



Hedayah



The Roles of Families and Communities in Strengthening Community Resilience Against Violent Extremism

Meeting Note
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Introduction

In recent years, a great deal of attention has been directed at understanding why and how individuals can be mobilized to support or commit acts of violent extremism and terrorism, and whether there are intervention points along the process of radicalization or mobilization which offer opportunities for prevention. Less attention has however been paid to the environment in which the individuals are either radicalized or de-radicalized, and the role that families and communities might play in efforts to counter violent extremism (CVE). To that end, Hedayah and the Global Center on Cooperative Security¹ convened a workshop on 4-5 December 2013 in Abu Dhabi to explore the “Roles of Families and Communities in Strengthening Community Resilience against Violent Extremism.” Meeting participants were drawn from a range of countries including Afghanistan, Australia, Austria, Canada, France, Germany, Indonesia, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and the United States. Operating under Chatham House Rule, participants with expertise in a broad range of fields – including those working with victims of terrorism, youth, rehabilitation and reintegration of detainees and combatants, women’s groups and civil society organizations – considered the roles families and communities can play in both the radicalization process as well as in efforts to prevent and respond to violent extremism, and how these can inform CVE policies and practices.

Background

As the international community has struggled to respond to contemporary terrorism and violent extremism, there has been a recognition among key stakeholders that a reactive approach focused on traditional law-enforcement tactics, while it may be necessary at times, is insufficient to addressing the threat in the medium to long term. Increasingly, counter-terrorism policies are being developed that include more proactive approaches with an emphasis on preventing terrorism and violent extremism by reducing the appeal of, and support for, extremist groups and ideologies. This evolution is reflected in a number of emerging norms and practices developed at the multilateral level, including the United Nations’ Global Counterterrorism Strategy (2006), which promotes a multidimensional approach and urges states to address “conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism.”² Members of the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) have also

¹ On March 4, the Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation (CGCC), the co-organizer of this workshop, became the Global Center on Cooperative Security. To learn more about this change please visit www.globalcenter.org.

² United Nations, “United Nations Global Counter Terrorism Strategy,” *United Nations Action to Counter*

agreed that community engagement is a crucial component in CVE activities and initiatives. The specific topic of the role of families and communities has surfaced during discussions at GCTF meetings, which led to two good practices documents that were adopted at the Fourth GCTF Ministerial Meeting in September 2013: the *Good Practices on Community Engagement and Community-Oriented Policing as Tools to Counter Violent Extremism*,³ and the *Ankara Memorandum on Good Practices for a Multi-Sectoral Approach to Countering Violent Extremism*.⁴

The normative framework for CVE also draws on other important international efforts that focus on conflict prevention and mitigation, and the roles of different groups. For example, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (as well as subsequent resolutions on women, peace and security) has promoted the roles of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, areas that can also play important roles in countering violent extremism and in delegitimizing and reducing support for extremist groups. Recent deliberations within the United Nations on this topic underscored the need to include women's and girls' empowerment and gender equality in international peace and security efforts, with UN Security Council Resolution 2122 (2013) specifically underscoring the critical contributions of women and women's organizations to conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding.⁵ The importance of these efforts has also been reflected in the new mandate for the UN Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (UN CTED), noting to "increase its attention to women, peace and security issues in all relevant thematic areas of work on its agenda, including in threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts."⁶

To more closely understand both the positive and negative roles women can play in relation to violent extremism, the Global Center co-hosted a meeting with the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) in Singapore, in September 2013, titled "Strengthening Community Resilience Against Violent Extremism in South Asia: What Role for Women and Civil Society?" Discussions focused on the many positive roles for women in the region to further development, human rights and good governance. Conversely, participants also explored the roles women have played in furthering violence and extremism, and what kinds of motivations and drivers contributed to their activities. These discussions highlighted lessons learned and good practices in the region that can shape CVE efforts, and also underscored the broader role played by families and communities. The discussions in Singapore benefitted from insights and contributions from participants representing all but one country of the 'SAARC' (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) region as well as Europe, West Africa, the United States and the United Nations, and closely informed

Terrorism, September 8, 2006, <http://www.un.org/en/terrorism/strategy-counter-terrorism.shtml> (accessed May 5, 2014).

