a lack of positive role models and mentoring, and the nonexistence of venues through which to engage with the "other" or be exposed to perspectives that go beyond those prevalent in one's own community. It is important that those in charge of program design and implementation be clear about which sources are more significant, since particular approaches and activities will be more effective at addressing some types of vacuum than others. By the same token, the most valuable interventions will often be those that show a demonstrated potential for multiple impacts: in most targeted areas, one is likely to be faced with several if not all of the above types of vacuums, which exacerbate the negative consequence of each other.

**2. IS USAID, INSTEAD, SEEKING TO DEFUSE THE TENSIONS OR CONFLICTS THAT VEOS STRIVE TO ENCOURAGE AND HARNESS?**

That particular connection seems to have been at the heart of LCRI programming, though it was not fully acknowledged in strategy documents. On paper, mitigating sectarian tensions was only one of two program objectives (PO1). However, in practice, the CVE objective (PO2) was pursued to a significant extent through PO1-type activities. There is nothing wrong with that approach, but the link between the two is unclear in LCRI documents. As a result, it is possible that opportunities to target certain interventions may have been missed by thinking through the PO1-PO2 nexus.

**3. ALTERNATIVELY, IS USAID TRYING TO COUNTER VEOS?**

By facilitating the establishment or rehabilitation of the kind of facilities discussed earlier, which explicitly are cast as spaces of moderation and cross-sectarian cooperation, USAID may challenge VEOs that oppose the existence of such spaces and seek to appropriate them.

It is important that those in charge of designing the strategy and those tasked with implementing it ask themselves these questions on a regular basis to ensure that an intervention's actual impact is consistent with stated program objectives and/or minimizes the risk of unintended consequences. For instance, if the underlying rationale for a set of activities is to "fill a vacuum," then USAID and the implementer should think carefully about what is being accomplished by program activities and the dynamics they may be reinforcing: are they preventing VEOs from moving into the said vacuum? Are they, instead, replacing the state, partially compensating for its ineffectuality? Or do they contribute to both processes? The answers to such questions matter a great deal from a strategic perspective. If programming is filling a vacuum in a way that triggers, or is likely to generate, a hostile response from VE or VE-sympathetic elements, then a reasonable case can be made that USAID is, indeed, engaged in CVE, PVE, or mitigating VE work. Some of LCRI's work did draw such a negative response. But if all programming accomplishes is making up for the deficiencies of the state by providing the services that the government really should be delivering, then that case becomes harder to make. Indeed, one might argue that by compensating partially for the ineptitude and corruption of the state, programming intended as CVE could help perpetuate a fragile status quo that only allows the structural forces that fuel VE to become more debilitating over time, even if it provides a short-term benefit and gives communities with some capability to address their own problems.



## **SECTION VII:** THE RESILIENCE AND SOCIAL COHESION PROGRAMMING QUANDARY

Lebanon provides a particularly relevant setting, and the LCRI's experience an equally compelling opportunity, to reflect on the merits, assumptions, and limitations, of CVE programming that endeavors to strengthen community resilience and social cohesion as a way of preventing VEOs and their narratives from influencing society. For the purpose of the present discussion, such CVE efforts will be referred to as "R&C [resiliency and cohesion] programming."

R&C programming posits that higher levels of community resilience and social cohesion are particularly desirable, since they enable communities to cope more effectively with the destabilizing forces that are known to facilitate VE activity and recruitment. From a CVE perspective, strengthening communities' resilience is akin to boosting their immune system and, in the process, that of society at large. For reasons discussed further below, higher levels of social cohesion, both within and between communities, are assumed to perform similar functions. Resilience, however, can be a mixed blessing. While that does not diminish the powerful case for R&C programming, it does mean that such programming should proceed with an awareness of potential risks. Those risks are the focus of this section.

To provide context for this discussion, an effort is first made to explain what "community resilience" and "social cohesion" actually entail and how and why strengthening can contribute to CVE objectives. The case will be made both in generic terms and by using appropriate examples from Lebanon, LCRI, and the broader logic behind OTI's work in Lebanon. The discussion will then turn to an analysis of the limitations of R&C programming, again drawing on Lebanon's experience.

### **DEFINING RESILIENCE AND COHESION**

"Community resilience" and "social cohesion" have been defined in different ways and can take varied forms and expressions. For the purpose of this analysis, the most direct connection of such programming to CVE objectives is as follows:

#### **COMMUNITY RESILIENCE, VE, AND CVE PROGRAMMING**

Community resilience may be defined as the ability of a community and the individuals in it to cope with daily sources of adversity and shocks that affect the community, whether they originate from within or outside it. As they relate specifically to VE, the adversity in question may include:

- High levels of social exclusion and marginality and the absence of meaningful channels for civic engagement and positive social interaction.
- An environment that inspires feelings of "structural low self-esteem" and a lack of efficacy or agency, particularly among youth.
- High levels of political repression and human rights abuses.
- Chronic poverty, unemployment, and lack of economic opportunities.

Internal and external shocks may include natural disasters, the eruption of violent strife in the broader society, a severe economic crisis, or the spillover effects of a violent conflict in a neighboring country.

R&C programming assumes that such societal challenges may overwhelm individuals and communities alike; make them prone to despair; alienation from the existing order; and radicalization; and, therefore, render them vulnerable to VE narratives or activity. For at-risk youth in particular, these problems may also translate into a higher propensity to become involved in criminal activity, which frequently operates as a gateway to VE. R&C programming also implies that a community's vulnerability to VE is a function not just of the scope and intensity of the VE forces that confront it, but also of whether it has a strong enough "immune system" to protect itself against the "VE disease." Can it draw on some inherent strengths or assets to help its members reject or resist the pull exercised by VE narratives as well as recruitment efforts by VEOs? After all, from South Asia to Africa, the erosion of earlier sources of societal or community resiliency to VE ideas and activity has been described as critical to the headway made by some VEOs, creating an enabling environment for VE activities.

The lower a community's resilience and the weaker its immune system, the more susceptible it becomes to infection by VE. The immune system in question may comprise, for instance, deeply rooted institutions or traditions that provide a sense of identity and belonging and that facilitate peaceful and positive forms of engagement with others. It may also feature varied mutual aid and social, psychological, and

emotional support networks. Conversely, and to continue with the medical analogy, internal or external shocks may be conceptualized as a form of trauma, the impact of which can be mitigated by a resilient body with a strong immune system.

LCRI reflected that logic to a large degree. One specific form of resilience it aimed to strengthen was at-risk youth's sense of self-worth, agency, and belonging. Greater self-esteem, higher feelings of efficacy, and a more developed sense of attachment to, and recognition by, their community were rightly viewed as diminishing the propensity of vulnerable youth to seek such validation, empowerment, sense of identity, and community through involvement with VEOs. LCRI also sought to partially immunize Lebanon against the external shock created by the Syrian crisis. The Syrian crisis polarized communities along sectarian lines, increasing opportunities for VEOs. The vast influx of Syrian refugees also created new sources of socioeconomic and political tension likely to fuel VE.

