

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



The Prevention Project
Organizing Against Violent Extremism



CVE Workshop: Opportunities and Challenges for Bilateral and Multilateral Donors

Workshop Report, 17th June 2016



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 17 June in Brussels, the Royal United Services Institute, in partnership with the 'Prevention Project: Organizing Against Violent Extremism' and with generous funding support from the Government of Norway, convened representatives from national governments and international and non-governmental organisations to discuss the challenges that donors are confronting as they seek to counter violent extremism.¹

The closed-door workshop assessed the role of CVE donors, exploring the key trends impacting the field of "CVE", the structural, technical and financial difficulties associated with CVE-specific and CVE-related programming, and the practical challenges donors face as they look to expand their support for locally-led CVE interventions.

The workshop provided a platform for appraising contemporary CVE models, highlighting key concerns with the traditional approach donors are taking towards CVE – a field that may not be conducive to such an approach – and the broader conceptual problems that are now emerging as the international donor community seeks to operationalise and sustain what is intended to be a locally-driven CVE effort. The key themes, concerns, and recommendations highlighted during this meeting, many of which are captured in this report, will feed into a Prevention Project report – to be released by the end of January 2017 – that will offer actionable recommendations for policymakers and practitioners as they seek to maximise the impact of the global CVE agenda and, in particular, the "whole-of-society" approach embodied therein.²

Assessing the conceptual and structural challenges of implementing effective CVE strategies, participants argued the need for realistic expectations and focusing on what can be achieved in the short and medium term. To date, there has been some but still not enough headway in breaking down the silos that impede more effective cooperation between security and development actors that both need to be involved in CVE efforts. Participants noted the relatively new and amorphous nature of CVE as a field, with its definitional ambiguity that the international community has little appetite to address and that only serves to complicate the implementation of a global CVE effort. Instead of trying to prescribe a new ethic for the system as a whole, some suggested that donors focus on incremental improvements in programme management that are achievable in the short to medium term, while continuing to diagnose formal and informal opportunities for synergy.

The discussion highlighted how civil society organisations (CSOs) can provide often-neglected micro- and meso-level lenses for interpreting nuances within communities. A comprehensive understanding of local and community dynamics allows practitioners to detect radicalisation and emit early warning signals, enabling

¹ The terms 'countering violent extremism' and 'preventing violent extremism' were used interchangeably during the discussion and have likewise been used as such in this report.

² The ideas and recommendations highlighted in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the all the participants or the co-hosting organisations.

proactive measures that have a more targeted impact. However, participants cautioned that CSOs are too often perceived by donors as incidental partners in CVE programming whose value primarily derives from project delivery. Participants similarly underscored the importance of having collaboration move beyond simply appropriating local actors as conduits for imposing externally manufactured prescriptions. They argued for a concerted effort on the part of donors to enfranchise local agency at every level of policy process, from design through to implementation.

Participants noted that CSOs should make themselves as transparent as possible to alleviate the uncertainty of external sponsors and prove the relevance and effectiveness of their operations, particularly through systematically documenting their operations and highlighting realistic deliverables. However, concurrent changes should also be launched at the international level. By incorporating greater elasticity in their funding criteria, assuming more risk and designing pilot schemes to test the effectiveness of new initiatives, donors can proactively encourage innovation and help improve CVE methods.

In discussing local challenges, participants noted how donors face a number of competing priorities particularly over how they should engage politically unpalatable state and non-state actors.

