



BORROWING A WHEEL:

Applying Existing Design, Monitoring, and Evaluation Strategies to Emerging Programming Approaches to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism

Briefing Paper

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Executive Summary

Efforts aimed at ‘preventing’ or ‘countering’ violent extremism (P/CVE) encompass a range of initiatives that aim to directly and indirectly address the drivers of violent extremism and the factors that enable it. As P/CVE programming is increasingly well funded, recent years have seen heightened interest in understanding both *what* P/CVE programming can achieve and *how* it can do so more effectively. Correspondingly, there has been an increase in interest in how established design monitoring and evaluation (DM&E) methods and related experiences from development and peacebuilding efforts in conflict-affected contexts can support P/CVE programming.

DM&E systems are not merely technical processes through which to quantify project deliverables. Robust DM&E systems enable in-depth thinking and ongoing reflection, and ideally ongoing learning, about the overall approach, strategy, and theory of change of an initiative, its applicability in a given setting, and the type of results it can yield, as well as ways to incrementally track progress and facilitate adaptation and improvement during implementation.

A discussion of the definition of P/CVE is outlined in the first section of this paper, including an introduction to ongoing critiques of the P/CVE fields, and discussion of the question of whether it should be defined and recognized as a ‘field’ in itself. This paper recognizes the significant challenges related to this, but will not focus on this debate.

This paper reflects on why the field has struggled to effectively design, monitor and evaluate programmatic efforts and offers insights on how methodologies developed for and lessons learned by the fields of peacebuilding and development can be applied to address current challenges. This paper aims to contribute to improving the relevance and effectiveness of P/CVE approaches, including through the critical consideration of both the policy context in which P/CVE exists and the types of efforts being undertaken under this heading.

Examining Current Practice in P/CVE M&E

Recent evaluations of P/CVE projects and programs have used a range of evaluation methodologies, most of which fall short of rigorous investigations of program outcomes that are informed by empirical data. IMPACT Europe is an EU funded research effort aiming to “*Fill the gap in knowledge of what works in tackling different types of violent radicalization.*” As part of that effort, the RAND Corporation conducted a review of evaluations of counter-violent radicalization interventions. They assessed 52 manuscripts that included 126 samples. Of those, none of the evaluation designs were found to be high quality, 37% were medium (meaning that “empirical data was collected to answer the hypotheses but the circumstances would allow for more advanced data collection” (i.e. using multiple methods or multiple instruments)), and 63% were low quality (meaning that they “deployed no empirical investigation even when circumstances would allow it to answer key impact evaluation questions”). The review did not include lines of inquiry regarding the utility of the evaluations, however, anecdotally, the commonly heard refrain of “We don’t know what works” suggests that uptake and learning from existing P/CVE evaluations is limited.

van Hemer, Dianne et al. “Synthesis report on the state-of-the-art in evaluating the effectiveness of counter-violent extremism interventions.” Cambridge: Innovative Method and Procedure to Assess Counter-violent-radicalization Techniques (IMPACT) in Europe, 2014.

Current Challenges

A range of factors make it difficult, but not impossible, to monitor and evaluate P/CVE programs. These include:

- A **blurred understanding and unclear boundaries of what constitutes P/CVE** (as opposed to other efforts in fragile and conflict-affected contexts), **including a lack of in-depth analysis around the specific problems** that a given intervention or set of projects are trying to address;
- **The notion that P/CVE programming is something entirely new**, and should be categorized separately from other means to address violence or conflict - neglecting the fact that a majority of approaches to prevent and address drivers of violent extremism are grounded in fields such as peacebuilding, organized crime prevention, development and livelihoods assistance, or human rights promotion— hence not building sufficiently on learnings on effectiveness and DM&E of such approaches;
- **A lack of policy coherence** that means that project and program results are unaligned with and sometimes undermined by bigger picture policies, as well as limited coordination amongst the range of actors and approaches (diplomatic, security policy, development interventions) that work towards P/CVE at different levels;
- Limited understanding amongst many P/CVE implementers of the broader **conflict systems** and the political economies of the contexts in which they implement programming, and an unhelpful assumption that the ‘problem’ lies exclusively with VE groups, including a failure to recognize, under a generalized heading of ‘national ownership,’ the violent political agendas that certain Governments might themselves be promoting;
- Limited understanding of **individual behaviors** of violent extremist actors and the interlinkages with **structural drivers** that enable a **conducive environment** for VE and individual drivers and triggers;
- Politically driven (and not evidence based) P/CVE agendas combined with a sense of urgency around violent extremism/terrorism-related issues that results in **unrealistically ambitious objectives and unclear program objectives and untested or overly ambitious theories of change**;
- The “**prevention challenge**:” it is often said that prevention programs cannot be evaluated because of the challenge of proving that something did not happen – a classic dilemma in the field of conflict prevention;
- A **lack of standards or consensus** around what constitutes sound DM&E for P/CVE due to the range of actors and approaches used and a lack of awareness of established DM&E methods from other fields;
- **Funders expectations** that evaluation will prove attribution in complex contexts, and a corresponding and perhaps resultant overemphasis on reporting project outputs (deliverables) – rather than on real change at local level. This problem is additionally driven by unclear project objectives that are thereby un-measurable;
- **Difficult-to-access-beneficiaries** and target populations in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, the **sensitivity of key topics**, and the challenge to set **baselines in highly dynamic contexts**;
- Moreover, there is **little evidence** and **consolidated learning of what works in which contexts**, program designs struggle to evidence causal assumptions that underpin an intervention.

Existing Approaches to DM&E of Peacebuilding and Development Applicable to P/CVE

Many of these issues are familiar to the fields of peacebuilding and development. As such, several strategies that have been developed to address limitations faced by peacebuilders and other development actors, can be applied to P/CVE including:

- Differentiating the various programmatic approaches and more clearly articulating what each programmatic approach can achieve, and on what level (i.e. individual, group norms, institutional, community);
- Enhanced engagement with **analysis of the drivers of VE** and the use of **conflict and conflict systems analysis** tools to further understand VE drivers and the system in which they exist and inter-relate;
- Improved coordination and support for the development of **holistic strategies that conceptualize how individual efforts add up to larger P/CVE impacts**, possibly through whole-of-government approaches and coordination amongst local, national, and international actors and funders involved in P/CVE work;
- Supporting greater **understanding amongst donors and implementers regarding what can be reasonably expected of a project** and what M&E can and cannot demonstrate;
- Developing detailed **theories of change** and **realistic program objectives** and regularly testing and revising them;
- Utilizing **evidence principles to guide evaluation designs** while leaving room for substantial differences due to the range of programmatic approaches and delivery contexts;
- Focusing M&E efforts on **demonstrating how the intervention has contributed to P/CVE outcomes**, rather than trying to attribute *impacts* to individual interventions, i.e. **be explicit about the project results that M&E systems can and cannot demonstrate**;
- Use **emerging evaluation approaches**, such as Developmental Evaluation to track projects with hard to predict outcomes and causal relationships, and to enable continuous learning;
- Design specific **data collection instruments** suitable for P/CVE contexts that also consider conflict-sensitivity principles: consider the use of **proxy indicators** and **alternative questionnaire designs** that use list experiments and other methods to avoid associating respondents and researchers with potentially dangerous information.
- Partner with credible **Third Party Monitoring** organizations, building trust and mutual understanding of objectives, in order to access difficult-to-reach-populations and better understand local nuance and dynamics;
- **During implementation**, track **attitudes** and **perceptions** of program participants and local stakeholders and other incremental changes that are pre-requisites for achieving the objectives of P/CVE efforts.