## **SOCIAL COHESION, VE AND CVE PROGRAMMING**

Social cohesion may be defined as the readiness and capacity of individuals – or of society's component groups – to cooperate with each other to enhance overall well-being. It may apply to society at large, a given community, or a set of communities. It implies trust (among individuals or between communities), social capital, and bonds that tie individuals or communities to each other. Social cohesion, in the form of bridging across communities or inter-personal bonding within them, is a major source of resilience. The more individuals and communities feel connected to each other in meaningful ways, the less likely it is that they will engage in conflict with each other and the more inclined they will be to resolve differences peacefully. From a CVE perspective, social cohesion matters in three main ways:

1. It shelters individuals against the social fragmentation, atomization, loneliness, identity crises, and anti-social behavior they may promote and that facilitate VE activity and recruitment.
2. The more cohesive a society or community is, the less VEOs can tap into its internal conflicts and the less likely it becomes that they will expand their influence by taking advantage of the prevailing insecurity or by posing as the champion or defender of one of its segments. In the case of a society with deep sectarian fault lines, such as Lebanon, and in a region where those divides have been deliberately fueled and exploited by VEOs (and other political actors), greater social cohesion expressed through cooperation across sectarian divides will make it more difficult for VEOs to harness sectarianism to achieve their goals.
3. A greater degree of social cohesion may enable communities to project greater collective strength and be more effective in putting pressure on decision-makers to address issues known to fuel VE, particularly those that relate to service provision, economic opportunities, and the alleviation of social problems. In this powerful way, social cohesion may not just allow communities to cope with problems, but may also empower them to increase the likelihood that these problems will receive greater attention from otherwise uninterested or ineffectual government entities and politicians.

LCRI's contribution to CVE objectives also rested, in part, on the logic articulated above. LCRI programming aimed to build trust and social capital within communities as well as between them. As far as the latter objective was concerned, LCRI supported projects explicitly designed to create bridges between neighboring communities with different sectarian make-ups and a history of or vulnerability to sectarian conflict (e.g., Aarsal and Labweh in the Beqaa; Bab el-Tebbaneh and Jabal Mohsen in Tripoli).

## **THE COMPELLING LOGIC OF R&C PROGRAMMING**

Perhaps the most powerful case for R&C programming is that it is grounded in a realistic understanding of what CVE programming may be able to achieve in many VE environments. It recognizes that many of the most salient drivers of VE consist of intractable, systemic problems and complex dynamics that operate at the national and even transnational levels that lie beyond the ability of most stakeholders to affect. Consequently, it focuses on how communities can best be sheltered, at least partially, from those forces and on what can be done to mitigate some of those drivers at the community level, where the likelihood of meaningful impact is greater. R&C programming recognizes that while it provides partial remedies to the VE threats, it can reduce both the stressors in target communities and the number and/or influence of VE actors in those communities. At the same time, it can help ensure that target communities do not add fuel to the VE or conflict fire when negative externalities occur; those communities may instead, be able to stay out of the problem or serve as a force for peace. The strengthening of more moderate actors and their influence in those communities may have long term effects that can, where enough coverage is acquired, begin to shift political dynamics in a more positive direction. However, attention does need to be paid to scale to avoid the "patches of green" problem.

Lebanon represents a textbook case of the argument for R&C programming.<sup>41</sup> Consider, for instance, the mix of intertwined exogenous and internal drivers of VE in that country. Internal drivers (which themselves are often hard to disentangle from each other) include:

- Continued state neglect of long-deprived Sunni areas<sup>42</sup> and, consequently, poor educational and socioeconomic prospects for their inhabitants.
- Growing Sunni disaffection with the state and, more broadly, with the existing order.

- The rising perception among Sunnis that their community has been politically sidelined and that the core state apparatus (including the army and the security services) is controlled by an increasingly assertive Hezbollah, which uses that apparatus to marginalize Sunnis.
- Sunni fears of Shia ascendancy in both Lebanon and the broader region.
- Sunni disquiet about the perceived lack of credible and effective leadership in their community (which has opened space for radical forces to stake a claim as protectors of a sect they described as humiliated and under attack).
- The inability of mainstream Sunni parties (especially the Future Movement) as well as official religious bodies (Dar el-Fatwa) to connect with the Sunni base and direct rising Sunni discontent through established channels.

Exogenous drivers consist, first and foremost, of the Syrian crisis, which has fueled violent Sunni radicalization because of:

- The Alawite-dominated, Syrian regime's slaughter of Sunnis.
- Hezbollah's military intervention to save the Syrian regime.
- Support for Syria among some Lebanese Shia and Alawites.
- The opportunities the Syrian conflict has created for transnational VEOs to recruit and radicalize Sunnis in Lebanon.
- The tensions fueled by Syrian refugees in Lebanon, especially in economically deprived areas.

Particularly among disenfranchised Sunni youth, the Syrian crisis has facilitated the dissemination of increasingly crude sectarian narratives. It has also encouraged the rise of a new brand of "entrepreneurs of sectarianism" who have sought to use heightened sectarian feelings to carve out a space for themselves on the political scene. Other exogenous drivers relate to the broader geostrategic context include:

- The perceived regional ascendancy of Iran.
- Competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia is waged through proxies, some of which operate in Lebanon.
- The Sunni-Shia conflict across the region (not just in Syria) and the wars to which it has contributed.
- The ability of transnational Salafi Jihadist networks to activate their networks in Lebanon (including in Palestinian refugee camps).

At least in the short to medium term, it is not realistic to expect CVE programming to affect the national-level drivers identified above, to say nothing of the regional and geostrategic ones. That is particularly true when one considers that these drivers are not just formidable on their own, but that they also feed into each other and create negative, self-sustaining dynamics that facilitate radicalization and recruitment by VEOs. Work at the community level is a far more compelling approach to CVE, and one that LCRI used, since it involves working where one can make a difference, engaging at-risk populations in positive forms of civic engagement that undermine the perceptions and outlooks that support VE activity.

The case for such an approach lies partly in the intractable nature of several of the macro-level forces that sustain VE. In the case of Lebanon, the state is weak, lacks capacity with regard to policy-making and implementation, and is captured by societal interests. For all practical purposes, it is largely absent from many of the regions and towns that are most susceptible to VE. An attempt to confront head-on the higher-level drivers of VE would likely prove futile and could be destabilizing and counter-productive. Consider, for instance, the decisive role played by the following set of inter-related factors as drivers of VE: Hezbollah's growing sway in Lebanon, the influence it has gained within the security and intelligence agencies, and its overt military involvement in support of the Syrian regime. Particularly in disenfranchised Sunni communities, these dynamics have fueled anger and powerlessness at what many view as Hezbollah's impunity and provocative displays of power. Yet any effort to address this issue directly would be resisted forcefully by Hezbollah and could trigger a bloody showdown that none of the parties and communities involved could win. It is precisely because the latter is well aware of that logic that it has decided to ignore the downsides associated with the status quo and opted to consider it a fact of life. That is not an unreasonable calculus in light of the alternative. The result, nonetheless, is bitterness at the grassroots level – among Sunnis, to be sure, but also among Christians and even a large section of the Shia community – as well as continued political paralysis at the elite level.<sup>43</sup> Political and governmental gridlock, in turn, generates further political decay that enables VE to fester.

41. The political analysis presented in Section VII was compiled by the two team members who are political scientists and experts on Lebanon; they have studied the country's politics for decades.  
42. The state often neglects Shi'a areas as well, but Hezbollah steps in to fill the gap.

## RESILIENCY'S TRADE-OFFS

The discussion thus far has highlighted the compelling rationale for R&C programming in a setting such as Lebanon, yet it is still worth considering the limitations. It is to those drawbacks that this section now turns. The discussion will be framed again both in generic terms and through a Lebanon-specific lens, emphasizing risks that can be associated with R&C programming. While there are often no satisfactory answers to the dilemmas raised below, it is important that practitioners are aware of them.

In some cases, building resilience and social cohesion will not be enough to make much of a dent in the structural causes of VE. Questions to consider here include: When is R&C programming the most practical and effective option to respond to pressing VE threats, particularly through quick-impact activities? Might core structural drivers become more powerful over time if not addressed directly by some entity or can R&C programming have some impact on them? Are others addressing these structural drivers? And if unaddressed drivers do indeed become harder to counter over time, is R&C programming buying the country time to heal itself or making some portion of the population less reactive to those drivers?