3 Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), "Good Practices on Community Engagement and Community-Oriented Policing as Tools to Counter Violent Extremism," http://www.thegctf.org/documents/10162/72352/13Aug09_Community+Engagement+and+Community-Oriented+Policing+Good+Practices+++pdf (accessed May 5, 2014).

4 GCTF, "Ankara Memorandum on Good Practices for a Multi-Sectoral Approach to Countering Violent Extremism," <http://www.thegctf.org/documents/10162/88482/Final+Ankara+Memorandum.pdf> (accessed May 5, 2014).

5 UN Security Council, "Resolution 2122", October 18, 2013, <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2122> (accessed May 5, 2014).

6 UN Security Council, "Resolution 2129", December 17, 2013, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2129\(2013\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2129(2013)) (accessed May 5, 2014).

Hedayah is the International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism, established in Abu Dhabi through the GCTF. Hedayah was established to serve as the premier international institution for training and capacity building, dialogue, collaboration, and research to counter violent extremism in all of its forms and manifestations, in support of long-term, global efforts to prevent and counter terrorism.

The Global Center works with governments, international organizations, and civil society to develop and implement comprehensive and sustainable responses to complex international security challenges through collaborative policy research, context-sensitive programming, and capacity development. In collaboration with a global network of expert practitioners and partner organizations, the Global Center fosters stronger multilateral partnerships and convenes key stakeholders to support integrated and inclusive security policies across national, regional and global levels.



the agenda and concept note for the December workshop in Abu Dhabi.⁷

The emphasis on the role of families and communities in identifying early signs of violent extremism is also underscored by lessons learned in disengaging and de-radicalizing members of violent extremist organizations, whether white supremacist or Neo-Nazi gangs, ethno-nationalist separatists or religiously inspired groups. These experiences have underscored the critical role that mothers, fathers, siblings and social networks can play as a conduit of values and traditions, and particularly in shaping the worldviews of children and youths. This also provides valuable opportunities to detect early signs of support or engagement with violent ideas and activities. At the same time, experts have also noted that families can also be supportive of violent extremist groups and ideas, and may in some cases provide an enabling environment for young people to join extremist groups.

The ‘Families and Communities’ workshop also drew heavily on an emerging discussion about the role of education and educational institutions in contributing to CVE. In his address to the UN Security Council in November 2013, former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair observed that “The root causes of extremism will never be defeated by security measures, only the education of young people can achieve their demise.”⁸ Prior to that presentation, the Global Center and Hedayah hosted an expert roundtable in September 2013 on the role of education in CVE, where participants pointed out that educational facilities and initiatives provide an important locus of interaction for families and communities; values and lessons imparted in the classroom can be countered or reinforced at home. There has been much discussion about the role of education (or lack thereof) in creating conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, and the critical importance of female education.⁹ This is reflective of findings in development studies that educating mothers reduces the health risk to children and improves their development indicators.¹⁰ Hedayah also hosted a Senior Official meeting on this topic on 25 September 2013 in New York to raise high level awareness and political support of the topic. The outcomes of the September 2013 meetings also provided the impetus for the December 2013 workshop in Abu Dhabi on the role of families and communities in CVE.

7 Fink, Naureen Chowdhury and Rafia Barakat, “Strengthening Community Resilience Against Violence and Extremism: The Roles of Women in South Asia,” Center On Global Counterterrorism Cooperation, November, 2013, http://globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/13Nov27_Women-and-CVE-in-South-Asia_Policy-Brief_Final.pdf (accessed May 5, 2014).

8 Blair, Tony, “Education is a security issue”, *Speech at the Counter-Terrorism Committee of the United Nations Security Council*, November 21, 2013.

9 Alhassen, Wedad; Rafia Barakat, Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Ivo Veenkamp and Sara Zeiger, “The Role of Education in Countering Violent Extremism”, Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation, Hedayah, December, 2013, http://globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Dec13_Education_Expert_Meeting_Note.pdf (accessed May 5, 2014).

10 See for example, World Bank, “How Does Schooling of Mothers Improve Child Health? Evidence from Morocco,” April, 1997: <http://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/book/10.1596/0-8213-3833-1>.