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Key Acronyms:

CVE – Countering Violent Extremism

CT – Counter-Terrorism

DE – Developmental Evaluation

ISIL – Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

DM&E – Design, Monitoring and Evaluation

PVE – Prevention of Violent Extremism

TOC – Theory of Change

TPM – Third Party Monitoring

UN – United Nations

VE – Violent Extremism

VEO – Violent Extremist Organization

About this Paper

This paper explores key methodological challenges associated with the design, monitoring and evaluation of preventing and countering violent extremism programming, and discusses the applicability of solutions from the fields of peacebuilding and development. The paper draws on the latest developments in the field, lessons and insights from DM&E of peacebuilding and development programming that the authors consider relevant to P/CVE, as well as the authors' professional experiences designing, monitoring and evaluating P/CVE programming. In addition, the authors conducted selected Key Informant Interviews in order to gain access to specialized knowledge on specific topics.

This paper focuses on P/CVE programmatic efforts implemented in countries where most political and extremist violence exists, in most cases countries affected by weak governance and rule of law, fragility and violent conflict. The findings in this paper might also be, likely to a lesser extent, relevant for P/CVE initiatives in North America or Europe that focus on individual de-radicalization efforts.

The paper begins with a definition of **terminology and the scope of practice** analyzed, including a brief overview of **critiques related to the P/CVE field**. This is followed by three key sections related to DM&E of P/CVE: (i) a discussion of **program design** challenges and strategies for overcoming them, (ii) a section on suggested methods for developing sound and **useful M&E frameworks**, and (iii) a section focused on **data collection** challenges and mitigation strategies. The paper concludes with an outline of areas for **further inquiry and research**.

About the Authors

Lillie Ris is an independent consultant, specializing in designing, monitoring, and evaluating stabilization programming. She has over a decade of experience in program assessment and management, including six years of field experience in the MENA where she implemented and evaluated programming in the areas preventing/countering violent extremism, community security and access to justice, civil society strengthening, gender, and youth development. Committed to program effectiveness and facilitating institutional change, Lillie has worked with field teams and management at a variety of implementing and funding entities, both designing monitoring and evaluation systems and conducting evaluations, as well as supporting strategic planning processes. Lillie holds a Masters degree from Fletcher School where she focused on human security and evaluation in conflict-affected and post-conflict settings.

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academia and local NGOs. She is currently developing a new collaborative learning initiative on effective approaches to prevent violent extremism (PVE), collecting evidence on what works and what doesn't in this field, and related theories of change. Anita has substantive expertise in conflict prevention, peacebuilding effectiveness, governance programming, conflict analysis, and conflict-sensitivity/Do No Harm. Anita is an experienced facilitator and trainer in systems approaches to peacebuilding work, including systems mapping. She works on the development of new design, monitoring and evaluation approaches to peacebuilding and conflict sensitivity. She also contributes to CDA's ongoing collaborative learning initiative on the role of business in peacebuilding. Anita has led numerous engagements with governmental, non-governmental and private sector stakeholders as an advisor, facilitator, trainer, program manager, and applied researcher in MENA, Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Defining Terminology, Scope of Practice, and Critiques of the 'P/CVE' fields

Terminology and Scope of Practice

There is significant debate around terminology of what 'preventing' or 'countering' violent extremism entails, including questioning the utility and possible negative consequences of classifying P/CVE as a field with rather than a sub-set of peacebuilding or other established fields (development, livelihoods, human rights etc.) whose efforts address drivers of VE. This paper will briefly reflect on these discussions, and then put forward working definitions that are used for the purposes of this paper.

Under the Obama administration, the US government was a champion of 'CVE' approaches, with the US State Department and USAID's joint CVE strategy supporting "[...] *proactive actions to counter efforts by violent extremists to radicalize, recruit, and mobilize followers to violence and to address specific factors that facilitate violent extremist recruitment and radicalization to violence.*"¹ CVE was intended as a complementary, and in some ways, counterbalancing approach to the counter-terrorism agendas of previous US Administrations. The extent to which it has achieved those aims is debated, with some positing that CVE has repeated the mistakes of the counter-terrorism agenda, undermining and instrumentalizing security and development efforts in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, and not challenging the 'counter-terrorism' logic and narrative in foreign policy and defense discourses.²

The United Nations coined the term 'PVE' – prevention of violent extremism - recognizing the need "*to take a more comprehensive approach which encompasses not only ongoing, essential security based counter-terrorism measures, but also systematic preventive measures which directly address the drivers of violent extremism that have given rise to the emergence of these new and more virulent groups.*"³

In this paper, we will use 'P/CVE' to combine these two framings. The **unit of analysis in this paper are efforts that intend to address the drivers of violent extremism, as well as de-radicalization programs**. Given the nature of their approaches, security sector-based measures to directly counter VE in the near term may find this paper less relevant. In addition, the paper does not provide specific insights or guidance on how to design 'VE aware/sensitive' approaches that do not aim to address drivers of VE directly.

Counter-terrorism and preventing or countering violent extremism are different approaches. The approaches are not linear, nor are they mutually exclusive. The below presents an adapted approach developed by the Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP), to show how the two approaches, in principle, address violent extremism at different points of the radicalization process and engagement in terrorist acts.⁴

¹ See USAID. 2016. "Department of State & USAID Joint Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism," p. 4.

² For a more detailed discussion of these critiques see Attree, Larry. 2017. "[Shouldn't YOU be Countering Violent Extremism?](#)" Saferworld.

³ See UN. December 25, 2015. "Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism" Report of the Secretary-General, p. 2.

⁴ Alliance for Peacebuilding. 2016. "Countering Violent Extremism." Policy Brief. Washington, DC.

	Focus of Engagement
Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Address the drivers</i> of the conflict and implement conflict transformation and reconciliation programming. ▪ <i>Create resilient communities</i>, by building immunity to recruitment by violent extremists, by catalyzing community-based programs. ▪ <i>Deter and disrupt</i> recruitment or mobilization and assist with reintegration of former violent extremists.
Counter-Terrorism (CT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Deter, disrupt and isolate</i> groups that use terror. ▪ <i>Train and equip</i> state security forces to fight terrorist groups ▪ <i>Increase the state's capacity</i> to prepare, prevent, protect and respond to terrorism. ▪ <i>Interdict and prosecute</i> through law enforcement.

The number of programs designed and implemented with P/CVE objectives has increased exponentially over the past several years, and the boundaries between different types of approaches are often not entirely clear. In practice, there is often a lack of clarity regarding the distinctions and complementarities between different approaches, which causes ambiguity in relation to expected objectives, theories of change, results, and funding decisions. Many programs operate under a 'P/CVE' label to tap into new funding streams without being clear whether and how they address P/CVE aims.