Programmers should consider whether the decision to embark on R&C programming is primarily a form of resigning oneself to a self-serving political class that is uninterested in providing good governance, which is arguably the best weapon against VE.<sup>44</sup> In the context of a broken political system and chronically inefficient mode of governance, one could argue that the greater the level of community resilience and social cohesion, the more the country can circumvent or afford to live with dysfunctionality. In this scenario, the coping mechanisms provided by R&C can help individuals and communities alike to “get by,” by-pass formal institutions and mechanisms of governance, and develop their own survival strategies, but, in the long run, they might do so at the cost of allowing citizens to disengage from efforts to reform their malfunctioning state. As citizens progressively give up on the state and formal politics, demands for accountability from public officials may decrease markedly. Before making strategic programming decisions, however, this line of reasoning should be contrasted with the argument, presented earlier, that cohesion has the ability to enhance community strength and community resolve to put pressure on decision-makers to address governance-related problems that fuel VE. It can also make them more resistant to the ethno-sectarian appeals of politicians, appeals which raise the risks of conflict. As this section emphasized from the outset, there are no “right” answers to the many questions raised, but seriously considering them will help enrich R&C programming.

Lebanon again illustrates this logic. The resiliency of Lebanese communities, and of Lebanese society as a whole, can be conceptualized as one of the three legs of a “containment tripod” that prevents Lebanon’s often-predicted political meltdown and descent into violence while also providing a measure of protection from VE. The other two legs of that tripod consist of:

1. Last-minute political bargains struck by politicians when the country seems on the verge of collapse or faces an imminent security threat (domestic, external, or both); and
2. Security measures by the LAF and the ISF.

Unfortunately, this containment tripod also helps perpetuate a fragile status quo that enables sources of VE to fester. Precisely because it is reasonably effective, it breeds among key actors the very complacency that generates further political and socioeconomic decay and, in turn, ensures the perpetuation of the VE threat.<sup>45</sup> R&C programming, while a practical and compelling approach to mitigating VE risk in countries where drivers are notoriously hard to tackle, particularly by foreign donors with limited amounts of funding and standing, it

43. Revealing of this stalemate and broader political degeneration is the fact that the Lebanese parliament could not agree on a new president from May 2014 until October 2016 (even though it convened approximately two-dozen times to elect one) and that parliamentary elections were delayed repeatedly after May 2013. Parliament took it upon itself to extend its own term, as its members proved unable to agree on a new electoral law (they finally reached a compromise in the summer of 2017 and elections are now supposed to be held in May 2018, five years behind schedule, but with no assurance that they will not be postponed again).

44. It is true that some well-governed or reasonably well-governed states face VE challenges and that among the less well-governed ones there is no straight line of causality between the extent of bad governance and the severity of the VE problem the country confronts. Still, overall, especially when one takes a medium- and long-term view of the issue, good governance creates powerful resiliencies to VE, while its opposite produces a host of political, economic and social malfunctions that VEOs deliberately look for and are adept at exploiting.

may also amount to turning away from those drivers. This conundrum raises some important, inter-connected questions including:

- Does R&C programming buy time for communities to heal themselves and build up their immune system to VE? Does it, instead, create time for the forces that fuel VE to become more intractable? Or does it do both?
- Does it enable individuals and communities to work around a broken system and develop survival strategies that prevent political collapse and/or the spread of VE activity? Or does it create an environment in which, precisely because citizens have given up on the state, they also have renounced holding it accountable?
- Is there a tipping point, for communities and the broader society alike, where the positive effects of increased resilience and social cohesion – the endurance, coping mechanisms, and greater capacity for collective action associated with them – create a broader demand for change and, as a result, more effective policy responses to the VE threat?
- Can the containment strategies that R&C programming entails and the shaky equilibrium to which it contributes in countries like Lebanon guarantee sustainability of any CVE gains that might be made through them? Can the new attitudes and behavior facilitated by R&C programming become more permanent and generate new societal patterns that reduce the VE threat? Or, if R&C programming is intended mainly to prevent further deterioration to VE pending a more supportive overall environment, do we know what kind of programming must follow or be put in place alongside it?

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45. Security measures have a double-edged impact on VE prevention. They have thwarted terrorist incidents, disrupted planning and operations by VEOs, and provided reassurance to Lebanese that their country is still safe. But they also disproportionately target disenfranchised Sunni communities. They entail many excesses in the form of sweeping and indiscriminate arrests, indefinite detentions without trial, convictions that are often made on the basis of flimsy evidence, and they are known to have resulted in humiliation and torture of inmates. Consequently, they feed a sense of victimization among Sunnis by state and security agencies controlled by hostile forces. The anger this situation creates is compounded by the perception that the state in general, and the security apparatus in particular, turn a blind eye to Shia militancy, thus giving a pass to Shia extremists and conveying the impression that “VE” applies exclusively to the Sunni community.



## SECTION VIII: LESSONS ON MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) should not be approached as a stand-alone endeavor or mere reporting requirement. Development and CVE practitioners generally understand that imperative, but, in practice, it is not always reflected in actual program design and management. LCRI's experience points to several specific M&E-related guiding principles likely to increase the quality of CVE programming.<sup>46</sup>

### LESSON 1

#### M&E-RELATED FACTORS MUST BE CONSIDERED EARLY ON AND BE INTEGRATED INTO STAFFING, STRATEGY AND ACTIVITY DESIGN.

M&E should be approached as an intrinsic part of all phases of CVE programming, beginning with strategy design and the early phase of interventions. It has much to contribute to effectively conceiving the overall strategy and component activities. That is particularly true in fluid environments, where adaptive management is needed and course corrections are to be expected. Over the life of project, regular M&E may highlight the need to revisit strategy and/or ongoing concrete interventions because of a change in their projected impact. Final evaluation reports (FERs) that assess the impact of a grant/activity when it comes to an end, as well as an overall assessment of the entire program upon its completion, should be viewed as only two dimensions of a process that, instead, should begin much earlier and inform the content of all programming.

M&E staffing needs to be carefully considered. Often projects in the DRG, conflict and VE domains, where results are abstract and difficult to measure have too few M&E staff assigned. LCRI started with one M&E staff person, which may have been adequate in the first days of the project, but quickly became suboptimal. Eventually three were assigned; in addition, project leadership in the final year asked field staff to carry more responsibility for data collection.

### LESSON 2

#### ENGAGE M&E STAFF IN STRATEGY DESIGN AND PERIODIC REVISIONS AS WELL AS IN CVE TRAINING.

If M&E considerations are appropriately prioritized in the design of the strategy, senior M&E staff should have both strong qualifications (where country education systems permit this) and a seat at the table where that process takes place. M&E staff should not be confined to their "M&E silo." Instead, they should be in constant consultation with the rest of the team, creating mutually beneficial, ongoing flows of data, information, and analysis in both directions. A critical objective should be enriching in real-time the thinking of those tasked with designing (and modifying) strategy and implementing activities with the information and analysis provided to them by M&E staff. That will not happen if M&E only takes place at the conclusion of activities.