Despite the high-level recognition and support of community engagement strategies surrounding the role of families and communities in CVE, there has been little discussion or expert engagement on how lessons learned to date can practically shape CVE policies and programs. The workshop in Abu Dhabi meeting sought to begin filling this gap and identifying recommendations on how actors at the local, national, and international levels can engage with families and communities to counter violent extremism. This workshop in Abu Dhabi raised three key questions that shaped the discussions:

- 1. With whom should governments, NGOs, civil society, and other relevant actors engage with on CVE issues?**
- 2. How can engaging with families and communities enhance the effectiveness of CVE programming, and what lessons can be learned from engagement in related areas (education, victims, rehabilitation, for example)?**
- 3. What methods or good practices can be identified, from related areas of engagement, have proved successful and applicable to CVE efforts?**

The remainder of this report will address each of these three questions, drawing extensively from participant inputs to the workshop, and also from related research and literature reviews undertaken by the organizers.

With Whom to Engage?

Credible Community Actors

Underscoring the good practices listed in the *Ankara Memorandum on Good Practices for a Multi-Sectoral Approach to Countering Violent Extremism*¹¹ and *Good Practices on Community Engagement and Community-Oriented Policing as Tools to Countering Violent Extremism*,¹² attendees at the meeting identified trust as a crucial element to building relationships within a community and delivering effective preventive messaging that builds resilience to violent extremism. *Good Practices on Community Engagement and Community-Oriented Policing as Tools to Countering Violent Extremism* also emphasizes the need to empower communities to develop a counter-narrative to the violent extremist narrative.

Elaborating on this topic, participants agreed that the message or narrative to prevent violent extremism must come from trusted voices. Experts at the meeting shared that their experience suggested that the most trusted community members were often mothers, fathers, relatives, teachers and friends. Community leaders and religious leaders were also identified as trusted members of society. It was agreed that women, especially in their roles as mothers and wives, are powerful preventers and have the ability to dissuade family members from supporting or perpetrating violence. On the other hand, among some of the least trusted members of the community were the police as well as government officials who were not always best positioned to deliver a counter-narrative, a view shared by several participants across the different workshops on this topic.

In terms of programming and policy, participants recommended that CVE efforts take into

¹¹ Good Practice 10 says “it is crucial for states to build trust while working with communities. States should ensure meaningful community participation in order to mobilize the resources of the community in CVE-relevant activities.” See <http://www.thegctf.org/documents/10162/88482/Final+Ankara+Memorandum.pdf>.

¹² Good Practice 2 says “Establish the methods with which to build trust in the community.” See http://www.thegctf.org/documents/10162/72352/13Aug09_Community+Engagement+and+Community-Oriented+Policing+Good+Practices+++pdf.



consideration the local perceptions of trusted community members. Participants also noted that it is essential for local communities and community groups to take ownership of the problem of violent extremism and the interventions to prevent it, and cautioned against interventions that are driven by external parties. The sections below elaborate on some of the credible and trusted community voices with which policymakers and practitioners should engage.

Youth

Reflective of the good practices listed in the *Ankara Memorandum*,¹³ as well as recent discussions that have taken place in the international community on the role of education and CVE and lessons learned from the development community, participants identified youth as the most likely instigators of change within the community. Consequently, the need to invest in developing young community leaders as responsible citizens and role models was widely emphasized. It was pointed out during the meeting discussions that there is little research on youth needs and aspirations, and that CVE programming should consider and respect the views of young people—and include them in the program design—whenever possible. Attendees also noted that programs should not only focus their attention on developing citizenship skills in the obvious youth leaders, but also on marginalized youths who may be the most vulnerable to recruitment by extremists. That is, in order to effectively build a cohort of youth leaders, CVE program developers should provide opportunities for youth that have the talent to lead and organize, but may not have had enough opportunities for success in their context to make them strong members of their community.

Victims and Survivors of Terrorism

Participants at the Abu Dhabi meeting noted that victims and survivors of terrorism were potential powerful community voices against violent extremism.¹⁴ However, participants also warned that victims are themselves also subject to different pressures and influences, and should not automatically be assumed a representative for all victims. There was also a discussion about respecting the time and process needed for victims of terrorism to recover from their trauma. It was also noted that for many young people, direct contact with victims was a powerful experience and could help challenge extremist narratives and rhetoric. Offering support for victims of terrorism and opportunities for them to share

¹³ Good practice 14 says “CVE programming should place a specific emphasis on youth at risk of radicalization and recruitment.”