Violent extremist movements and politically motivated radical groups (broadly speaking) are not a new phenomenon, and not confined to the Global South or predominantly Muslim countries. In recent history, Basque groups in Spain, the IRA in Northern Ireland and Shining Path in Peru all represent extremist groups that used violence for political ends, justified by goals of equity and justice. In the current context, violent extremist organizations have played an increasingly important and complex role in many conflict-affected states in areas as diverse as Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, Morocco, Somalia, Kenya, Philippines, Nigeria, Indonesia and India (not an exclusive list). We have also witnessed a surge in nationalist and supremacist movements in Europe and North America that condone or actively support violent actions, which have been accompanied by a surge in attention to and media coverage of VE dynamics in the US and Europe.

Violent extremist behaviors and movements are diverse and need to be understood in their specific contexts, with implications for action at the local, national, regional, and international levels. The fact that most VE groups are politically motivated and that the majority appear in contexts of conflict and fragility, raises important questions about the implications of labeling certain groups as violent extremist organizations. Some posit that such labels can be a distraction and oversimplification of the issues driving political violence and that in some cases, rather than preventing violent extremist behaviors, labeling a group as such can promote their use of violent extremist behaviors.⁵

Critiques of the P/CVE fields

Amongst many human rights, development, livelihoods, peacebuilding and conflict transformation circles there is a significant level of discomfort with how the P/CVE field has established itself. It is viewed as an area of practice that receives a significant amount of funding

⁵ Attree 2017

and in so doing threatens to limit the space for other approaches in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, and poses significant policy challenges.

Practitioners in the aforementioned fields argue that P/CVE approaches have not succeeded in effectively prioritizing long-term local needs over the short-term security agenda of 'The West' and other regional powers. Failing to prioritize local needs risks reinforcing the marginalization that drives VE and results in the development of programmatic approaches that are ineffective and unsustainable. In addition, the primacy of externally driven security agendas has sometimes resulted in partnerships with national governments and alliances with local actors whose actions and policies comprise some of the factors that drive violent extremism.⁶

There are concerns about the security of those at the frontlines of programming. When existing development, human rights, livelihoods or peacebuilding efforts are leveraged for P/CVE purposes, aid workers might be put at increased risk. As explained in Attree's recent Saferworld critique of P/CVE, "*If the implicit message of a jobs programme shifts from 'we are supporting your livelihood because your well-being matters' to 'we are supporting your livelihood to stop you becoming a terrorist' this carries risks.*"⁷

Some P/CVE approaches are critiqued for failing to address drivers of VE, for example by focusing on ideology and counter-narratives rather than addressing underlying grievances, as well as security sector reform efforts that are blind to the factors that drive citizens' distrust in national and local security forces. To address drivers, such efforts could promote meaningful dialogue and the engagement of local communities around the socio-political and economic factors that drive conflicts in a given setting and "*empower societies to help transform the behavior and accountability of security actors – and the power structures that keep them in place.*"⁸

While this paper is intended to provide practical insights on how to apply established DM&E approaches for P/CVE programs from a methodological point of view, it also expects that by doing so it will make a contribution to respond to some of the 'bigger picture' challenges in the P/CVE field more broadly as outlined above.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *ibid.*

Program Design

The Importance of Analysis

Context specific analyses of the drivers of violent extremism are critical. It is important to have a nuanced understanding of the following aspects:

- The different types of patterns of behaviors that violent extremist groups and individuals present in a specific context;
- Drivers that motivate individuals to engage in violent behavior and/or join extremist groups;
- Drivers that create an enabling environment for violent extremism; and
- Triggers for acts of extreme violence.

“As funding for work defined as CVE has expanded, this lack of focus [in analysis of drivers of violent extremism] has produced mission creep, the relabeling of existing programs in terms of CVE, and other tactics that undermine efforts to determine what is distinctive about the work of countering extremism and to design and test models and tools that explicitly target specific drivers of extremism.”⁹

Analyzing and understanding the various aspects in more detail will also aid the identification of distinctions between initiatives that are already being implemented as development or peacebuilding programming, and efforts that directly address specific drivers of VE.

Funders and international actors engaged in P/CVE programs and have a responsibility to encourage learning from other fields and pro-actively build on other analyses and programming in their area of engagement.

The **environment** in which extremist organizations operate heavily influences the type of VE phenomena present in each context. Broadly speaking, those can be distinguished as (a) transnational networks (e.g. Al-Qaeda core or ISIL); (b) regional organizations (e.g. Al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb in Algeria/Sahel, and Al- Shabaab in East Africa); and c) national and local groups (e.g. Ansar Dine, a militant Islamic group in Northern Mali). Different actors are better placed to engage on some levels than others, e.g. development P/CVE approaches operate mainly at the local and national level, whereas security focused CVE approaches often operate at regional or transnational levels.

The understanding and available literature on the various **drivers of violent extremism** has developed significantly over the past few years. The main distinctions and classifications are between understanding the enabling environment and structural causes that drive people towards radicalization and violent extremism (which some call structural root causes, permissive factors or push factors¹⁰), and the individual incentives and more short-term triggers for behavior change towards radical and violent behavior (which some call precipitant factors, or pull factors).

⁹ Chowdhury Fink, Naureen. 2014. “Something Old, Something New: The Emergence and Evolution of CVE Efforts.” *USIP Insights State of the Art* (1): 10.

¹⁰ See for example: USAID. September 2011. “The Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency: Putting Principles into Practice.” USAID Policy. pp. 3-4.

More recent research from RUSI shows that these two levels tend to be too limited for many contexts, leading to insufficiently nuanced programming choices, and offers a revised approach to this analysis typology:

- **Structural motivators** can include (depending on specific context) repression, corruption, unemployment, inequality, discrimination, a history of hostility between identity groups, external state interventions, etc.
- **Individual incentives** can include (depending on specific context) a sense of purpose (which might be generated through acting in accordance with perceived ideological tenets), adventure, belonging, acceptance, status, material enticements, fear of repercussions by VE entities, expected rewards in afterlife etc.
- **Enabling factors** can include (depending on specific context) the presence of radical mentors, access to online radical communities, social networks with VE associations, access to weapons, a comparative lack of state presence, an absence of family support, etc.¹¹

“[It is] fair to say [...] that the grievances articulated by violent extremists are often grounded in the same political realities that peacebuilding efforts are designed to engage, although practitioners must take care not to draw facile connections as proximity is not always causation.”¹²

Most **conflict analyses**, as conducted for the purposes of developing conflict-sensitive development or peacebuilding programming cover an analysis of structural causes and ‘motivators,’ as many of those might also be drivers of violent conflict more broadly (again, depending on the context). Hence, those who design P/CVE programming are well advised to pro-actively collect and build on existing conflict analyses in order to avoid re-inventing the wheel.