Conversely, creating an organic working relationship between M&E personnel and other members of the CVE team will enable the latter to provide the former with information and analysis that is essential to designing effective M&E tools and approaches. The strength of M&E instruments and staff will be greatly enhanced if M&E personnel are provided with an understanding of the strategy and the analysis behind it and are given an explicit role in that strategy. On OTI programming, this generally means working closely with the PDOs. It becomes much easier to ensure efficient M&E if both the overall strategy and specific activities were conceptualized with ways to monitor impact in mind. By the same token, if programming explicitly entails layering activities that are intended to build on each other and pave the way to a logical outcome, then it will become much easier for M&E staff to design effective instruments for monitoring the impact of each "layer" or "increment" of activities if said staff has a clear understanding of where each phase (or layer) fits within

46. This section owes much to the insights of LCRI M&E officer Mohamed Raouda.

the overall approach, though given the experimental nature of OTI programming, it needs to be recognized that staff in general may lack a clear picture of the way forward at the outset of intervention in a new community or setting. For instance, if in a given location programming consists of three “phases” (or three “layers” of multiple activities), then the instruments and approach for monitoring phase two should be shaped, in part, by an understanding that it is phase two and not phase three or phase one. Furthermore, M&E staff can design the proper tools and approaches for phase two only if they are aware of the entire sequence. That, in turn, necessitates their involvement in strategy design or at least in the elaboration of the TOCs. Such close coordination is not always easy to pull off, especially under the pressure of issuing and managing multiple grants.

The benefits of the close involvement of M&E staff in strategy design and revisions will be significantly enhanced by – indeed, may require – including said staff in the CVE training discussed in Section V. M&E staff must be familiar with how to analyze a VE environment and program against it.

## LESSON 3

### NUMERICAL INDICATORS ARE RARELY A SATISFACTORY WAY OF GAUGING IMPACT.

In retrospect, too many of the indicators that LCRI developed or commissioned to assess progress were numerical ones – e.g., how many people attended an activity, how many individuals were trained, or how many activities were launched. This is not surprising given the very short term nature of most grants. Such “counting indicators,” however, do not provide a dependable basis for measuring genuine progress toward the stated CVE objectives. But the heavy use of quantitative indicators is also understandable when you consider the challenges associated with measuring short-term, low value grants. However, such indicators can misrepresent actual impact and detract from more effective and qualitative methods for collecting relevant information. Qualitative data were collected by LCRI, but often focused on grantee and participant interpretations and quotations. More dependable means of capturing impact may include, for instance, short perception and behavior surveys built into the M&E plan, as well as evidence of cross-pollination and networking among grantees.

Short, targeted perception and behavior surveys may be a particularly effective way of determining whether activities are changing the perceptions which VEOs deliberately tap (e.g., feelings of isolation, marginalization, stigmatization, anger, and/or powerlessness). These surveys should take place on a regular basis throughout the life of the program. They are especially relevant to projects like LCRI, which revolved heavily around efforts to tackle the micro-level drivers that sustain VE. It is revealing, for instance, that on one occasion when LCRI conducted a brief perceptions survey, the results revealed that the youth engaged by the project were not as vulnerable as previously believed. Such findings have important and obvious implications and should lead to a retargeting and/or recasting of activities. For programs that aim to defuse sectarian tensions, improve refugees-host community relations, and/or reduce the potential for VE by enhancing the sense of agency of at-risk populations, perception surveys might monitor changes in such areas as:

- At-risk populations’ assessments of the future (greater optimism or pessimism)
- Sense of efficacy and self-worth (improvement or deterioration)
- View of the sectarian other (tendency to demonize or vilify)
- Perspectives on one’s community (propensity to idealize)
- Readiness and ability to think autonomously from the dominant opinions in one’s community
- Attitudes toward refugee populations (inclination to stigmatize or stereotype)
- Integrative complexity (the propensity to recognize the many dimensions of a given issue, to approach it from multiple perspectives, and to go beyond black-and-white thinking)

The extent to which networking and joint endeavors among partners are occurring can also be a reliable indicator of impact. Relevant questions may include: are coalitions (formal or informal) being formed that bring partners together and help them work toward shared goals? If so, what are these coalitions achieving? Is there evidence that partners are learning from each other? Is a partner’s success in a given locality inspiring other partners, or non-partner organizations, to engage in similar endeavors elsewhere?

**LESSON 4**

**FORMAL MECHANISMS AND PROCESSES NEED TO BE ESTABLISHED TO ENSURE THAT THE INFORMATION PROVIDED BY GRANT FERs FEEDS INTO ON-GOING PROGRAMMING.**

FERs can be useful when determining whether progress towards program objectives is being achieved, where programming may be falling short, and how activities should be conceptualized or implemented differently to maximize impact. The experience of LCRI suggests that both OTI staff and IP PDOs tried to implement lessons learned through FERs. OTI and LCRI staff made a point of discussing FERs regularly and PDOs' thinking about forthcoming activities appears to have been influenced by FERs-based information on the efficacy of previous interventions. But this process was largely ad hoc and the fast pace of programming and issuance of new grants did not always allow the rigorous integration of lessons learned. FERs were often completed late because M&E staff were overloaded with work<sup>47</sup>; by the time FERs were finalized, PDOs had already designed the next wave of activities.

Such observations suggest that the process of integrating lessons from FERs (and other lessons learned in the course of programming) need to be formalized and systematized. For instance, one person on the implementing staff might be given responsibility of synthesizing the lessons that can be derived from all FERs submitted during a two or three-month time period and providing specific programming recommendations based on those lessons. The objective should be to alert the implementing team and USAID to promising and less promising approaches and results and draw attention to potential red flags or pitfalls. Unless this process is institutionalized and a staff member is formally tasked with it, the useful feedback found in FERs may not have the sway it should on programming.

47. Generally on OTI programs, PDOs write the FERs but this was not the case for LCRI. M&E staff were tasked with that action. Initially meetings were held to reflect on FERs; eventually the fast pace of programming and the slow completion of FERs made those meetings infrequent.



## CONCLUSION

This document was not intended as, and does not constitute, an evaluation of LCRI. However, it was informed by an exploration of the successes and limitations of that program's approach to CVE, as transpired through a comprehensive review of its documents as well as interviews and FGDs conducted in May and June 2017. The preceding pages did note areas in which programming sometimes fell short, but the vast majority of the lessons highlighted above draw on the program's successes, which are very real and look all the more impressive when one considers: a) the intricacies of the Lebanese political environment in general, the complexity of its VE landscape in particular, and the massive challenges associated with trying to program against it; and b) how few CVE programs can point to credible evidence that they had a substantive positive impact (and how many, in contrast, have shown at best very modest results despite heavy investments). For a program that had limited resources and a life of less than three years, LCRI can claim very significant accomplishments that make it an experience worthy of CVE practitioner study. The lessons in this guide highlight those achievements in detail, but by way of conclusion, it may be useful to summarize some of the ways in which LCRI's experience stands out and what CVE programmers elsewhere might learn from it.

First, through LCRI, OTI was able to gain access to at-risk communities where other donors were not active – often because those donors were unable to find effective ways to enter them. The very nature of OTI's work and LCRI's programming (including the targeted provision of “tangibles”) was instrumental in helping the project gain traction within these communities. It was no small achievement for a USG-funded implementer to establish a presence in, and credibility with, such communities as Aarsal, Labweh, Bab el-Tebbaneh and Jabal Mohsen – let alone to build bridges and defuse sectarian tensions between the first two towns and the latter two neighborhoods. Being able to operate in these communities and support effective grantees in them may look routine by May 2017, but it seemed a daunting task – and clearly one that deterred other donors – a short three years earlier.

LCRI also demonstrated a keen awareness of the importance of addressing the psycho-social needs of at-risk youth through CVE programming – in particular their quest for empowerment, self-esteem, and public recognition, as well as their desire for self-expression and for a sense that their frustrations and hopes are being heard and validated by the community. As importantly, LCRI was able to identify grantees who also understood that and who, with LCRI's support, were able to carry out activities to that effect successfully. The interventions in question often found creative and effective ways of satisfying vulnerable youth's emotional needs, from community-improvement projects to performance arts. Furthermore, many activities were intentionally implemented to create multiple and mutually reinforcing CVE-supportive impacts. For instance, a community improvement project might provide a grantee with access to the community and a way of gaining its trust; in the process, it might enable youth to achieve a greater sense of self-worth through community recognition, while also lessening the sectarian divides that fuel VE by engaging those youth across sectarian lines; and it also might open the door to “softer programming” aimed at building VE-resiliency skills through targeted training.