Finally, participants highlighted a number of recommendations, including for further research and discussion:

1. The international donor community needs to improve how it **balances the pressure for short-term results with the long-term commitments** CVE requires by insulating funding, to the extent possible, from transient political demands.
2. There needs to be **greater investment in developing methods for monitoring and evaluating programs designed to counter violent extremism (“CVE-specific” programs)**. This should include increasing funding for small-scale pilot programmes and research projects to generate more data, and ensuring the results of these efforts and the resulting data are more systematically shared among donors and the broader CVE community.
3. There is insufficient **coordination of CVE initiatives and research**, leaving donors vulnerable to inadvertently duplicating their programming, wasting finite resources, and perpetuating knowledge gaps.
4. **Funding for locally-owned CVE initiatives has to be a sustained, long-term commitment**. This is not only to bolster the confidence and capabilities of local organisations and practitioners but also because preventative programming often requires long time-horizons if it is to be effective in building the trust in and winning the hearts and minds of recipient communities.

5. **It is incumbent on donors to experiment and take more risks**, going beyond the cluster of “usual suspects” and proactively seeking credible local actors who are effective on the ground but may lack the administrative capacity to apply for traditional service contracts. This includes expanding the core-funding mechanisms of organisations, such as GCERF, to enable more local CSOs to launch autonomous CVE-related projects. Doing so creates space for greater innovation and refinement of CVE strategies. These risks can be partially alleviated by preserving general funding conditions (e.g. the “Do No Harm” principle) and developing mechanisms to facilitate the regular transmission of information across the CVE community as a means of expediting learning and reinforcing donor confidence. Over the long term, risk would also be naturally mitigated as a collateral benefit of ‘smart’ investment, diminishing as a more effective set of ‘best practices’ coalesces.
6. **It is crucial that every actor engaging in CVE has a deep understanding of the environment in which they are operating.** The donor community can achieve this by integrating local voices at every level of programming, from its initial design to implementation and subsequent monitoring, and to the formation of both national and international plans of action.
7. **Strengthening the state-citizen relationship lies at the heart of effective CVE efforts and donors have a dual responsibility to not only provide funding to local initiatives but to exert their diplomatic and political influence where possible to help build confidence, mutual trust and strong governance.** Donors cannot afford to avoid engaging in centralised states that have yet to embrace local communities as CVE partners or where poor or weak governance is a driver of violent extremism. However, national CVE plans of action are most likely to be effective if local conditions align with the priorities the international community views as necessary for facilitating CVE. Donors must therefore walk a fine line between engaging with political realities on the ground and not being complicit in legitimising or perpetuating ‘bad governance’. Similarly, when taking decision on which local CSOs to support, donors have to determine the extent to which they are willing to accommodate the political preferences of host governments, and how far they are willing to fund CSOs that might be unpalatable to host and/or donor government, for example, non-violent extremist groups.
8. It is **essential to develop a comprehensive mapping of all CVE-relevant initiatives** as a basis for identifying and connecting disparate programmes, maximising inter-organisational synergies, encouraging information exchange and co-creation, and energising the overall implementation of the CVE agenda.
9. **There is still a systemic ambiguity** that persists across the field of CVE, with donors and practitioners often amalgamating security, development and CVE objectives without sufficiently differentiating among the them and the different time frames and conditions associated with each approach. Actors

need to be clear over what they are trying to achieve and properly sequence among different forms of intervention in order to exploit synergy more effectively.

1. STRATEGY AND ROLE OF DONORS

Key Points:

- Funding is likely to remain *ad hoc* unless those engaging in CVE-specific and CVE-related projects produce empirical evidence that clearly demonstrates the efficacy of their initiatives and shows how they complement and reinforce existing security and development-centric strategies.
- Every actor engaging in CVE should have a deep understanding of the environment in which he or she is operating. This can be achieved by integrating local voices at every level of programming, from its initial design to implementation and subsequent monitoring, and applies to the formation of both national and international plans of action.
- Despite the successes and efficiencies displayed during sporadic instances of inter-organisational collaboration around CVE, both governmental and multilateral actors face significant challenges in breaking-down silos and sustaining cross-institutional synergy.

