Development Approaches to Countering Violent Extremism

Background

There is increasing global recognition that both security and development approaches are required to address violent extremism effectively. The UN Secretary General has issued a Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, setting out the case for holistic approaches grounded in human rights. The OECD has recognised activities preventing violent extremism as ODA-eligible and is developing a casebook of applicable activities. Australia's aid policy recognises that well-targeted Australian aid can complement diplomatic, trade and security efforts to promote stability[1].

Violent extremism disproportionately affects developing countries[2] and undermines basic development goals. It produces serious economic consequences, compromising economic growth[3], reducing investment, tourism[4] and trade. It limits participation in education, particularly for women and girls[5]. Violent extremism can create ungoverned spaces which facilitate the organised movement of money, drugs, arms and people[6], as well as exacerbate conflict and destabilise neighbouring regions[7]. In responding to violent extremism, states may divert resources away from basic services to security, which in turn can further alienate populations and exacerbate violence. Violent extremism can constrain the operational ability of development and humanitarian donors and their delivery partners[8].

Definitions

There is no agreed international definition of violent extremism, which is a complex phenomenon that differs substantially across and within countries.

The Australian Government defines violent extremism as 'a willingness to use unlawful violence or support the use of violence by others to promote a political, ideological or religious goal.'[9] Countering violent extremism (CVE) involves a range of activities which aim to address the drivers of violent extremism (push and pull factors) and help individuals disengage from violent extremism. It includes both prevention and recovery aspects, as well as domestic and international activities. The Australian Government uses the term *countering* violent extremism to refer to a broad spectrum of activities, ranging from preventative measures through to engaging with those who have radicalised to violent extremism.

Evidence around the drivers of violent extremism

There is broad academic consensus that no single factor drives violent extremism[10] and no single profile can reliably be used to identify at risk individuals[11]. Rather, violent extremists emerge from a confluence of individual, group and environmental factors. The significance of factors varies according to the individuals and contexts concerned.

To accommodate this complexity, there is an emerging consensus among academics and bilateral donors that a context-based, multi-level approach is required to identify the factors contributing to violent extremism, which can form the basis for targeted activities. In assessing the drivers of violent extremism in a given context, models typically account for:

- **macro-level drivers**: broad socio-economic or political trends ('*push' factors*)
  A 2015 study by the Institute for Economics and Peace found twenty-eight factors which demonstrated a statistically significant correlation with terrorism, though only nine of them were broadly present across OECD and non-OECD contexts: high levels of political terror, lower respect for human rights, the existence of polices targeting religious freedoms, group grievances, instability and lower respect for international law[12]. Context matters.

- **meso-level drivers:** identity group influences ('*pull' or enabling factors*[13])
  There is robust evidence that radicalisation is a social process and that identity is a key factor in individuals joining violent movements[14]. Violent extremist groups may use collective grievances of particular minority groups to enable narratives of victimisation. They also exploit religious beliefs, ethnic differences and ideologies[15].

- **micro-level drivers**: individual factors ('*pull' factors)*[16]
  The psychological make-up of an individual influences their vulnerability to radicalisation.[17] Individual vulnerabilities may include cognitive constraints; a disposition to violence, social isolation, or susceptibility to messaging narratives through social media or person-to-person channels[18]. Examining radicalisation at the micro-level helps us identify that, even *within violent extremist groups,* there is a wide variation of individual motivations for joining.

Evidence suggests the reasons individuals are radicalised are complex and varied. Socio-economic or macro-level factors can push people towards extremist ideas. But not all people faced with the same set of circumstances will become radicalised. A search for personal and group identity can radicalise an individual, but not all those who have become radicalised will join a terrorist organisation or engage in acts of violence[19].