However, there are **specific drivers of VE**, mainly at the level of individual incentives, which most ‘regular’ conflict analyses can overlook when they focus on socio- economic and political dynamics, rather than analyzing the behavior of individuals. Detailed stakeholder analysis is required to understand the drivers of conflict, and analysis and evidence from gang violence prevention and organized crime might also provide useful experiences and pointers on the additional type of analysis needed to, for example, understand how individuals radicalize. Furthermore, understanding the resilience factors and drivers and champions for peace in a given context is absolutely critical (and often missed) as a key pre-condition to understanding leverage points for change in conflict systems and leverage points for programming.

Some sector-specific conflict analyses might also contain some of this information. For example, an analysis of the role of the education sector in the larger socio-political context of Pakistan will necessarily include an analysis of the potential influence of radical mentors. Hence, VE planners and programmers should tap into existing analyses as much as possible – as, in this case, only focusing on understanding the role of radical mentors would miss the mark in understanding the broader structural issues in which they are embedded.

¹¹ Khalil, James, and Martine Zeuthen. 2016. “Countering Violent Extremism and Risk Reduction. A Guide to Programme Design and Evaluation.” Whitehall Report 2-16. London: Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies. p. 9.

¹² Parker, Tom. 2014. “Theory vs. Practice.” *USIP Insights State of the Art* (1): 2.

Systems analysis might be particularly useful to understand both the relationships between structural motivators, individual incentives, and enabling factors, as well as the dynamics between such drivers of VE and socio-economic and political conflict drivers in a given context. Many P/CVE interventions have limited impact because they neither sufficiently consider the overall socio-political and economic context in which VE happens, nor do they understand or consider the very specific drivers of VE in that context. A holistic understanding of how drivers of conflict systems and drivers of VE interact could make a powerful contribution to increasing the relevance of VE interventions.¹³

Having sound analysis of the overall conflict drivers and drivers of VE is critical to design **relevant** interventions. Identifying programmatic initiatives that are aimed at preventing violent extremism requires clearly defined relevance criteria grounded in an analysis of the drivers of violent extremism. **Relevance analysis** identifies whether the socio-political and/or individual level changes targeted by specific programs or policies are connected to drivers of VE identified in the VE analysis. During planning and program design, assessing relevance helps to ensure that activities are strategic; in evaluation, it enables examination of whether P/CVE interventions have affected the drivers of VE.

Defining the Objectives and Levels on which Change will be Affected

P/CVE efforts work on multiple levels and different scales, seeking to affect change on the individual, socio-political, community, provincial or national level. Some programs seek to impact structural motivators of VE such as inequality or discrimination over the long-term, others attempt to counter-balance individual incentives such as a sense of acceptance in communities, or to address enabling factors such as social media campaigns to counter the influence of online radical communities. ***Having clarity from the beginning about the level on which the project will affect change can help to set expectations and target the program, including ambitious, but realistic and achievable objectives.***

A question of scale and cumulative impact? A VE program in select villages in the North of Iraq may be able reduce the appeal of recruitment into ISIL or other violent militia groups amongst young people through targeted initiatives, and thus, affect change at the individual-personal level in those communities. However, to measurably and sustainably degrade ISIL and militia groups, much more would need to happen to contribute to that larger socio-political change in the long run. What exactly the right approach is would need to be determined through a very localized and context specific analysis.

What can we learn from peacebuilding practice about linking different levels of change?

“By viewing the problem of extremist violence using the broader and more neutral lens of conflict prevention, peacebuilders can help extract a deeper understanding of the drivers of

¹³ For further reading on systems analysis, please see CDA’s manual on conflict systems analysis CDA Collaborative Learning Projects. 2016. [Designing Strategic Initiatives to Impact Conflict Systems: Systems Approaches to Peacebuilding](#). A Resource Manual. For an example of how to use it see conflict systems analysis produced with the ARK Group on Syria: ARK Group DMCC. 2016. [The Syrian conflict: A systems conflict analysis](#).

violent extremism. In this way, the local, contextualized, and inclusive approach of peacebuilding can add considerable value to CVE practice.”¹⁴

Contemporary peacebuilding theory and practices recognize the value of working at multiple levels of society. This understanding has emerged, in part, from critiques of ‘top-down peacebuilding’ focused at the national level and top leadership only. It is also widely recognized that a multi-prong approach that addresses the political, economic, and social aspects of peacebuilding and seeks synergies between multiple peace efforts in a single conflict zone has a much higher likelihood of “adding up” to create progress towards Peace-Writ-Large and broader impact at socio-political level. Obviously, this requires the collaboration of many different actors working towards similar objectives on different levels¹⁵.

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN PROGRAM AND PEACE EFFECTIVENESS IN MACRO-LEVEL PEACEBUILDING DM&E:

Program Effectiveness focuses on assessing whether a specific program is achieving its intended goals in an effective manner. This kind of evaluation asks whether the program is fulfilling its goals and is successful on its own terms.

Peace Effectiveness asks whether, in meeting specific goals, the program makes a contribution to Peace Writ Large and has a positive effect by reducing key driving factors of conflict. This requires assessing changes in the overall environment that may or may not result directly from the program. In most instances this requires identifying the contribution of the specific program to PWL, rather than seeking clear attribution of impacts from discrete peace initiatives. Impacts at the level of PWL typically cannot be achieved by single activities and projects, but rather are cumulative, resulting from many different efforts happening simultaneously, especially when these efforts are deliberately designed to complement one another. Strategic linkages among efforts in a single context are therefore critical.

Most evaluations done for P/CVE programs have stayed at the level of program effectiveness and evidence on how such initiatives have impacted the broader conflict systems are rare.

P/CVE efforts at the level of diplomacy, security policy and development interventions might all be geared towards similar objectives, but intervene at different levels of society, work with different people, and do not necessarily speak to each other. There is a plethora of activities implemented simultaneously, but often no **holistic strategy** regarding how the various individually funded and conceptualized pieces might add up to larger P/CVE impacts. At national and bi-lateral levels, results could be enhanced through whole of Government approaches, at national levels through joint strategies between the various involved Ministries and Departments; at international level, coordination amongst Governments and bi-lateral donors with multi-lateral agencies as well as civil society organizations is required. This means considering the various sensitivities – e.g. concerns about disclosing sensitive information amongst military actors or a fear of being compromised by ‘coordination’, or hesitations on the development and peacebuilding side to get forced into a politicized agenda.

Building trust with local partners, participatory program design, and investing in long-term relationship building with a wide variety of stakeholders and partners is a key lesson from

¹⁴ Holmer, Georgia. 2013. “Countering Violent Extremism: A Peacebuilding Perspective.” *Special Report 336*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace. p. 7.

¹⁵ See Ernstorfer, Anita, Diana Chigas, and Hannah Vaughan-Lee. 2015. “From Little to Large: When does Peacebuilding Add Up.” *The Journal for Peacebuilding and Development* 10(1): 72-77. For more information on CDA’s work on cumulative impacts in peacebuilding, please visit cdacollaborative.org

effective peacebuilding practice in order to address underlying drivers of conflict and fragility and address the needs of communities. Many counter-terrorism and P/CVE approaches have not prioritized this in past, often leading to a lack of understanding the drivers of VE and ‘missing the mark’ in programming.