Participants discussed the relationship between security and development-orientated programmes. Some expressed scepticism over the value of bifurcating the two approaches, and argued for a more integrated one to maximise comparative advantages in the application of both CVE and broader peace-building goals. Others pointed out that despite their mutual inter-dependence, security and development strategies are sequential and have numerous practical differences including divergent priorities, objectives and independent time frames. This has presented substantial problems for sustaining collaborative interventions, and there has been insufficient headway in successfully breaking down the silos that impede more effective cooperation between the two communities.

Participants conceded the strategic realities of operating in certain contexts, including Afghanistan and Iraq, have necessitated close cooperation among different agencies in a single government in the past. For example, Canada and a number of other Western donor countries were cited as building more holistic policy instruments after adopting a “3-D Approach”: deliberately joining up government processes to synthesise the faculties of defence, development and diplomacy. This manifested in a new stabilisation framework that, in theory, mobilises ‘all of government’ and harmonises the various dimensions of foreign intervention by balancing the priorities of capacity building with shorter-term security imperatives. While not concentrating explicitly on CVE, this template exemplified the advantages of horizontal thinking, and collaboration has subsequently both been largely normalised at the diplomatic level and, in various cases, between specific departments on an interpersonal basis.

However, participants emphasised that this cooperation has not translated into sustained cultural shifts in the bureaucratic infrastructure supporting programming on the ground in other contexts. While numerous top-down initiatives have been launched to incentivise greater institutional collaboration, and linkages can be quickly established between individuals, it is difficult to generate any systemic realignment in the existing power structures, particularly when they have pre-set budgetary interests. This was partially a problem of scale; government agencies are usually extensive institutional systems integrating a range of different actors but often lack mechanisms to facilitate efficient internal communication. This undermines their capacity to scale up models of inter-departmental collaboration.

Within multilateral platforms there is also a pervasive and persistent silo mentality that obstructs cross-institutional synergy. Participants noted the EU Defence Security Strategy 2012 for the Sahel, which incorporates an amalgam of EU development, diplomatic and defence interests and includes mandated explicitly predicated on inter-disciplinary cooperation. Despite the comprehensive, integrated framework on paper, participants described instances of individual EU agencies and programmes paying lip service to the benefits of a holistic approach while remaining largely insulated in practical terms.

Participants suggested that, as a hybrid field incorporating both development and security elements, CVE lacks any natural source of independent funding and remains susceptible to financial shortfalls. Defence spending typically consumes a very large share of national budgets, with the majority being channelled to core security programming. Some noted that scepticism over CVE's short-term deliverables and 'bang for its buck', alongside recent cuts in public expenditure experienced by all major government donors, has resulted in a persistent lack of resources devoted to the field. Development actors are similarly reticent about providing sustainable funding, and while their agendas increasingly refer to comprehensive CVE integration, participants argued there is a degree of financial and political expediency to this shift, suggesting that the broader development community still remains largely resistant to change. In this context, it was pointed out that funding is likely to remain ad hoc unless those engaging in CVE-specific and CVE-related³ projects produce empirical evidence that clearly demonstrates the efficacy of their initiatives and shows how they complement and reinforce existing security and development-centric strategies. However, some participants conceded that this would be a substantial challenge; standard development evaluation efforts are difficult in insecure environments and it is hard to demonstrate that deeper community engagement measurably reduces violent extremism.

The discussion underlined the need for a granular understanding of contextually specific dynamics when conducting CVE programming, and described the utility of CSOs in providing such an understanding of local contexts. A comprehensive understanding of local power structures, informal economic circuitries and societal norms allows CSOs to detect radicalisation and emit early warning signals, enabling

³ The term 'CVE specific' refers to activities that specifically aim to counter VE, whereas 'CVE relevant' alludes to activities that counteract VE drivers but in a less direct fashion.

proactive measures with a more targeted impact. They also act as essential interlocutors, translating the goals of CVE into a language more attuned to communal sensibilities. This is essential as CVE depends on audiences understanding, internalising and reproducing its value systems, which may be compromised if they are viewed as the product of a foreign entity. By partnering with domestic CSOs, exchanging ideas and fostering local ownership, recipient societies are likely to become more receptive to CVE interventions in a way that makes them sustainable.

