

EX POST PAPER

RAN LOCAL How to cooperate with religious organisations and communities within the local approach to radicalisation?

RAN LOCAL Brussels, 8 December 2016

Summary

The last meeting of RAN LOCAL in 2016 in Brussels focused on cooperating with religious organisations and communities within the local approach to radicalisation. Four dilemma's formed the basis of the discussions during this meeting. In this paper the condensed version of the outcomes of this meeting is described.

Introduction

During this meeting about cooperating with religious organisations and communities within the local approach to radicalisation we focused on four dilemma's:

1. How to choose the 'right' religious organisations to cooperate with as a municipality?
2. How to assess the credibility of religious organisations?
3. How to start interreligious dialogue and why?
4. How to be an intermediary between municipalities and religious organisations?

1. Right Partners

How to choose the right partners for cooperation in the prevention of radicalisation? How to choose partners who play role in the local community and are willing to cooperate and are trustworthy?

Principals when engaging:

- It is key to have a long term strategy about the reason why cooperating together with religious organisations within the local community against violent extremisms. The goal of the cooperation and the reason to cooperate need to be clear from the start for all parties involved.
- The key religious organisations could be listed in the local strategy or action plan against violent extremism next to the description of the reason (why) to and aim (goal) of cooperation.
- Be transparent about the procedures and terms of cooperation and/or possible

funding. The funding or recognition criteria need to be clear cut and consistent, both for organisations you cooperate and do not cooperate with.

2. Credibility

After selecting the religious organisations and communities their credibility needs to be checked. Some tips:

- Due diligence is needed. Look into the funding of the organisations, when and how they were mentioned in the media, look at the website, press releases etc.
- What is the ideology, the mission and who are the main members/followers of this organisation in your local community? Do they accept democracy? And, important, before starting an dialogue: What is the organisations view on pluralism, are they inclusive or exclusive? This will determine the goals .
- Make an estimate about the role of the organisations you consider to work with in the local community. Who do they represent and what have they already done about countering violent extremism and the prevention of radicalisation? Can they actually play a role?

Checklist



- Key partner in local CVE approach
- Mission & Ideology
- Members/followers
- View on pluralism, inclusive or exclusive
- Funding
- In media & own press releases
- Openess to dialogue
- CVE experience
- Problems within their community

3. Interreligious dialogue

After selecting and checking credibility the cooperation can be started. For example by starting interreligious dialogue. But how to start a dialogue and why?

- Keep in mind that often, some dialogue is better than no dialogue. Have knowledge about the organisation or community. Check with the first line practitioners who are in contact with persons who belong to the community or organisations. Build on the experience from the field. They can also help to identify the credible voices or key figures.
- There are no simple answers for multi-layered phenomena. Avoid isolation is the biggest challenge, this is why communication is essential. Keep listening to pluralist perspectives.
- Look into the organisation. What are their main concerns and issues? Do their members/followers have specific problems? Ask the first line practitioners who work with them for information as well.

- Do not have a hidden agenda when cooperating or starting a dialogue. Be clear about expectations, reasons and limits.
- Certain knowledge is required to work with Muslim organisations. For example: know the difference in Jihadist and Islamic ideology.
- An (interreligious) dialogue is a way to ease tensions. Direct “face to face” contact matter a lot.
- Provide a neutral ground which makes it easier to interact. Discuss themes that ‘clicks’ or concerns all, like child abuse, youth work. Contact with representatives from religious institutions, but also beyond these representatives.
- Listen also to the concerns of the community or organisation.
- Look into ways to engage together with other religious organisations in positive action. Support local / grassroots initiatives.

4. Intermediary

Once the cooperation is started the local authorities can form a bridge between the key religious organisations within the local community. Together they can play a role in creating an inclusive society and keeping people ‘on board’ and not ‘loose’ them to extremist organisations. How can the local authorities be the intermediary?

Tips:

- It is important to give plural perspectives, to be open to all groups. Do weigh

different perspectives, take into account how many people are represented and their expertise. Ask who the person represents to get that clear.

- Motivate: find common ground, common goals, meet the people where they are (also physically), find out what their situation and needs are.
- Potential of the network as part of the solution. Religion institutions can be part of the solution. You have to be clear about the challenges or problems and the role the organisations can play. State what is expected of them.
- Local authorities can be the facilitator, for round table discussions and for dialogue. Telling what legal boundaries are for what you can do and say in public, telling what the legal framework is. Establish boundaries and rules.
- Finding common denominators, like removing people from poverty.
- Bring partners together, to start the discussion, being as neutral as possible.
- Being positive on what we have in common.
- Do not have a one sided focus, for example only contact for CVE purposes. Reciprocity is involved in human reaction. There are more concerns than 'only CVE' and are the authorities there as well when it regards other issues like drop-out youth, discrimination or bad press? Be clear about what they can expect of the local authorities.

- Example: Draft a manual for 'the good mosque'. Do not interfere on how to run a mosque.
- Do not stigmatise one group.

On the next page, 7 useful tips for instant cooperation by Nicholas Boothman.¹

¹ More info @ www.nicholasboothman.com

7 Tips for good cooperation by Nicholas Boothman

1. **If you want instant cooperation always use the word “because”** (“have you thought about talking to/incorporating this because.....”) Automatic response is based on reason, or at least the appearance of reason.
2. **Adjust your attitude to fit the situation before you approach someone**, or they approach you because your attitude not only drives your behavior – it drives theirs. Welcoming, curious, enthusiastic and resourceful are really useful attitudes.
3. **Speak in positives because when you say what you mean it makes cooperation easy.** (“Rest assured” instead of “don’t worry,” “you are welcome,” instead of “no problem,” “call me with any questions about delivery,” instead of “don’t hesitate to call if you are unsure about delivery”)
4. **Make eye contact because you can’t create trust without it.** The same goes for open **body language** – open hands, uncrossed arms, etc.
5. **Give feedback, physical and spoken** (nod, say “I see” etc.), it makes the person feel understood and gets them to open up.
6. **Make sure your voice tone, your body language and your words are all saying the same thing.** Mixed messages (like smirking when you’re angry) cause confusion and destroy trust.
7. **Be on the lookout for opportunities to say “Me, too”** (or “What a coincidence,” or “Funny you should say that”). There is no faster way