Several other components of LCRI's approach and its intervention toolkit might serve as inspiration for CVE programmers elsewhere. Among them, the following stand out: the importance of thinking systematically about how to sequence and layer CVE activities to maximize their impact; recognizing the centrality of parents to the success of interventions directed at at-risk youth, including females; the benefits of activities that enable the “reeling in” of parents, and, through them, of broader community segments; the critical contributions that the provision of “physical space” can make to youth-oriented CVE programming; the need to look for ways of harnessing the creative arts' ability to advance CVE goals; the importance of trying to broaden the frame of reference of at-risk youth by creating experiences for them out of their immediate community; the merits of activities that deliberately seek to alter negative perceptions of “the other” through cross-community youth engagement; and the critical contributions that social media and relevant training can make to CVE goals, whether in terms of expanding the public visibility of grantees and magnifying the impact of their activities or with regard to shifting negative perceptions of the other in general and of certain at-risk communities in particular.

As discussed in much greater detail above, LCRI's experience also provides valuable insights into how to increase the odds of longer-term results when engaging in activities with a short time frame; how to select effective grantees and ensure that they sustain progress toward CVE objectives; and how important it can be to help proto-groups become more formal entities and sometimes be registered.

Finally, we should note that, by the judicious manner in which it used the resources at its disposal, LCRI was strikingly successful in breaking the taboo associated with accepting U.S. funds. It changed the way many people in a variety of communities viewed US assistance, and, as importantly, how willing they were to publicly acknowledge the benefits.<sup>48</sup>

That is not a small achievement – especially for a program that actively avoided insisting on branding. In this regard, LCRI's experience suggests that, at least in some instances, the key variable determining whether or not the expected benefits of branding materialize is not whether one insists on it (let alone whether one imposes it on grantees in settings where that is likely to backfire), but whether the interventions create such tangible improvements in the community that members will be willing to give the USG credit.

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48. On social media, the solar lights that LCRI made possible on the five-mile stretch of road connecting Labweh to Aarsal were described as “the biggest infrastructure project in the area since independence” and the role of US funding in making it possible was acknowledged. In Majdel Anjar, a Salafi stronghold in the Beqaa, an al-Azhar Sheikh publicly thanked USAID in a speech delivered on the inauguration of a community project carried out by another LCRI grantee. Similar comments were made by the town's mayor. It was remarkable that these two local leaders were willing to “go out on a limb” to challenge Salafi voices that denounce USG funding.



## **ANNEX I:** LCRI BUILDS BRIDGES AND MITIGATES CONFLICT AND VE RISK IN TRIPOLI

This mini-case study focuses on a series of five grants implemented in two adjacent and rival Tripoli neighborhoods, illustrating several lessons in detail discussed in the body of this report. In this example, the method of grantee selection; sequencing and layering of grants and activities; approaches to youth, conflict resolution and meeting community needs; and use of the arts to meet emotional needs are all noteworthy. Finally, the care taken by the grantee to foster a more positive relationship between youth and the Lebanese security forces is striking.

The two feuding neighborhoods of Mankoubin, a primarily Sunni neighborhood, and Jabal Mohsen, an Alawite Shia neighborhood, within the northern city of Tripoli have become increasingly unstable as a result of poverty, high levels of unemployment, and government neglect with few constructive outlets for youth. Too many youth drop out of school early, engage in drug use and petty crime, and hold out little hope for the future. Historical tensions between these communities, which date back to the Lebanese civil war, have erupted into violent clashes, destroying infrastructure and goodwill. Tensions have been further exacerbated by the inflow of Syrian refugees. Previously nascent extremist elements have expanded their influence into these communities and now prey on feelings of marginalization and anger to secure community support and recruit youth, several of whom have gone to Syria to fight.

Basmat Amal (BA) is a grassroots CSO based in Mankoubin. Through LCRI, BA expanded its activities, evolving into an organization trusted by the community to implement varied initiatives that mitigate rising sectarian and host community-refugee tensions. Of the many grants awarded by OTI, the five grants completed in sequence from March 2015 to July 2017 by BA were particularly successful, fully addressing LCRI sub-objectives and providing tangible results to the two neighborhoods. BA's grant design sought to mitigate tensions between Mankoubin and Jabal Mohsen and provide positive alternatives for youth by specifically targeting those that were at-risk, accomplishing the following:

### **REPAIRING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN YOUTH AND SECURITY FORCES**

BA leveraged activities with at-risk youth, and the credibility it had established through those activities, to address the explosive relationship between, on the one hand, the army (LAF) and the security services (ISF, Military Intelligence) and, on the other hand, at-risk youth from these disadvantaged neighborhoods. That relationship is widely recognized as a critical driver of VE in Lebanon that is not easily programmed against. One of the major sources of Sunni disaffection with the state, particularly in disadvantaged Sunni areas (nowhere more so than in these neighborhoods in Tripoli), is the perception that the army and the security services are targeting Sunnis, that they are under the influence of Hezbollah, and that they are vehicles through which Shia, Iran, and Syria control Lebanon and oppress Sunnis. For their part, ISF and LAF officers tend to view disadvantaged Sunni youth primarily as VEs, potential extremists, drug addicts, or petty criminals. It is this context that gives some of BA's activities significance. The association was able to bring together representatives from the various arms of the security apparatus and disadvantaged Sunni youth. By doing so, it began to change the manner in which disadvantaged Sunni communities and the security forces relate to and perceive one another. The ISF and LAF started to reevaluate their perception of disadvantaged Sunni youth (previously viewed as mere extremists or criminals), while the latter changed their view of security personnel (previously viewed as the enemy or the oppressive arm of an otherwise indifferent state). BA leaders noted that the ISF and LAF provided protection for some of the events the association organized and that the ISF and LAF would now sometimes consult the leadership of BA on the character of a suspected Sunni youth whom they may have previously arrested on mere suspicion of VE activity. BA is now viewed as a trusted interlocutor between the security services and the disadvantaged Sunni communities where it is active. From that position, it can advocate for youth in these communities and prevent some of the excesses by the security services that fuel Sunni alienation and, in the process, VE activity and recruitment. In the fourth grant implemented, BA built on this success by shifting from the occasional involvement of security forces in programming to including the ISF and LAF in all community activities. This strategic change provided more opportunities to foster positive perceptions and relationships between youth and the security forces.

## CONSIDERING COMMUNITY TENSIONS THROUGH ALL STAGES OF PROGRAMMING

Two Mankoubin suicide bombers attacked the Omran Café in Jabal Mohsen in January 2015. In March, BA's first grant began. This fresh dose of violence exacerbated community tensions and made it particularly difficult to recruit at-risk youth. As one recruit stated, "It's my first visit to Jabal Mohsen and I was afraid of entering the Omran Café because as Mankoubin youth, we feel guilty about what happened since the suicide bombers were from our area."

Recruits included individuals who committed acts of violence in the past, were victims of this suicide bombing, and the sister of one of the two café suicide bombers. During recruitment, BA ensured that an equal number of recruits were from Mankoubin (Sunni) and from Jabal Mohsen (Alawite Shia). For the first meeting between these sensitive parties, the grantee used a puppet to "...br[ing] out all their fears and illustrat[e] what their life would look like if they [kept] fighting." Despite the dark subject matter, the use of puppets allowed participants to relax and interact with grantee staff and each other. BA also ensured community events and projects were equally divided between Mankoubin and Jabal Mohsen or held between the two neighborhoods. This careful attention to local tensions and perceptions created an environment where antagonistic parties could come together and slowly begin to reconcile with the other.