However, it was strongly emphasised that donor engagement with CSOs should not be a tokenistic gesture. International actors recognise the need for local ownership but often fail to sustain it in practical terms across the duration of projects. This stems from a general hesitance on the part of Western policymakers to integrate civil society more formally in upstream decision-making processes. Instead, CSOs are too often perceived as incidental partners in CVE programming whose value primarily derives from project delivery. Participants argued for a concerted effort on the part of the donor community to enfranchise local agency at every level of policy process, from design to implementation.

Participants also highlighted that it was incumbent on donors to sustain funding to both demonstrate their commitment to their local partners and adhere to the substantial time-horizons associated with preventative programming. CVE challenges the underlying ideas, social constructs and structural drivers that initially precipitate extremism, and is therefore a long-term endeavour. It was noted that the majority of available finance is weighted towards short-term projects due to the risks associated with fixed long-term investments and the political expediency of demanding immediate results. This increases the risks of ineffective interventions and wasted resources, but also can also undermine the credibility of CVE as an emerging field of practice. It was suggested that donors revise both their funding models and expectations to correlate with the practical realities of local programming.

2. INTERNATIONAL ARCHITECTURE

Key Points

- Donors should continue to push for greater linkages among existing institutions despite their limitations rather than pursue structural reforms and risk replicating the same underlying problems in new platforms.
- There is a lack of leadership in coordinating CVE initiatives and research, leaving donors vulnerable to inadvertently duplicating their programming, wasting finite resources, perpetuating knowledge gaps and missing opportunities for capitalising on synergy between national, regional and international programming.
- The UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism has the potential to enhance donor coordination at the international level.
- Any reform at the international level needs to be supplemented with stringent donor coordination at the national and regional levels around plans of action that both align with the UN and reflect context specific priorities.

Bureaucratic inefficiencies, weak coordination, and resource strains at the multilateral level are not unique to CVE. Participants highlighted how these problems have characterised multilateral programming in general for decades, with consortiums focusing on fragile states, development and peace-building all reproducing the same policy prescriptions to address the same problems that consistently remain unresolved. Instead, by focusing on strengthening formal and informal linkages between existing institutions, there are on-going attempts in the CVE field to gradually improve intra and inter-organisational collaboration. Participants collectively hailed the transition as a step in the right direction, acknowledging the importance of setting realistic goals rather than replicating the same calls for vaguely defined and largely inapplicable cultural shifts in large, bureaucratic institutions.

The participants discussed the United Nation's Plan of Action, which argues for an 'all-of-UN Approach' to CVE with all relevant UN entities being asked to develop specific deliverables in seven identified priority areas.⁴ By avoiding micro-management and using experienced staffers to design and administer coordination mechanisms on a macro-level, some argued that it is possible to maintain structural cohesion while facilitating a constant exchange of information among different UN entities. One participant cited the creation of a high level P/CVE Action Unit, composed of senior managers, which functions as a steering body for a constellation of satellite working groups and would enable the UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force Working Groups – composed of specialists with technical expertise in CVE alongside local actors – to operate autonomously and deal more effectively with contextual nuances without diminishing the UN's overarching strategic vision.

Crucially, however, participants stressed the Plan of Action had not yet been formally adopted by the UN General Assembly and its measures remain non-binding, highlighting the challenges to having it influence state behaviour, especially if its prescriptions are seen as conflicting with national and political interests. The discussion highlighted that the UN General Assembly has already obstructed many of the new functions proposed by the Secretary General to support implementation of the Plan, and there is a possibility that these measures will be ignored in the areas where they are most needed.