¹⁴ The UN Global Counterterrorism Strategy (2006) lists victims of terrorism and their families as important community actors in preventing terrorism, and encourages Members to facilitate normalization for victims and support their engagement in civil society in the global campaign against terrorism. The subsequent mandates for the UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (UN CTITF), through the Global Strategy, and the mandate for the UN Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (UNCTED), through UNSCR 2129 (2013), have indicated that supporting victims of terrorism is one way of addressing conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism. Similarly, the *Madrid Declaration on Victims of Terrorism* declares support for victims as a primary concern in the efforts to counter violent extremism. See GCTF, “Madrid Declaration on Victims of Terrorism”, July, 2012, <http://www.thegctf.org/documents/10162/39710/Madrid+Declaration-English> (accessed March 9, 2014).

their experiences was seen as an important means of humanizing conflict and particularly with vulnerable groups, alerting them to the human cost of violence.

Cultural and Religious Leaders

Participants noted the need to continue to engage cultural and faith leaders, and the valuable role they can play in their communities in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Religious and traditional cultural leaders are often trusted community members that are positioned to offer support and guidance to families or potential extremists. Moreover, they are often well placed within communities, in terms of community relationships but also a physical presence, and can advise and support the development of appropriate CVE initiatives and also credible interlocutors who can participate in them. It is therefore important that such actors are equipped with counter-narratives that are useful and practical for families and individuals to use when engaging with loved-ones that are at different stages during the radicalization process, and engaged as appropriate in the development and implementation of CVE initiatives.

The impact of family on countering violent extremism

Whilst the international community has paid closer attention to community actors' roles in preventing and countering violent extremism, less attention has been paid to CVE interventions that focus on the family unit and communities of support that might either contribute to the radicalization process, or participate in efforts to prevent or counter radicalization. Drawing on different fields of practice and research, participants at the Abu Dhabi meeting indicated that in many instances, families have a significant impact on an individual's choice to engage in violent extremism.¹⁵

In particular, participants noted the positive role that family members may play in preventing or countering violent extremism. The experiences of several practitioners working in contexts as varied as northern Europe, the Middle East and Southeast Asia has demonstrated the important role of families and social networks in ensuring in many instances the success of de-radicalization or disengagement programs. Participants also discussed that families of former violent extremists are also particularly critical in the rehabilitation process. "Family days" in prison settings have been effective tools to reengage families with detainees in a structured and supervised environment. The roles of spouses and partners were particularly highlighted in these processes, noting that women have a powerful role in shaping the rehabilitation and reintegration process of male violent extremist offenders.

However, meeting attendees also noted that isolation, particularly isolation of women or children, could limit roles they can play in identifying, addressing or reporting concerns about violent extremism either in their families or in their communities. Isolation also makes them less accessible to the police and other law enforcement officials, particularly male officers. For example, one participant recalled from her research that some women felt that they could not share grievances or concerns about their children with anyone outside their homes. To that end, a number of recommendations were made to engage women

¹⁵ See also for example "The Role of Civil Society in Counter-Radicalisation and De-Radicalisation: A Working Paper of the European Policy, planners' Network on Countering Radicalisation and Polarisation (PPN)", Institute for Strategic Dialogue, https://www.counterextremism.org/download_file/10/134/6/ (accessed May 3, 2014).



and children in CVE programming and overcome the challenges of isolation. These recommendations included: the recruitment and training of more female law enforcement officials, developing a more community-centric and collaborative approach to policing and the creation of safe spaces where mothers, or other family members, felt able to share concerns and discuss their experiences.

It was also noted by several participants that there was a further need to focus on the roles of fathers in both recruitment and prevention, especially given the importance attributed to the father-son relationship in many cultures. Several meeting attendees described cases in which an absent father figure led to feelings of resentment and isolation in a young boy, and how those feelings can contribute to their engagement with violent extremism. In this regard, meeting participants recommended that research be undertaken on the role of fathers and father figures, and that CVE programming should consider engaging with men in the community as fathers.