BA built on this approach by using their knowledge of local tensions to try and defuse fear of the other. Grantee participants from Jabal Mohsen were sent to Mankoubin and grantee participants from Mankoubin were sent to Jabal Mohsen to evaluate which projects could help the community most. "I didn't expect myself to be that courageous and fill out a questionnaire with people I used to consider enemies. These people that I always wanted to get revenge from. They know where I was from and they still welcomed me!" When youth were met with threats of violence or hostility, BA's coordination with the ISF and LAF helped protect youth when they chose to carry on with activities.

## RECRUITING TRULY AT-RISK YOUTH

Several of the grantees supported by LCRI struggled to find willing youth participants who fit an "at-risk" profile. Grantees occasionally resorted to filling spaces with youth who were either not particularly at risk or not even truly youth. It can of course be difficult to determine which youth are in fact most at-risk of VE recruitment, though in vulnerable communities, rough if inexact profiles can be built. But it can be particularly challenging to do so upon entry into a suspicious community: if the grantee is new and has not built up a reserve of trust, little information about youth vulnerabilities will be shared. The combination of clear recruitment criteria and the bonds of trust BA solidified with these communities through their status as a local grassroots organization, association with other grassroots organizations, and their knowledge of the population ensured that recruits could be labeled as both "at-risk" and "youth". The age parameter of 16-26 ensured participants were of the appropriate age, while vulnerability criteria were used to include those who were directly impacted by violence, were perpetrators of violence, or were Syrians subjected to the animosity of the Lebanese community. BA also took care to recruit those who were unemployed, poorly educated, and female.<sup>49</sup> While youth were directly recruited in the first grant implemented by BA, dialogue forums were held and used to gain recruits in subsequent grants, building on community interest inspired by the first grant's success. BA's choice to include new individuals in the following grants, in combination with those who participated previously, created an opportunity for at-risk youth who were previously uninterested in or unable to participate because of negative community or family pressures to participate while casting early participants as role models.

49. Through all five of these grants, the number of female participants was at or exceeded 25% of the total. This is a special achievement since the norms of these communities limit female participation.

## EMPOWERING YOUTH THROUGH GRANT ACTIVITIES

In both Mankoubin and Jabal Mohsen few opportunities are available to youth. Idle and unemployed, many youth fall prey to extremist recruiters or drug peddlers. The most susceptible youth have dropped out of school early, a common trend in these areas. Illiteracy and idleness feed the distrust of parents and contribute to the low confidence of youth. Parents do not trust their children to leave home for fear that they could be enticed into risky situations by troublemakers and potentially arrested.

BA based its grant on the theory that youth feel powerless in their current environment, making them vulnerable to both drug use and extremist recruiters who offer a sense of belonging and empowerment and a chance to create change. Petty crime is also an ever-present temptation as it can entice youth with no means of income and few alternatives to fill their time. BA focused on recruiting these at-risk youth, and then provided training relevant to planned grant activities. The training provided included community needs assessment, conflict mitigation, and community project design in most of the grants and then specialized training was offered on topics like photography and theatre to provide an outlet for emotional needs. By imbuing youth with the skills and confidence to initiate change in their communities themselves, BA sought to tackle issues of low self-esteem and the lack of alternative activities which inspired negative behaviors in youth. Public forums addressed these and other community issues, illuminating the common links between unemployment and poverty in both neighborhoods and discrediting the historical narrative of animosity between the two groups while engaging youth. One engaged youth said, "The hostility towards each other disappeared quickly because we understood that our communities are suffering from the same social and economic problems, with high unemployment rates and lack of hope in a better future." All five grants provided training, required the youth to organize community events, and design and implement community projects. The sequence of these activities changed from grant to grant.

The community events organized by youth were often art-based activities, like plays created by the youth participants, musical performances, and comedic performances in addition to Ramadan activities and sports gatherings, like soccer matches. A local resident explained that his children were excited about the events because, "No one has ever provided such recreational activities for children in the area. These kids were only used to the sounds of grenades, not to the sound of music."

The public events recast "troublemakers" as individuals within the community who were dedicated to its success and capable of helping improve their neighborhoods. Youth participants were specifically trained in theatre in the final three grants and asked to write and perform the plays at community festivals and events organized by the engaged youth. Youth performed stories from their own lives, using theatre as an emotional outlet and a means of communicating with their communities, often bringing audience members to tears with the relatability of their message. "These projects did not only affect the participants, but their parents and the community as well. We were finally able to understand our children's needs and behaviors." These activities also brought members of both communities into a space that allowed them to peacefully interact. A 21-year-old attendee commented, "Today, I witnessed different activities for the first time and met new people from other neighboring areas and I invited them to play soccer next week."

BA had youth conduct needs assessment in both communities and analyze the results themselves before implementing community projects, for which they received grant funding. In addition to other projects, they beautified streets, installed a bus stop, and renovated a public park, creating tangible evidence for both themselves and the community that youth could be a source of positive change. The youth involved in revamping these public places were often those who played a key role in destroying that very space. Completing these projects helped them make amends for their past actions and build a sense of belonging to these communities.

The third grant took these activities a step further, teaching grant participants from the first two grants how to train their peers in needs assessment and project implementation. "I was worried about giving the training but it was not hard after all and it went smoothly, especially that we were well guided and given the flexibility to choose the topics we are most comfortable presenting." This further solidified gains in the empowerment of these specific youth, showcasing them as role models for other participants and youth in both communities. The success of this method of engagement led to its repeated use in the fourth grant.

The fourth and fifth grants focused on empowering youth while bolstering BA's role as a moderate actor. BA conducted activities similar to the previous grants with a stronger emphasis on improving youth's relationship with security forces, publicizing activities so youth would receive recognition and BA would be reinforced as a moderate actor, and improving the safe space BA provided through its center in Mankoubin. These activities were a great success, solidifying BA's positive image in the community and publicizing its legitimacy to new donor organizations like Save the Children.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Members of both of these communities, and many other communities assisted through LCRI, were tired of the empty promises of development assistance. When grantee participants started surveying the communities to assess needs, "...many residents [were] nonresponsive and criticiz[ed] them for being like other organizations that collect information and then do nothing about it..." The community support garnered by BA through these activities can be attributed to their care in navigating community tensions carefully, their intentional program plan, and their provision of tangible community improvements. The members of BA live and work in these communities; they are themselves disadvantaged community activists, using their passion and knowledge of local dynamics to create effective programs that inspire change. Their grant activities not only addressed youth empowerment, but also worked to strengthen moderate actors, breakdown tensions between communities and security forces, build stronger relationships between local grassroots groups, and erase physical symbols of violence and degradation in both neighborhoods. By recruiting at-risk youth like the sister of one of the Omran Café suicide bombers, BA transformed stigmatized individuals who were symbols of violence and division into role models dedicated to bringing the two communities together. Local attitudes toward grantee activities and engagement changed, permitting BA to expand its work and the positive network within which beneficiaries were now embedded.



## ANNEX 2:

# INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR KIIS AND FGDS

*Prepared for the ARK Group by Management Systems International (MSI)*

## OBJECTIVE OF THE GUIDE AND HOW TO APPROACH IT

This interview guide is intended to facilitate KIIs and FGDS. It should be approached as a “navigation chart,” not as a “cookbook.” That is, it provides the general structure required to direct the interviews and discussions, and it points to the specific information that needs to be obtained from respondents, but it should not be used as a straightjacket. For instance, one or more of the questions or follow-up questions below may need to be adjusted to take into consideration the answer that has been given to a previous question. In a few instances, one of the follow-up questions may need to be skipped if the information it is intended to generate already has been obtained.