Participants also underscored the urgent need to synthesise relevant state, regional and international 'plans of action' and strategies into a comprehensive framework. It was argued that vertical linkages need to be strengthened to help avoid overlapping CVE interventions, support a more efficient division of labour, and integrate disparate programmes into coherent responses to transnational threats, such as the flow of foreign fighters. In this context the discussion alluded to a significant coordination deficit in the field of CVE more broadly.

⁴ The priority areas outlined by the Secretary General were: dialogue and conflict prevention; strengthening good governance, human rights and the rule of law; engaging communities; empowering youth; gender equality and empowering women; education skill development and employment facilitation; and strategic communications, including through the Internet and social media.

The point was raised that there needs to be a comprehensive mapping of all CVE-related initiatives as a basis for both connecting otherwise largely atomised programmes and avoiding duplication of efforts. Opportunities for exploiting synergy are similarly liable to be overlooked: linkages among existing sub-regional and regional CSO networks (whether or not labelled as CVE) are critical for co-creation, sharing information on challenges, best practices, and opportunities for and energising the implementation of the CVE agenda. Participants noted that platforms are available for convening multilateral dialogues on CVE issues (although they generally are not conducive to advancing multi-stakeholder discussions or approaches). On the larger coordination point, some argued that an administrative body with the human and financial resources to initiate, sustain and grow these relationships is needed.

3. TECHNICAL CHALLENGES

Key Points

- To fuel innovation donors should embrace risk and increase funding for new CVE initiatives led by organisations that extend beyond the cluster of “usual suspects”.
- The international donor community needs to improve how it balances the pressure for short-term results with the long-term commitments CVE requires by insulating funding from transient political demands.
- A key method of achieving this could be expanding and replicating the core funding mechanisms administered by the GCERF, which provides speculative funding to support CSO-led initiatives on the ground and empowers local actors to pursue autonomous programming.
- Risk can be partially mitigated by incorporating research at every stage of CVE programming, adopting a pilot approach and ‘starting small’, and gradually developing CVE-specific monitoring and evaluation methodologies over time.
- All stakeholders need to make a concerted effort to establish bridges between one another and exchange research, data sets and ideas in the absence of centralised mechanisms to administer the process.

Accountability and transparency were referred to as critical requirements, especially when national and international donors are operating with public funds, but participants argued this should not be at the expense of encouraging innovation and risk-taking in approaches to CVE. Participants commented that service contracts or restrictive grants have often been used to for CVE programs as they provide relatively secure frameworks for vetting and monitoring potential recipients and allow donors a greater degree of control over project delivery. Participants noted, however, that this “safe” approach comes with significant opportunity costs. For example, many local CSOs do not have the administrative capacity to apply for external grants, or lack the regulatory mechanisms donors typically demand. Participants noted that this can result in effective CVE-practitioners re-directing resources towards improving their corporate appeal at the expense of project delivery, or simply being overlooked completely.

Broader financial problems were similarly highlighted. For example, forcing local actors to conform to pre-scheduled opportunities for applying for funding risks suppressing organic, practitioner-led development of CVE programming by restricting their ability to launch new initiatives or quickly build on existing projects that start to gain traction.

Participants stressed the need for the global community to therefore strike a careful balance between financial regulations and operational autonomy, developing mechanisms to filter the international pool of local CSOs working in the CVE space, without infringing on the ability of local actors to experiment and innovate.

A major challenge was identified as the need to sufficiently diversify the mechanics of funding so Western donors can reach out beyond the 'usual suspects' to channel resources towards a wider pool of CSOs and empower autonomous local agency. Initiatives like the Core Funding Mechanism operated by the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) were cited as useful templates for pursuing these goals. Alongside extensive collaboration with state partners, the Fund proactively seeks out and sponsors grass-root and municipal practitioners, delivering a relatively flexible mode of financial support that is not rigidly constrained by pre-determined preferences. GCERF can therefore source, access and accelerate new forms of CVE-intervention, broaden the field and encourage the development of a more effective set of 'best practices'. As an independent actor GCERF also has the advantage of partially insulating funds from the fluctuating political exigencies of national and multilateral donors, providing it with space to sustain the long-term investments that correspond with the lengthy timelines of CVE projects. While the Fund's activities are contingent on donations, and may therefore be indirectly exposed to external variables, participants unanimously called for an expansion of its activities⁵ and highlighted the need for more elements of the international community to adopt a similar degree of flexibility in its outreach and grant-making mechanisms.