Families roles in recruitment and participation in violent extremism

On the other hand, elaborating on recent research on the participation of women in violent extremism, participants noted that both women and men contribute to the radicalization process and support for violent extremism in their communities.¹⁶ As one participant noted, terrorism is a “family affair”, and that a male relative engaged in violent extremism also increases the probability that female members are involved in a violent extremist organization.

Meeting participants noted that sexual violence against children has sometimes led to recruitment into violent extremism, particularly for young girls who feel they need to redeem their honor, or that of their family members. Participants also suggested that sometimes participation in violent extremism is due to coercion by family or group members, as was the recent case of a young Afghan girl claiming her brother forced her to become a suicide bomber.¹⁷ Reinforcing recent attention on including women and children in peace and security concerns, notably through UNSCR 1325 (2000) and UNSCR 2122 (2013), experts at this meeting discussed the need for policy and interventions to better address the role of violence against women and girls in conflict areas, especially sexual violence, and its relationship to violent extremism. However, participants noted on the contrary, that women have also been voluntary and capable recruits into violent

¹⁶ Dr. Mia Bloom has written extensively about the role of women and girls in violent extremist organizations, with examples from Russia, Northern Ireland, Palestine, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Iraq and others. See *Bombshell: The Many Faces of Women Terrorists* (2011). The subject has also gained some traction through the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), who recently held a workshop on “Women, Girls, Gender in Extremism: Gender-Specific Approached in Prevention/Intervention”, which discussed women’s involvement in Neo-Nazi and rightwing extremism in Europe as part of a broader project evaluating women in extremism. See Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), “Women Girls, Gender in Extremism: Gender Specific Approaches in Prevention/Intervention”, December, 2013, http://www.cultures-interactive.de/womex-en.html?file=tl_files/projekte/womex/Programme_WomEx-Berlin_December-12th-and-13th.pdf (accessed May 5, 2014).

¹⁷ Popalzai, Masoud and Mariano Castillo, “Afghan girl says she was sent on a suicide mission”, CNN. <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/01/07/world/asia/afghanistan-girl-suicide-mission/> (accessed May 5, 2014).

extremism, and their active and willing participation should also not be underestimated.

Participants at the Abu Dhabi meeting recommended that future community engagement interventions should consider developing programs that consider relationships between family members in greater detail, and cautioned that families play a heavy role both in preventing violent extremism, but also in encouraging it. Participants recommended that policymakers are mindful of the fact that family members play different and important roles in the home and in the community, and that interventions should take into consideration local perceptions and cultural traditions of the family unit. CVE interventions can engage family members through a variety of programing such as educational or vocational classes, dialogue sessions or cultural activities that encourage their participation in CVE efforts.

What engagements or interventions are most effective?

A number of critical opportunities and needs were discussed among participants considering how the discussions about the roles of families and communities could inform current and future CVE policy and practice. The recommendations and ideas below reflect the discussions in Abu Dhabi, as well as those that preceded it, and indicate possible areas of CVE engagement that can address the need not only to consider the role of individuals, but communities of support, in efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism.

Developing parenting skills and knowledge about child development

Noting that one of the main programmatic challenges for CVE actors is establishing effective methods for engaging with families, meeting attendees suggested that parenting classes could be one way of reaching families in regions susceptible to recruitment. Participants shared experiences from their work with families that parents often do not possess adequate knowledge of child-rearing and child development, which can limit the ability of a parent to detect early warning signs of violent extremism or potentially contribute to radicalization. Participants noted several examples of after-school programs that educated mothers on child development and psychology and were successful in addressing processes related to radicalization. There was general agreement that building parenting skills and knowledge of child development could help strengthen the relationship between the parents and the children. This in turn could also result in improving communication between parents and children on difficult topics such as violence or radicalization.

Participants also noted that there was a lack of available information for families on what to do when a parent suspects their child is involved with violent extremism. It was also discussed that often parents are aware of the early warning signs, but do not know how to respond, or to whom to communicate in this case. Some participants discussed the idea of “hotlines” for radicalization, but it was noted that there was already a previous unsuccessful attempt to develop such a hotline. It was also mentioned that families are not likely to report signs of radicalization to police or law enforcement due to the potential consequences, such as arrest or imprisonment.