Realistic and Achievable Objectives

Many P/CVE funders have unrealistic expectations regarding the specific types of change that can be realistically achieved by individual interventions with short timeframes and limited funding. Piece meal funding approaches have been an impediment to long-term structural approaches. This is a problem of strategy that has implications for the credibility and legitimacy of implementers, and ultimately for the success of these interventions. Because violent extremism is frequently in the news, there is a sense of urgency, and funders are eager to see results. They may push for the project to claim that it can measurably degrade the capabilities of a terrorist or violent extremist organization and call for attribution of those results directly to one particular program or funding sources.

There is only a slight chance that a one- to three-year effort with a budget of two million dollars can do so on its own. Implementers of P/CVE programs should have open and frank conversations with their funders from the beginning, and involve them in the design of engagements to develop goals and objectives jointly with funders and local partners that indicate an aspirational direction of travel while clearly articulating what the program can achieve in a given timeframe and with a given amount of funding, as well as how the project will collaborate with other efforts to achieve greater impact. Being aware of a possible ‘hierarchy of objectives’ in a multi-layer engagement is important, as is being aware of what can be achieved in the short-term, medium-term and long-term.

“[...] Scaling up CVE projects and moving from a tactical to a strategic approach remains a challenge. Evolving or unclear funding mechanisms for projects have not always been conducive to the kind of multi-year support required for CVE projects that focus on addressing structural prevention [...].”¹⁶

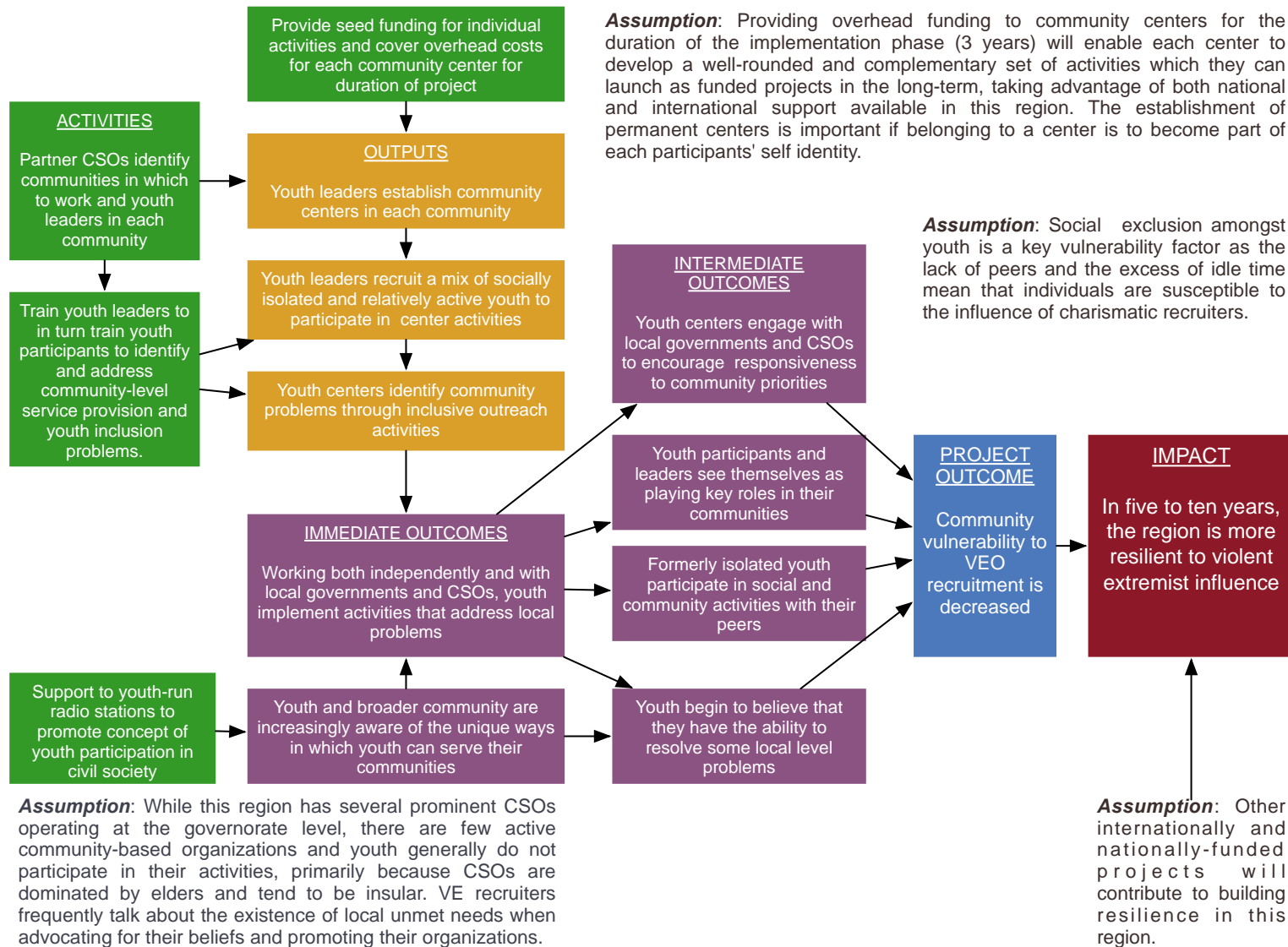
Articulating Theories of Change

A theory of change is an explanation of how and why an action is believed to be capable of bringing about its planned objectives, i.e. the changes it hopes to create through its activities, thereby revealing underlying assumptions. A clear theory of change helps to articulate the logical flow from the starting point (analysis) to the action (objective) to the change the organization wants to achieve.

The below shows an example of a theory of change of a hypothetical youth social inclusion project at community level, implemented in a context in which the conducted analysis shows that in this region, the lack of responsive civil society and the social isolation of youth are risk factors for recruitment by violent extremist organizations.

¹⁶ Chowdhury Fink 2014, 7

Theory of Change Illustrating How to Depict Flow of Results from Activities to Impact



This (hypothetical) program might be accompanied by other engagements at other levels – e.g. national level policy change on youth empowerment, or changes at the regional government level – highlighting the need for inter-connected theories of change at various levels.

P/CVE theories of change need to be context specific, nuanced, and realistic. Often fueled by donor pressure to make results frameworks more rigorous, the process of developing theories of change is sometimes an overly technocratic process more concerned with wordsmithing than discussions with local partners about the actual desired and achievable changes on the ground.

Developing theories of change jointly between donors, policy makers, implementers and local partners is an excellent opportunity to:

- Consolidate a joint understanding of the drivers of VE amongst everyone involved;
- Develop the longer-term strategy of an engagement;
- Identify the concrete changes that are achievable with the mandates of organizations involved, available funding and timeframes;
- Test assumptions about how change might happen in a given context;
- Develop a joint vision on where the journey is going in bigger picture terms;
- Build trust and open lines of communication amongst all stakeholders involved.

Many peacebuilding and development programs that attempt to address structural drivers of VE have operated with implicit theories of change in relation to P/CVE for many years. They appear to be reluctant to make their implicit theories of change more explicit or develop obvious P/CVE objectives. New donor funding envelopes that operate under a P/CVE or CVE heading present a challenge in this regard.