Perhaps most pressingly, participants highlighted the critical issues in diagnosing which CVE programmes are viable. It was noted that, as preventive measures, CVE initiatives face substantial difficulties in proving a negative (e.g. the number of individuals who did not radicalise because of a specific project), and it may thus be hard for practitioners to demonstrate the efficiency of their work. More broadly, the point was made that CVE is a relatively untested field: the quantifiable data is too recent to give its conclusions any firm statistical relevance and there is little experience in accurately monitoring and evaluating (M&E)⁶ programmes beyond the

⁵ It is currently working in five countries: Bangladesh, Mali, Kenya, Kosovo and Nigeria.

⁶ Monitoring and evaluation can be defined in a myriad of different ways. However, the descriptions used during the discussion broadly correlated with monitoring being defined as 'the capturing of data throughout the cycle of a programme as a means of indicating how well it is performing at the activity and output levels' (Dawson, Edwards and Jeffray, 2014, p. 21). Similarly evaluation can be conceptualised as 'the systematic assessment of a programme (using the monitoring data) to establish how well it is performing when measured against the standards and goals set out in policy or strategy documents' (Ibid, p.21).

ad hoc application of non-CVE assessment methods⁷. In this context, participants said it is vital that donors accept these risks and understand they are not only investing in grass-root initiatives but the incremental development of new CVE-specific methodology. They should also recognise that it may be difficult for practitioners to prove their success in the short term and should realign their expectations to reflect CVE's longer time-horizons.

However, participants acknowledged that there should not be a total absence of safeguards, and elaborated on alternative ideas for at least partially mitigating risk. Flexible mechanisms and a loosening of the staple reporting requirements of traditional development projects can be compensated for by preserving a number of general funding conditions, including the 'Do No Harm' principle and ensuring a 'human rights-based approach'. If practitioners and local actors are fully integrated into the decision making process, risk would also be naturally mitigated in the long term as a collateral benefit of 'smart' investment, resulting in any immediate spike in wasted resources gradually diminishing as a broader, more effective set of 'best practices' coalesces.

Similarly, in the absence of comprehensive CVE-specific M&E processes participants recommended the development of mechanisms to facilitate the timely and regular transmission of information and ideas across the CVE community, as it could both expedite learning and reinforce donor confidence. Despite the 'enormous' appetite for 'lessons learnt' on the part of sponsors, participants noted how existing CVE data sets remain largely segregated between closed circles of NGOs and academics. The impetus is therefore on actors engaging in CVE to make their findings public or at the very least increase the volume of empirical data shared between organisations.

Participants highlighted how a CVE Community of Practice (CoP) was a possible way of taking this forward. However, some participants argued this must be organised cautiously to avoid a proliferation of ineffective and bureaucratic networks. Participants noted how forums, including the GCTF, GCERF, Strong Cities Network, RESOLVE, and Hedayah are already available for convening dialogue among interested stakeholders and some argued that energy would be better channelled towards consolidating intra- and inter-organisational linkages rather than replicating the same underlying problems in new platforms.