As such, CVE policies that are engaging particularly with families should consider training parents on child development. These training courses could include a CVE-relevant discussion on the warning signs of radicalization, effective counter-narrative strategies, and disengagement methods. Moreover, training courses for parents on child development and child-raising could be a mechanism for CVE actors to interact with populations in areas susceptible to recruitment in a way that does not appear to be over-securitized.

Enhancing education opportunities at the formal and non-formal levels

Participants' comments on community education were generally in alignment with previous discussions on the role of education, specifically that "civic education and citizenship responsibility components in curricula could equip students with the social and communication skills necessary to address their grievances in a positive, nonviolent way."¹⁸ Additionally, participants generally noted the need for CVE programming to provide youth the opportunities to develop leadership skills, foster independent thinking, and empower youth to challenge extremist messages and narratives. One participant suggested that CVE programming could connect youth to existing community leaders to develop mentoring relationships.

In addition to civic education, participants discussed cases in which families, particularly mothers, stated that a better knowledge of religion would be useful for countering the narrative of violent extremism. Meeting attendees generally agreed that hosting families at regular sessions with religious scholars could help inform and educate families to better prepare them to offer alternative interpretations of religious ideas when confronted by violent extremism with religious undertones. Participants noted that this was particularly critical for communities receiving former violent extremists back into the communities; families of formers in particular should be equipped with the necessary tools to counter the justifications of violence, both religiously and ideologically.

Strengthening local and regional narratives

The Global Counterterrorism Forum's CVE Working Group has noted that communications strategies are an essential component of a broad-based counter-terrorism strategy.¹⁹ However, it has also been noted that governments and multi-lateral organizations are not always the most effective messenger for positive or counter-narratives against violent extremism.²⁰ Participants noted that building local narratives that are unsupportive of violence and violent extremism is one way of preventing future radicalization that leads to violence. Also in alignment with recent discussions in the international community on the role of women in CVE,²¹ it was suggested by meeting attendees that an effective tool

18 Alhassen, et. al, "The Role of Education in Countering Violent Extremism", http://globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Dec13_Education_Expert_Meeting_Note.pdf.

19 GCTF, "GCTF CVE Working Group: WorkPlan 2012-2013", <http://www.thegctf.org/documents/10162/19594/CVE+Working+Group+2012-2013+Workplan>" (accessed May 5, 2014).

20 See GCTF, Hedayah, Center on Strategic Counterterrorism Communications, "Countering Violent Extremism through Communications Work Stream: Practical Seminar on Monitoring and Evaluation Techniques for CVE Communication", February, 2013, <http://www.hedayah.ae/pdf/cve-comms-february-2013-meeting-summary.pdf> (accessed May 5, 2014).

21 See, Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe, "Women and Terrorist Radicalization: Final

for countering the narrative of violent extremism is for community groups, particularly mothers of former violent extremists, to highlight the mundane aspects of violent extremism in contrast to the grandiose vision of violent extremist narratives. At the same time, participants suggested to use organic narratives and tools already existing in local traditions, specifically narratives that emphasize dialogue, inclusivity and tolerance. Participants also suggested that building effective community narratives also means equipping local communities with the skills to transmit messages effectively. This may include, for example, training on using local radio stations, computer skills, websites and/or social media.

What methods are effective in engaging families and communities?

Formal (and non-formal) education

Echoing the insights gleaned from previous discussions on Education and CVE, participants stated that even in well-developed education systems, there is often not curriculum that engages with youth on the particular topic of violent extremism. Participants noted that the school environment could be utilized as a safe space for addressing grievances and discussing community issues without the fear of punishment or consequences. However, participants also warned that without proper training, teachers/educational institutions could be used as a monitoring/intelligence gathering institution, which may detract from the overall CVE goal by decreasing community trust for a particular educational actor.

Meeting attendees raised the idea of “tandem teaching”, or bringing outside experts to the schools to teach on difficult topics in place of teachers. This may include religious leaders, experts on political science or even victims of terrorism. Participants also noted that one challenge to this idea could be that tandem teachers may have to compete with the work and lessons that are being taught in existing school systems.