Lessons learned from the field and research

Key lessons to date suggest CVE-related development programming should:

- *Understand the local drivers* – drivers of violent extremism (and the risks) vary across contexts; successes in one context cannot be easily replicated in another;

- *Badge appropriately* - CVE activities may carry risks, including the possibility of stigmatisation, alienation of target communities or harm to partners – officers should take these into account in how activities are labelled and acknowledged;

- *Do no harm* – to minimise unintended harm, activities should be based on robust analysis; careful selection of partners, methods and communication strategies; and be grounded in respect for human rights;

- *Promote local ownership* - locally-led projects will be more sustainable, build capacity; be better targeted; and be perceived as more credible than external programs;

- *Engage host governments* – an appropriate level of engagement will be essential for the viability of an activity;

- *Start small, be flexible but selective, and scale up* – making careful choices on small activities can diversify risk, test assumptions and provide for innovation;

- *Build in research and collect evidence as you go* –the development of an evidence base will improve future effectiveness;

- *Take a coordinated approach* – coordinating with other agencies and managing sequencing issues will be essential as CVE is only likely to be successful within the context of wider approaches to addressing fragility and promoting stability; keeping in touch with likeminded donors can assist in avoiding duplication and sharing lessons;

- *Conduct ongoing analysis* – recognising that violent extremism continues to evolve, regular review of underpinning analysis and implementation frameworks is essential;

- *Challenge assumptions regularly* – in particular, on the differentiated role of women in perpetuating and/or preventing violent extremism;

- *Consider transnational strategies* – given violent extremism can cross national boundaries, look for opportunities to engage with other diplomatic missions and programs.

Framework for DFAT interventions

Drawing on the best available evidence and lessons learned in the field, DFAT's framework sets out three core principles for designing, implementing and evaluating CVE-related investments.

The <u>first overarching principle</u> of DFAT's development approach to CVE is that, in delivering any development investment in a country affected by violent extremism, officers should ensure it *does no harm*. All reasonable steps should be taken to ensure investments do not inadvertently exacerbate conditions underpinning violent extremism, or cause harm to partners or staff.

The <u>second overarching principle</u> of DFAT's development approach to CVE is that the extent to which CVE is incorporated into aid programming should be determined by posts and their counterpart divisions *based on robust analysis* of the local drivers of violent extremism. This principle recognises that violent extremism is a diverse phenomenon, which varies across and within countries.

The <u>third overarching principle</u> of DFAT's development approach to CVE is that any intervention should *employ appropriate tools with appropriate partners*. This principle recognises that addressing diverse manifestations of violent extremism will require tools and partners specific to the context. In some cases, it may be best to engage with multilateral partners to deliver assistance as part of a multi-donor package of national support; in other cases, it may be appropriate to deliver targeted CVE interventions through an NGO partner working with a particular group of at-risk individuals. Development assistance may not always be an appropriate tool to address a given driver; policy dialogue or security cooperation may be more appropriate in some cases, or should work in tandem.

Practical guidance for designing CVE-related investments

DFAT recommends four steps to ascertain whether violent extremism is a development problem, what drives it and how it might be addressed.

1. Determine if countering violent extremism is relevant to our shared development policy goals in the target country. (If no, continue to monitor for changes.)

2. Undertake an analysis to identify the drivers of violent extremism:

    A good analysis should seek to isolate the key drivers, including through examining:

    - The root causes, including historic, political, economic and socio-cultural;
    - The relationships, interests and incentives of actors and institutions;
    - The current conflict/violent extremism dynamics, including potential triggers for violence, capacities for peace and future scenarios;
    - How these elements are experienced differently at sub-national levels.

    In conducting their analysis, officers can employ differing levels of analytical rigour and participatory design to fit resource constraints, risks and circumstances of host countries.

3. Consider possible entry points to address the drivers.

Officers should ask a range of questions to determine whether and what type of development assistance may be an appropriate tool to address identified drivers of violent extremism. These questions should seek to confirm:

- *The opportunity to affect change*
- *Whether risks can be managed*
- *Whether impact can be measured*
- *Which partners could be engaged and what impact this will have*

In constructing or adjusting programming to deliver CVE objectives, officers may seek to pursue specific or broader CVE investments, or better explain how existing aid investments contribute to building more stable, inclusive and equitable societies that can be more resilient against violent extremism.

4. Develop a theory of change with indicators and a monitoring and evaluation framework to demonstrate how CVE-related investments can make an impact.

As with other development programming, designs of CVE programming should include:

- a program logic, or a theory of change, for how the program contributes to tackling violent extremism;
- proposed program activities; and
- indicators to capture CVE impact under the monitoring and evaluation framework.

References

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