Theories of change need to be tested and updated on an ongoing basis, and consider emerging research in particular fields. For example, Mercy Corps has recently conducted applied field research in Afghanistan, Colombia, and Somalia to examine the principal drivers of political violence amongst youth. They found that those are most often rooted not in poverty or lack of development (as often assumed), but in experiences of injustices, such as discrimination, corruption and abuse by security forces.

“In light of these findings, many familiar approaches — vocational training programs, for instance, and civic engagement — are unlikely, in isolation, to have much effect on stability. We need a new approach, one that tackles the sources of instability, not just the symptoms.”¹⁷

¹⁷ Mercy Corps. 2015. “Youth & Consequences: Unemployment, Injustice, and Violence.”

M&E Framework Development

The field of P/CVE does not have formal standards to guide monitoring and evaluation design, nor is there consensus on whether standards are needed, nor whether standards from other fields, such as peacebuilding, can be adapted to respond to P/CVE DM&E needs. While some P/CVE funding instruments are subject to the M&E policies of the governmental bodies to which they belong, program managers with non-development or peacebuilding backgrounds may be unaware of such policies or how to operationalize them.

This poses **two primary challenges**: assessing P/CVE interventions is complicated by the fact that programming can involve difficult-to-access populations and highly sensitive topics, as well as indirect and intangible outcomes. This means that evaluation frameworks need to be flexible and creative. The absence of standard practices means that it is not possible to know what is ‘good enough’ nor to refer to a distillation of lessons learned by others. The second challenge is that a lack of standards further complicates attempts to manage individual funders’ high expectations regarding what M&E can demonstrate regarding a project’s impact on local, national, and even global security.

Ensuring that an M&E Framework is as Rigorous as Possible

While the currently broad range of P/CVE approaches means that there may be limited utility in defining prescriptive standards around what constitutes sound evidence and quality evaluations, recent expert papers have argued that the OECD DAC evaluation criteria (relevance, impact, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and coherence) can be used to good effect to guide the development of evaluation questions for P/CVE evaluation.¹⁸ Taking the additional step of adapting evidence principles, of which the Bond Principles are an example, would address some of the tactical challenges of designing an evaluation, M&E framework or evaluative exercise, while accommodating the field’s range of approaches and delivery contexts.

The Bond Evidence Principles¹⁹ were designed to help NGOs ensure that development interventions’ evaluations are as rigorous as possible. With some modifications, the principles demonstrate how guidance could be used to inform the design of P/CVE monitoring and evaluation frameworks. The principles and the authors’ suggested modifications to adapt the principles for P/CVE programming follow:

1. **Voice and inclusion**: While the original principles state that an evaluation should be based on the perspectives of those living in poverty, for P/CVE programming, basing the evaluation on the perspectives of those directly affected by violent

BALANCING THE NEED TO PROVIDE ‘GOOD NEWS’ WITH AN EVALUATOR’S COMMITMENT TO RIGOROUS INQUIRY Because funder expectations are sometime very high, it can be helpful to detail concrete and tangible results attributable to the intervention. When constructing a results chain or theory of change, and designing evaluative activities to assess progress towards intended results, it is possible to identify the pieces of the results chain for which the implementing organization can claim attribution. For example, a project addressing issues of social isolation may begin by training cadres of social workers, whose acquisition of new skills and knowledge can be directly attributed to the project. At the same time, a sound M&E plan will also be explicit about the outcomes for which the project cannot claim attribution, due in large part to the complexity of most operating environments in which P/CVE programming is delivered and the intricacies of the process of de-radicalization.

¹⁸ Khalil and Zeuthen 2016

¹⁹ Bond. 2013. “An introduction to the principles for assessing the quality of evidence.”

extremism in the country of the intervention is important as they are best placed to speak to how the effort has affected their lives. For initiatives targeting individuals vulnerable to extremist influence, include the voices of those individuals and their communities.

2. Appropriateness: The original principles state that an understanding of how the data will be used should guide decisions about data collection methods and the quantity of data collected. Given the public attention placed on issues relating to P/CVE, project level reporting can be relayed directly to senior-level policy makers, who may have different standards for evidence and data collection. Prior to designing an M&E framework, it is useful to gain an understanding of the project and donor direct and indirect information needs and the acceptability of different forms of evidence.
3. Triangulation: The principles describe how to mitigate possible bias by using a range of data collection tools and research participants. This principle is especially relevant when a project seeks to affect a VEO, as collecting that data can be very challenging. Similarly, interventions seeking to catalyze behavior change may benefit from a multipronged approach that includes input from those targeted by the intervention, direct observation, as well as tools such as media monitoring and key informant interviews to verify initial findings.
4. Contribution: As discussed in the following sections, in P/CVE as in traditional development programming, to assess project effect, the evaluation must look at what has changed as a result of the intervention, as well as external factors that also may have contributed to that change.
5. Transparency: The evaluation design and subsequent reporting should detail the data collection tools, as well as the challenges and limitations associated with those tools, to enable consumers of that information to assess the quality of the information independently. In an effort to attract a wide-range of audiences, many P/CVE and CVE evaluation reports omit methodological details, severely limiting the utility of the findings.

Do No Harm principles are highly relevant to DM&E of P/CVE programming given the sensitivity of key topics and the fact that the majority of P/CVE efforts are delivered in fragile and conflict-affected settings. Conflict sensitive M&E (designing the actual M&E process in a conflict-sensitive way) means being aware of conflict dynamics and ways in which an evaluation design or data collection instruments could potentially exacerbate conflict, and adjusting the design and tools accordingly. More broadly, conflict-sensitivity needs to be integrated across all elements of program design and implementation to avoid inadvertently exacerbating negative dynamics, putting program partners at risk, and, ideally, maximizing the potential of any engagement to support peaceful foundations and resilience in societies.

Evidencing an Intervention's Contribution to P/CVE Outcomes

As with the fields of development or peacebuilding, most project- and program-level P/CVE evaluations in dynamic and complex contexts seek to demonstrate that the project activities have **contributed** to intended outcomes rather than **attributing** those outcomes directly to the intervention. Attribution is reserved for interventions in which the changes are achieved in a linear manner and are caused exclusively or primarily by the intervention. As put by André Kahlmeyer, an evaluator with experience assessing P/CVE programming, *“There is consensus that, even in the*

best cases, we are looking at contribution, not attribution."²⁰ Despite this consensus among evaluation practitioners, donor representatives and some P/CVE implementers with less exposure to evaluation norms and standards strive to directly attribute impacts to specific interventions. Reflecting on differences between development and CVE clients in an interview conducted in February 2017 for this paper, Johnny Heald of ORB International stated that some CVE funders are more demanding with regards to attribution of results than funders working on tangible development projects. By **articulating links between intended outcomes and drivers of extremism**, theoretically, if not empirically, evaluations demonstrate that the intervention has contributed to P/CVE outcomes and impacts. However, considering the range of programming approaches employed by bi-lateral and multi-lateral agencies, INGOs, local NGOs, and development or stabilization consultancies in one given context, it is implausible that an evaluation would credibly be able to prove that degraded VE capacity is attributable to one specific intervention.