Sports, arts and culture

In alignment with current discourse on Education and CVE, participants noted that sports, arts and cultural programming could be useful for delivering CVE content. Sports, in particular, were identified as a way to reach youth in conflict-ridden areas—to address grievances, to provide a physical outlet for frustrations, and to provide a mechanism to address difficult topics such as health, conflict, safety and gender. One participant gave an example of swimming lessons being offered to the community as a way to reach families. Parents brought their children to the swimming lessons to learn how to swim, but also engaged in structured group dialogue with other parents and families.

Participants also discussed examples of youth leadership programs that gave youth the opportunities to affect change in their community while developing key skills such as public speaking, problem-solving and creative/critical thinking.

Report,” February, 2013, <http://www.osce.org/secretariat/99919?download=true>.



It was noted that arts, music and theatre are an effective way to reach both youth and families as theatre/drama performances also engages families as audience. Films may also be an effective method for CVE programming to reach a larger audience. For example, victims' voices have been captured on film and shown at schools or in the community, and these films have been powerful at reaching a large number of community members.

Finally, participants noted that while many experts agree that art, culture and music are useful tools for developing critical thinking and problem solving skills in students that may help build community resilience, there is a general demand for subjects such as math and science in the developing world. This means that despite expert advice on the contrary, literature, art and music classes are receiving less funding. Participants recommended that one way to overcome this gap is to integrate creative problem-solving and critical thinking skills into existing math and science curricula.

Community-oriented policing

Well-developed community-oriented policing techniques have been effective in engaging families and communities, especially in work with youth and youth organizations. Participants noted that police that have a direct interaction with the community in the “pre-criminal space” help to build trust between police and the community. This not only helps the police in intelligence-gathering efforts to make arrests, but also helps the community see police as a trusted figure. In general, meeting attendees noted that tailoring CVE programs to address specific communities as “at-risk” for radicalization can be counter-productive. Instead, CVE programming for the police should be inclusive of the community at-large. It was also discussed that trust-building between police and community groups is most effective when the police have a local, credible partner with whom to engage—particularly for work with youth.

Adopting an integrated approach to CVE

In alignment with the work being done on community engagement, both through the United Nations and the GCTF, participants recommended a more integrated approach to engagement with families and communities across a multitude of stakeholders. That is, there needs to be a coordinated effort between many types of practitioners, including educators, development workers, social workers, corrections officers, police officers, peace-building, conflict resolution and youth organizations both in terms of policymaking and program design. Participants suggested there needs to be a simultaneous top-down and bottom-up approach to CVE programs involving families and communities; policies should support programs at a local level, and local initiatives should be aligned with government strategies.

Participants generally agreed that human rights should be a baseline for policies—effective policies keep basic humanity as core of policymaking. Further, integrating gender perspective into policies and programs is one way of addressing violent extremism; CVE and gender equality programming often have similar goals. Participants also cautioned

that anti-terrorism financing laws often favor larger, more organized non-governmental groups with a public profile. The community does not always trust these larger groups, and money does not always reach the partner on the ground that would be most effective at countering violent extremism. Smaller community organizations may also reject CVE funding because it undermines the community's trust of their organization and therefore undermines their effectiveness. These concerns could be addressed through a more coordinated effort to evaluate the effectiveness of the reach of grassroots organizations prior to accepting or denying funding, and through capacity-building projects that build grassroots organizations' abilities to manage funding grants.

Conclusion and next steps

The discussions that took place at the 'Families and Communities' meeting emphasized and built upon the current discourse on strategies, policies and methods for countering violent extremism and identified recommendations on how actors at the local, national, and international levels can engage with families and communities to counter violent extremism. The expert recommendations that were generated in this discussion could contribute to a planned good practices document on Education and Countering Violent Extremism, led by Hedayah, and a planned good practices document on Gender and Countering Violent Extremism, led by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), both of which will be endorsed by the GCTF at a Ministerial Meeting in the coming 2 years. These recommendations can also contribute to implementing the mandates of the UN CTITF and UN CTED by integrating non-traditional counter-terrorism actors such as women and youth into a more multi-faceted and comprehensive approach to counter-terrorism.