It is critical that those who will conduct the KIIs and FGDS become very familiar with this guide before the fieldwork takes place. They must develop beforehand a clear grasp of the logic behind the questions and follow-up questions that are being asked. They also must understand how these questions are intended to build on each other and how they progress in a logical manner. That preparation work is essential if those conducting the fieldwork are to be able to make on the spot the quick adjustments that may be called for in order to reflect the flow of the conversation or the thought process of the respondents. Flexibility, however, should not deter from the necessity of securing the required information. On a few occasions, interviewers may find it useful to come up with one or two follow-up questions of their own in order to enable a respondent to clarify a particular point, finish a specific thought, or elaborate on a promising line of inquiry.

## ORGANIZATION

The guide differentiates among three categories of respondents and, for each category, it provides separate lists of questions (as well as suggested introductions to the interview or the FGD):

### CATEGORY 1 (“PARTICIPANTS”):

Individuals who participated in LCRI activities

### CATEGORY 2 (“CLOSE PERSONAL CONNECTIONS”):

Individuals with a close personal relationship to participants. Most often, these will be parents; in some cases, they may be siblings, and on a few occasions close friends.

### CATEGORY 3 (“POTENTIAL INDIRECT BENEFICIARIES IN THE COMMUNITY”):

Members of the community who, for instance due to their occupation or location, were more likely than other community members to have been exposed to, or impacted by, the activity and/or to have become familiar with it (though they neither directly participated in it nor were personally connected to those who did).

Grantees are expected to play a key role in helping identify respondents in Category 2 and Category 3.

The expected numbers of, respectively, KIIs and FGDS are 35 and 4. The tentative breakdown is as follows:

#### NORTHERN BEQAA:

##### 12 interviews

- 6 participants
- 4 close personal connections
- 2 potential indirect beneficiaries

##### 1 FGD (participants)

#### TRIPOLI:

##### 12 interviews

- 6 participants
- 4 close personal connections
- 2 potential indirect beneficiaries

##### 2 FGDS (participants)

- 1 participants
- 1 close personal connections

#### AKKAR:

##### 11 interviews

- 5 participants
- 4 close personal connections
- 2 potential indirect beneficiaries

##### 1 FGD (participants)

## 1. QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS

### INTRODUCTION

#### GUIDELINES

- Do not read. Memorize beforehand and deliver with minimal reference to handwritten notes.
- Prior to any given interview or FGD, those tasked with conducting it should study carefully the grant that will be referenced during it, so that they can summarize smoothly and effectively the objective and content of the activity the grant made possible. Respondents should not be asked to describe the activity. Instead, the interviewer should refresh their memory about what the activity entailed, and then proceed with the suggested questions. The interview or FGD will yield useful information only if interviewers are already familiar with the activity discussed. Please prepare accordingly

#### SUGGESTED WORDING

“Thank you very much for making time to speak with us today about the activity [state the name of the activity] in which you participated in / between [state date/time period]. As you may remember, this activity involved [introduce the specific grant and provide a clear summary of it].

USAID, which funded this activity as well as many other similar ones, has asked us to conduct a series of brief surveys to determine what was positive about the activity, what it contributed to you or to your community, but also, perhaps, how it could have been more effective, and how.

USAID hopes that, through these discussions, it will be able to come up with more effective ways of helping improve the wellbeing of Lebanese communities in which it supports various projects.

None of the questions we are asking are particularly sensitive, and, of course, all the answers will be kept confidential. Again, all that we are trying to get through these discussions is a general understanding of how you felt about the activity in which you participated was, and why, and the impact you believe it had on you or your community.

Do you have any questions for us?

So, let's get started. I will ask five main questions, and in some cases I will have a few brief follow up questions for you. Thank you again for your time.”

#### QUESTION 1. DID TAKING PART IN THE ACTIVITY CHANGE YOU?

Initial follow-up questions:

##### If the answer is negative:

- Why? Why didn't it have more of an impact on you?

##### If the answer is positive:

- How? In which ways?

Further follow-up questions (select from among the following list, depending on the nature of the answers to the above questions and on how much information the responded already has volunteered):

- Did the activity change the way you think about yourself? How? Can you give me one or two examples?
- Did the activity change your views and perceptions? Which ones? How?

**QUESTION 2. DID YOU COME OUT OF THE ACTIVITY FEELING MORE POSITIVE OR LESS POSITIVE ABOUT YOUR FUTURE?**

**Follow-up question** (if the respondent has not already volunteered the specific information): Why? How?

**QUESTION 3. SO FAR, WE HAVE TALKED ABOUT THE IMPACT OF THE ACTIVITY ON YOU. WHAT ABOUT THE IMPACT ON YOUR COMMUNITY? DID THE ACTIVITY HAVE ANY SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY?**

**Initial follow-up questions:**

**If the answer is negative:**

- Why? Why didn't it have more of an impact on the community?
- What changes should have been made to the activity for it to have a real, substantive positive impact on the community?

**If the answer is positive**

- Illustrative follow up questions (select from the list depending on the nature and extent of the information the respondent already has volunteered):
- What kind of impact? Can you give us one or two examples?
- Has the impact on the community remained as significant as it was right after the activity took place?
- Why/why not?
- Are you rather optimistic or rather pessimistic that the benefits of the activity on the community will endure?
- Why?

**QUESTION 4. WE HAVE TALKED ABOUT THE IMPACT OF THE ACTIVITY ON YOU, AND THEN ON THE COMMUNITY. NOW, I'D LIKE TO TURN TO A RELATED BUT DIFFERENT ISSUE: WHETHER YOU THINK THE ACTIVITY CHANGED YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE COMMUNITY, AND, IF SO, HOW.**

**Note:** It may be that partial answers to that question already have come up in answers to the previous two questions. You should select from the list of suggested questions below accordingly.

Did the activity change your view of the community and of your role in it?

**If the answer is negative:** Why?

**If the answer is positive:**

- How? Can you give us one or two examples?
- Have those changes in your view of the community endured since the activity came to an end?

Do you think the activity changed the way in which the community views you and deals with you?

**If the answer is negative:** Why?

**If the answer is positive:**

- How? Can you give us one or two examples?
- Do you feel that these changes in how the community views you and deals with you have endured since the activity came to an end? (If answer is no, ask why).

**QUESTION 5. WHEN YOU CONSIDER ALL THE CHANGES THAT THE ACTIVITY BROUGHT ABOUT (IN YOU, IN YOUR COMMUNITY, AND IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP OF THE COMMUNITY), DO YOU FEEL THAT ANY OF IT HAS ANY SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON THE EXTENT TO WHICH MEMBERS OF YOUR COMMUNITY ARE VULNERABLE TO VIOLENT EXTREMIST IDEAS, OR TO RECRUITMENT BY VIOLENT EXTREMIST ORGANIZATIONS?**

**If the answer is negative:** Why not?

**If the answer is positive:** How? Can you give us one or two examples?

## 2. QUESTIONS FOR CLOSE PERSONAL CONNECTIONS

### INTRODUCTION

#### GUIDELINES

- Do not read. Memorize beforehand and deliver with minimal reference to handwritten notes.
- Prior to any given interview or FGD, those tasked with conducting it should study carefully the grant that will be referenced during it, so that they can summarize smoothly and effectively the objective and content of the activity the grant made possible. Respondents should not be asked to describe the activity. Instead, the interviewer should refresh their memory about what the activity entailed, and then proceed with the suggested questions. The interview or FGD will yield useful information only if interviewers are already familiar with the activity discussed. Please prepare accordingly

#### SUGGESTED WORDING

“Thank you very much for making time to speak with us today about the activity [state nature of activity] in which your [identify by name: son, daughter, friend] participated in/between [state date/time period]. As you may remember, this activity involved [introduce the specific grant and provide a clear summary of it].