Participants similarly suggested 'starting small' could help mitigate risk. The 'Strengthening Resilience to Violence and Extremism' (STRIVE) programme launched by the EU was cited as a possible template in this regard. Delivered under the EU's Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, the STRIVE framework has coordinated a number of CVE-specific actions in the Horn of Africa, working in partnership with local communities to foster innovation and encourage conditions conducive to development and resilience towards violent extremism. Crucially it relies on a pilot approach; investing in a range of small-scale projects with the

⁷ A major example is USAID's Conflict Assessment Framework 2.0, which has been adopted by numerous international and national agencies as a prism for interpreting violence and developing effective security and development responses.

potential for rapid expansion. In this context STRIVE can manage risky ventures more effectively.⁸

The discussion highlighted that, by effectively synthesising research and practice, STRIVE was able to allocate its resources more efficiently and re-design its programming to more accurately reflect the key issues impacting Kenyan society.

4. LOCAL CHALLENGES

Key Points

- International donors need to invest in national strategies that acknowledge and provide a role for both government and civil society.
- Strengthening the state-citizen relationship lies at the heart of effective CVE efforts and donors have a dual responsibility to not only provide funding to local initiatives but to levy their diplomatic and political influence where possible to help build confidence, mutual trust and strong governance.
- The donor community cannot afford to avoid engaging on CVE in states/environments that do not fully embrace the “whole-of-society” approach to CVE and thus are not providing CSOs with the legal and political space to engage on CVE. As such donors need to decide the extent to which 1) they are willing to accommodate the political preferences of host governments when deciding which CVE-programmes and CSOs to support, and, related, 2) they are willing to fund CSOs that might be unpalatable to the host and/or donor government, for example, non-violent, extremist groups or groups linked to the political opposition.
- A key element of this is making sure CVE programming is not disconnected from CVE policy and broader bilateral engagement.

Participants stressed the importance of an overarching national strategy around which independent CSO-led initiatives can coalesce. Donors working exclusively with civil society – and not engaging with the relevant national and local governments –

⁸ The programme was geared towards understanding the underlying drivers of violent extremism through evidence-based analysis, developing a set of best CVE practice based on closely monitored pilot activities, and providing recommendations for increasing the impact and focus of interventions. This included initiatives focusing on CVE-relevant communications, local mentoring, intra-faith dialogue and inter-faith dialogue.

One participant outlined that while progress has been achieved across the first three streams, difficulties with inter-faith engagement immediately surfaced. It became clear external agencies generally lacked the sensitivities and contextual knowledge to be credible partners in the delivery of ecumenical cooperation. Similarly, the programme indicated that extolling the value of religious pluralism has an impact on moderate actors and is useful in terms of preventative action, but it has very little resonance with individuals already further down the path of radicalisation. Instead the pilot scheme revealed a need for great community resilience and more attractive and accessible disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes to entice disillusioned fighters. Lastly it confirmed the effectiveness of direct and personal interventions between trained CVE practitioners and ‘at risk’ individuals or those in the process of being radicalised. These are notoriously resource-intensive tactics and by gathering evidence that verifies its impact, it should be easier to solicit funding in the future.

risk promoting a fragmented CVE framework that is incapable of addressing the underlying drivers of radicalisation, many of which are linked to how governments treat their citizens and communities. In this context, the point was made that donors interested in maximising the impact of their local CSO investments need to engage with state institutions in those countries. A central element of this approach should involve encouraging host governments to develop inclusive national plans of action that acknowledge the role of government (national and local) and civil society, and work to collate input from a wide range of domestic actors, from law enforcement and social service providers to NGOs, community and religious leaders, and the media.

The discussion identified a number of major barriers to international-local synergy. For example, local actors may be reticent in establishing formal ties to international sponsors to avoid being stigmatised as proxies or fifth columnists promoting a foreign agenda. It was noted that the legacies of the “Global War on Terror” continue to impact many communities around the world and while the CT paradigm has shifted in operational terms, some noted that in many contexts CVE is still considered to be a soft front for the projection of Western power. Participants also discussed how these tensions are not exclusive to non-Western states, with some CSOs in the UK, for example, becoming reluctant to receive UK funding for CVE (or “Prevent”) because of their perception that CVE is in reality security concealed as social policy.