While quasi-experimental evaluation designs may be unfeasible for many P/CVE interventions due to project designs, the inaccessibility of control groups, and a range of other factors, **cross-historical comparisons** can effectively demonstrate results of both targeted one-on-one interventions, as well as efforts working on social attitudes or community perceptions of key issues. A cross-historical comparison compares data collected at multiple points in time, to identify changes amongst target beneficiaries. While the need for many P/CVE interventions to be highly **responsive to emerging dynamics** prompts some to argue that baselines will be rendered useless when perceptions of issues shift, effective identification of the primary drivers of radicalization and drivers that motivate individuals to engage in violent behavior/join extremist groups during the analysis and program design stage should facilitate identification of key behaviors, attitudes and perceptions that can be tracked over time. As new themes and issues emerge, they can be added to the areas of inquiry. Another challenge to cross-historical comparisons is that some program designs do not have overt P/CVE aims, as doing so could either negatively affect participant recruitment or could put project staff and beneficiaries at risk. While this challenge is best addressed at the program design stage, evaluation designs can cope with this challenge by collecting both qualitative and quantitative data, specifically using broad-based questions and/or covering a relatively wide range of issues that allow central P/CVE related issues to emerge organically. Tactics are discussed in greater depth in the following section on data collection.

Outcome mapping is a tool for structuring evaluative activities by collaboratively developing programming targets and monitoring progress towards those targets continuously and in great depth.²¹ Outcome mapping focuses on identifying changes in behaviors, actions, and relationships amongst direct participants, or, 'Boundary Partners,' as they are referred to in Outcome Mapping methodologies. Outcome mapping enables the robust assessment of tangible outcomes, as well as a nuanced understanding of how the intervention contributed to those outcomes, making it a good tool to address the cloudiness typically associated with P/CVE evaluative exercises. For example, a P/CVE initiative recently implemented remotely in a conflict setting successfully used outcome mapping to develop a common understanding between direct beneficiaries and project management regarding intended outcomes of a capacity development project. The process of

²⁰ Interview conducted by Lillie Ris on February 10, 2017 for the purposes of this paper.

²¹ BetterEvaluation. 2017. "Outcome Mapping." Accessed March.
http://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/outcome_mapping

refining outcome challenge statements allowed for in-depth discussions around the ways in which beneficiaries use the skills and knowledge they acquired during training as well as discussions about the ripple effects they expected to catalyze in their communities. The discussions helped the implementer understand the risks and challenges on the ground, which in turn enabled them to leverage emerging opportunities and mitigate potential harm in addition, the discussions helped the partners understand the overarching project logic and why the implementer needed to collect specific types of M&E data. Systematically tracking progress towards behavior changes amongst direct beneficiaries, through the use of journals and biweekly verbal debriefs, created a rich and verifiable record of project outcomes.²²

Exploring What can be Attributed to an Intervention

A recent intervention worked with a council of preachers. The project monitoring system sent people to places of worship to record the attendance rates in moderate and radical places of worship. Over time, the project found that following the provision of rhetorical speaking training for moderate preachers, attendance at their services increased. They managed to pull people from radical worship to moderate. The project and evaluation found that many attendees had preferred the services of more radical preachers because of their ability to reach the audience emotionally.

In this case, we could attribute the changes in behavior (from attending radical services to attending moderate services) to the intervention, but in terms of linking those outcomes to broader P/CVE impacts, demonstrating contribution was sufficient – and attribution would have been impossible.

Example provided by André Kahlmeyer, Conflict Management Consulting (CMC)

Using M&E Processes to Support Continual Improvement

In an ideal world, a program's logic model is constructed based on a series of causal assumptions that explain how specified activities will result in intended outputs and how each output (or group of outputs) will, in turn, catalyze an outcome (or group of outcomes). In more established sectors, program designers and M&E teams are able to draw on existing evidence to explain their causal assumptions. As the field of P/CVE lacks an agreed evidence basis for what kinds of interventions work in different contexts, some P/CVE approaches have borrowed evidence from other fields. For example, a media/communications for behavior change effort used health behavior change models, such as Prochaska's trans theoretical model of the stages of change, to evidence links between awareness and behavioral changes. The extent to which the health behavior change model applies in P/CVE settings was tested during implementation. The team designed specific indicators to assess the extent to which awareness precedes attitudinal changes and other fundamental causal assumptions.²³

Contextual assumptions are the factors that must be in place for the program to deliver its intended results. A sound conflict and VE analysis and access to extensive knowledge about the

²² The Stabilisation Network. 2017. "Approach to Measuring the Effects of CVE Programming."

²³ The Stabilisation Network. 2017.

context in which the programming is being delivered are key to understanding the operating environment.

One strategy to mitigate the challenge presented by the field's lack of an adequate evidence base and the tendency to drop technical specialists into new contexts (e.g. policemen or media producers who move from hot spot to hot spot) is to continually vet assumptions in consultation with individuals at the front line of the engagement. Even if empirical evidence cannot be collected, in-depth discussions can identify holes in the logic and misconceptions about local dynamics.

A strong M&E framework, if articulated at the start of a project, can enable the systematic assessment of assumptions. First, iteratively articulating the assumptions enables refinement of the team's understanding of those assumptions. Second, focusing research resources on the assumptions that are considered most tenuous or provisional can be a way to prioritize M&E spending.

Building evaluative processes into program implementation may present an opportunity to enable P/CVE efforts to overcome some of the challenges highlighted in this paper, as learning in real time can be used to revise initially weak project designs, and systematically capture and process feedback to improve delivery. Evaluative thinking includes the identification of assumptions, discussion of in-depth questions, engaging in reflection and perspective taking exercises, and identifying and informing emerging decisions. Examining the extent to which project components are clearly articulated and mutually understood either during the inception stage of an engagement, or early in implementation is key to both improving a project's design and to ensuring that results are measurable, as well as enabling the collection of baseline and ongoing monitoring data.

When an intervention is innovating by developing a new approach, or introducing an old approach in a new, complex setting, traditional evaluation methodologies may not be appropriate. **Developmental Evaluation**²⁴ (DE) is an approach that allows for continuous adaptive learning, drawing on systems concepts and relatively intense stakeholder engagement practices. Where structured evaluation frameworks may not be capable of anticipating the range of potential outcomes from an innovative intervention, DE presents a set of practices and strategies for creating a learning framework, to facilitate the identification and prioritization of key issues and things to learn.

²⁴ Dozois, Elizabeth, Mark Langlois, and Natasha Blanchet-Cohen. 2008. "DE 201: A Practitioner's Guide to Developmental Evaluation." Montreal: The J. W. McConnell Family Foundation and the International Institute for Child Rights and Development.

Applying Developmental Evaluation Principles

As part of an internal M&E team working on media and civil society development projects in the MENA region, we incorporated some components of the developmental evaluation approach into our program. We embedded designated M&E officers into the delivery teams, provided access to ongoing context research and analysis, and built both formal and informal reflection processes into the delivery schedule.