USAID, which funded this activity as well as many other similar ones, has asked us to conduct a series of brief surveys to determine what was positive about the activity, and what it may have contributed to those who took part in it, those connected to them, and the community.

USAID hopes that, through these discussions, it will be able to come up with more effective ways of helping improve the wellbeing of the Lebanese communities in which it supports various projects.

None of the questions we are asking are particularly sensitive, and, of course, all the answers will be kept confidential. Again, all that we are trying to get through these discussions is a general understanding of how the activity in which [identify by name] participated impacted him/her, you perhaps, and the community.

Do you have any questions for us?

So, let’s get started. I will ask five [for parents, four otherwise] main questions, and in some cases I will have a few brief follow-up questions for you. Thank you again for your time.”

#### **QUESTION 1. DID YOU NOTICE ANY CHANGES IN [NAME] WHILE OR AFTER HE/SHE TOOK PART IN THE ACTIVITY?**

Illustrative follow up questions (select from the list depending on how much information the respondent already has volunteered):

- Changes in his/her behavior?
- Changes in the views he/she expresses?
- Changes in his/her opinions about certain topics (if the respondent did not already cover in his/her response to b)
- If the answer is positive: Which topics? How have his/her views changed?
- Changes in how she/he seems to feel about the future? [ask for elaboration if needed: has he/she become more optimistic or more pessimistic? In which ways or areas? How does that greater optimism/pessimism manifest itself?]
- Changes in how he/she spends time? [ask for elaboration if needed]
- Changes in the people with whom he/she spends time? [ask for elaboration if needed]

**QUESTION 2. HAVE ANY OF THE CHANGES YOU NOTICED AFTER [NAME] TOOK PART IN THE ACTIVITY DISSIPATED SINCE THEN? HAVE THEY BECOME LESS VISIBLE OR PRONOUNCED?**

- **If the answer is positive:**  
Which change? In which areas (refer to the menu of options offered in Question 1)  
To what do you attribute the return to [depending on the answer to a: older attitudes or views; previous patterns of behavior; previous ways of spending time and with whom]?

**QUESTION 3: DO YOU THINK THAT [NAME] IS IN DANGER OF FALLING PREY TO NEGATIVE INFLUENCES, SUCH AS DRUGS, GANGS, OR HARMFUL AND DESTRUCTIVE IDEAS?**

- [If the answer to the question is positive, but the respondent has not identified a specific threat] Which negative influences are of greatest concern to you? Why?
- In your view, did the activity in which [name] took part do anything to reduce the likelihood that he/she will [refer to negative influence(s) of greatest concern, as expressed by the respondent in his/her response to the previous question]?
- Why/Why not?/How (if the answer to the previous question is positive)?
- [If the answer to b was positive] How long do you think the activity in which [name] took part will continue to protect him/her against [refer to the negative influence(s) of greatest concern, as expressed in a]?
- Have negative influences, and especially those about which you are most concerned, increased since the activity came to an end?

**If the answer is positive, but insufficiently specific, follow-up questions might include:**

- Why have these negative influences increased?
- How do these negative influences manifest themselves?

**QUESTION 4. DO YOU THINK THE COMMUNITY BENEFITED IN ANY SIGNIFICANT WAY FROM THE ACTIVITY IN WHICH [NAME] TOOK PART?**

**If the answer to the question is negative:**

- Why not?
- How different do you think the activity would have needed to be for it to have had a more substantive and positive impact on the community [ask for elaboration if needed]?

**If the answer to the question is positive:**

- What are the two major benefits that the community gained from this activity?
- Do you feel that the activity made it more difficult for violent ideas to gain traction in your community, or for violent extremist organizations to gain a foothold in it?
- Why/why not/how?
- [If the answers to a and b are positive] Now that the activity has ended, are you confident that its benefits to the community will endure, or do you feel it is more likely that these benefits will dissipate over time? [ask for elaboration if needed]

**QUESTION 5. [FOR PARENTS] WOULD YOU ALLOW OR EVEN ENCOURAGE [NAME] TO TAKE PART AGAIN IN THE SAME KIND OF ACTIVITY?**

- Why? Why not?
- If the answer is “no”: how different would the activity have needed to be for you to feel comfortable in [name] participating again in it?

## 3. QUESTIONS FOR POTENTIAL INDIRECT BENEFICIARIES IN THE COMMUNITY

### INTRODUCTION

#### GUIDELINES

- Do not read. Memorize beforehand and deliver with minimal reference to handwritten notes.
- Prior to any given interview or FGD, those tasked with conducting it should study carefully the grant that will be referenced during it, so that they can summarize smoothly and effectively the objective and content of the activity the grant made possible. Respondents should not be asked to describe the activity. Instead, the interviewer should refresh their memory about what the activity entailed, and then proceed with the suggested questions. The interview or FGD will yield useful information only if interviewers are already familiar with the activity discussed. Please prepare accordingly

#### SUGGESTED WORDING

“Thank you very much for making time to speak with us today about the activity [state nature of activity] that took place in your community in/between [state date/time period]. As you may remember, this activity involved [introduce the specific grant and provide a clear summary of it. Note that potential indirect beneficiaries are likely to be far less familiar with the activity than participants and even close personal connections; therefore, the summary of the activity will need to be more detailed than for the previous two categories of respondents].

USAID, which funded this activity as well as many other similar ones, has asked us to conduct a series of brief surveys to determine what was positive about the activity, and what it may have contributed to those who took part in it, those closely connected to them, but also the community at large – or individuals like you, who may have been directly or indirectly impacted by the activity, either positively or negatively.

USAID hopes that, through these discussions, it will be able in the future to come up with more effective ways of helping improve the well-being of the Lebanese communities in which it supports various projects.

None of the questions we are asking are particularly sensitive, and, of course, all the answers will be kept confidential. Again, all that we are trying to get through these discussions is a general understanding of how the activity we are discussing impacted you and your community.

Do you have any questions for us?

So, let’s get started. I will ask three main questions, and in some cases I will have a few brief follow-up questions for you. Thank you again for your time.”

**QUESTION 1.** DO YOU FEEL THAT [REFERENCE THE ACTIVITY] HAS HAD A POSITIVE AND SUBSTANTIVE IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY IN GENERAL?

**Follow-up questions**

**If the answer is negative:**

- Why?
- How different would the activity have needed to be for it to have had a more substantive and positive impact on you and/or the community?

**If the answer to the question is positive:**

- How did you benefit from the activity?
- How did the community benefit from the activity?
- [If the respondent provided a positive answer to the question] What exactly did the activity change for the better? [ask for elaboration if needed]
- [If the respondent provided a positive answer to the question] Are you confident that those benefits/positive changes will endure? Why/why not?

**QUESTION 2.** WOULD YOU HAVE LIKED TO BE INVOLVED MORE DIRECTLY IN THAT ACTIVITY, OR IN A SIMILAR ONE, AND WHY?

**QUESTION 3.** DO YOU FEEL THAT THE ACTIVITY MADE IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR VIOLENT IDEAS TO GAIN TRACTION IN YOUR COMMUNITY, OR FOR VIOLENT EXTREMIST ORGANIZATIONS TO GAIN A Foothold IN IT?

- Why/why not/how? [ask for elaboration if needed]
- [If the answer to the question is positive] Are you more concerned about the ability of violent ideas or violent extremist organizations to take hold in your community now that the activity has come to an end?

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