Indirect funding was also suggested as a way of partially alleviating some of these negative connotations. Participants highlighted how ‘Impartial’ third countries could be used as conduits for channelling financial and technical support towards local initiatives, with participants citing an example of how funding from the European Commission was used to leverage Colombian customs officials into leading capacity building projects in Morocco and Guinea Bissau. However, as was repeatedly underlined in the discussion, accountability exponentially diminishes with each additional actor and significant resources would have to be invested in regulating the chain of delivery, and training third party personnel to make sure they meet the requisite standards donors demand. It is therefore not an ideal solution but it may be useful as an immediate measure until the reputation of CVE can be improved, its misconceptions refuted and global audiences become more aware of what its activities involve.

Participants emphasised that while donors must avoid any perception of nation-building, they often have the resources and political influence to support or otherwise encourage dialogue between governments and their societies in third countries. It is therefore incumbent on those engaging in CVE to help fortify the social compact against violent extremism by promoting respect for the principle of equality before the law, equal protection under the law in all government-citizen relations, developing accountable and transparent institutions at all levels, and ensuring responsive, participatory and representative decision-making. Participants emphasised there was a limit to how much impact donors can actually have, especially if they are conflicting with the self-interests of a national government. The point was also made that in many countries these political values conflict with

historically embedded patriarchal structures, requiring external donors to assess how far they are obliged (or able) to intervene and unpack the social fabric of recipient communities without destabilising the situation further. Similarly, while diplomatic leverage is a valuable asset to be deployed, donors need to establish the parameters of doing so without detracting from the role and responsibilities of CSO practitioners operating on the ground. Despite these complications it was concluded that sponsoring communication and other non-violent interaction between government agencies, community and religious leaders, and the public more broadly, could at the very least create space for more stable relations between citizens and their state to develop.

Participants also recognised that CVE-specific programming may not be applicable in all contexts. In areas where civil society has been suppressed and power is centralised at the national level there may not be any other viable actors to partner with other than the government or government-friendly CSOs. This is problematic as donors risk becoming complicit in perpetuating ‘bad governance’, undermining the credibility CVE programming and possibly making communities more susceptible to extremist narratives. Similarly, attempts to circumvent the state and directly engage with independent CSOs under these conditions could precipitate a continued crackdown on civil liberties and engender further grievances at the local level.

However, by not intervening at all international actors leave violent extremist groups and propaganda unchallenged, accentuating the problem by allowing them time to infiltrate communities and mobilise support. In this context participants emphasised that donors need to be cautious when navigating the political complexities of host countries and must consider how far they are willing to accommodate the government preferences when supporting national CVE strategies at the project and policy level. Despite these difficult choices it is incumbent on donors to make sure their programmes are not disconnected from CVE policy and broader bilateral engagement.

Finally, participants argued there is an implicit assumption in CVE rhetoric that frames CSOs as amicable agents that confirm to a similar set of values as the donor community. In reality, across a number of conflict and post-conflict zones many front-line practitioners confronting violent extremism are non-violent iterations of the same ideology. It is therefore incumbent on donors, and particularly donor countries that are in a position to directly fund local agencies, to delineate the boundaries of acceptable CVE practice and identify which actors are the most appropriate to engage with at which point in the CVE process.

5. CONCLUSIONS

There are myriad structural, systemic and conceptual challenges that donors face in adequately funding and operationalising CVE programmatic interventions at the local level. The scope of CVE is vast, integrating a spectrum of heterogeneous activities across the security and development spectra that often conflate with other fields and manifest differently not only across contexts but between various levels within the same environment. This has been compounded by a dense international architecture and playing field with a far more diverse array of stakeholders than

donors are usually comfortable with. Exacerbated by mounting political pressure to deliver immediate and consequential results – in an environment of continuing terrorist attacks – there is an urgent need to improve the field’s current trajectory by diagnosing where challenges exist, where change is necessary and prescribing practical solutions.