The projects benefitted, as we kept results at the center of discussions about strategy, and created opportunities to rapidly and informally provide feedback from the populations targeted by the intervention. This was especially useful because some project components were delivered remotely and it was not possible for the program team to interact directly with beneficiaries.

One challenge we encountered when drawing on the principles of developmental evaluation was the struggle to balance the time required to engage with the project team around learning and the time required to collect and process data rigorous enough to satisfy donor reporting requirements. Greater communication with the donor around our approach and enhanced documentation of the improvements that we identified and adopted could have helped to mitigate this challenge.

Example from The Stabilisation Network. 2017.

Other relevant approaches might be evaluability assessments or program quality assessments, ideally infused with learnings from peacebuilding practice.²⁵

²⁵ Ernstorfer, Anita, Isabella Jean, and Peter Woodrow, with Diana Chigas. 2016. *Thinking Evaluatively in Peacebuilding Design, Implementation and Monitoring: Three Reflecting on Peace Practice (RPP) and Do No Harm (DNH)-infused options to strengthen the effectiveness of peacebuilding strategies and programs*. Peacebuilding Evaluation Consortium.

Data Collection

A number of factors make it difficult to collect data on P/CVE outputs and outcomes. Fortunately, peacebuilding and other fields, including social work and community development, offer solutions to difficulties accessing, communicating with and protecting direct and indirect beneficiaries.

Strategies for Accessing Difficult-to-Reach Populations

P/CVE interventions that address the drivers that motivate individuals to join extremist groups, the triggers for acts of extreme violence, and the enabling environment for violent extremism may target populations that are difficult to reach due to their proximity to extremist actors (physically, politically, or intellectually). In many cases, such interventions are delivered remotely, wherein an initiative is primarily staffed in one relatively secure location (e.g. Nairobi) with delivery taking place in other localities that are highly affected by violence and/or intimidation by violent extremist actors (e.g. South-Central Somalia).

In order to deliver effectively, remotely managed efforts must be built on strong relationships with local actors who inform project design as well as the design of M&E frameworks, ensuring that local priorities are represented and intricacies of the context are understood. Remote management likewise requires remote monitoring, and many aid, stabilization, and P/CVE interventions now utilize third parties to monitor delivery and results.

Proxy indicators are observable signals that a change has occurred. For example, to assess reductions in youth isolation, an M&E framework could track the frequency with which youth participants attend social events and the size of their social networks, as well as monitoring shifts in how youth describe their role in their communities.

Third Party Monitoring (TPM) is typically carried out by local civil society or research organizations who, by nature of their local relationships and sustained involvement in communities can access program partners and research participants while attracting less negative attention to themselves or the participants. Effective TPM requires strong partnerships and mutual trust between implementing organizations and TPM providers.²⁶ Effective partnerships also include **feedback mechanisms** to ensure that the monitoring process is going as well as possible, enabled by communication between the TPM providers and implementers.²⁷ When working with a TPM provider, it is necessary to allow more time than would typically be allocated for data collection. Engaging TPM organizations in designing questionnaires and analyzing data offers enhanced understanding of local dynamics, but also takes time. Depending on the experience and expertise of the TPM provider, the primary implementer may design the research instruments and the sampling methodology, in consultation with the TPM provider. The importance of a sound methodology and detailed training on how to implement it cannot be overemphasized.

In other contexts, when it is difficult to access local populations or when their participation in research activities could put them at risk, it is necessary to find creative solutions. In counter-messaging interventions, some initiatives test project outputs (online or print media) in simulations to establish that outputs are capable of delivering intended outcomes. Focus group discussions are used to examine whether a media product is capable of creating the intended

²⁶ Howe, Kimberly, Elizabeth Stites, and Danya Chudacoff. 2015. *Breaking the Hourglass: Partnerships in Remote Management Settings – The Cases of Syria and Iraqi Kurdistan*. Somerville, MA: Feinstein International Center.

²⁷ Ibid.

immediate outcomes amongst audiences similar to the target beneficiaries (e.g. populations recently displaced from areas under VEO control). This data is then used to establish the plausibility of causation between an output and an outcome. As in peacebuilding, **proxy indicators** are also useful for tracking difficult to measure or hard to access data. For example, a counter-recruitment engagement that helps mothers identify warning signs and intervene when their children are at risk might monitor school attendance rates as an outcome indicator as in that particular community, there is a correlation between dropping out of school and vulnerability to VEO influence. In other contexts, there might be little correlation between education and VE (stressing the need for context-specific approaches). Where contacting the individuals and families targeted by the intervention could put them at risk, interviews with teachers and school officials can be used to assess project effects.

Strategies for Minimizing Risk to Program Participants, Stakeholders and Communities

Delivering programming and collecting data to monitor or evaluate project effects in contexts in which violent extremist organizations have either control or influence over the population can put beneficiaries, stakeholders and communities at risk.

Minimizing such risk often begins with the project design. Depending on how the issues at hand are perceived in local communities, conversations with local stakeholders may focus on the near-term, immediate outcomes (i.e. increased participation of at-risk youth in community-building activities) rather than the intermediate outcomes that may more directly relate to P/CVE aims (i.e. decrease in use of sectarian language in chat groups). However, this does not mean that the effort's theory of change should obfuscate its intended outcomes.

In some contexts, affiliation with international implementers and interventions that are linked to foreign funding can put participants at risk. To mitigate this risk, some initiatives use **local research organizations** to conduct interviews and surveys in target communities. This practice warrants additional consideration of the ethical implications of researchers stating their association with a local research group, rather than an internationally-funded P/CVE program.

Research instruments can be designed in a manner that minimizes risk to research participants. **Working with local researchers and subject matter experts** to draft questionnaires is essential for avoiding triggering language and ensuring participant safety and ease of participation. **Framing questions** broadly allows the respondent to choose how to handle sensitive issues can protect a respondent. While this can complicate data analysis and coding processes later, drawing on local expertise can help to fill-in areas left intentionally vague. **Terminology** used in questionnaires and surveys can make a significant difference to the safety of those participating in research and collecting data. For example, while many refer to the Islamic State using the demeaning acronym Daesh, using the term Daesh in writing could put the individual holding that paper in danger. Additional methodologies to protect respondents and researchers include the use of **list experiments**. In a list experiment, individual responses to sensitive survey questions are *"concealed... by aggregating those responses with responses to several other control questions."*²⁸ List experiments and related methodologies are advantageous for guarding against subjectivity bias, as well as protecting respondents. As methods such as list experiments can be difficult to

²⁸ Graeme Blair. 2015. "Survey Methods for Sensitive Topics." *APSA Comparative Politics Newsletter* 25(1): 12-16.

implement, it is necessary to build in extra training time to ensure that researchers and TPM providers understand how to administer the survey and analyze findings.

P/CVE M&E data can be highly sensitive. Collecting and storing the data pose unique risks and program staff and M&E personnel must prioritize the security of information about partners, interviewees, and survey respondents. In some settings, the use of mobile data collection tools can limit risks to data collectors in the field, as they can upload and then delete materials from their device, avoiding the need to pass through checkpoints with sensitive documents. However, electronic data is also vulnerable to hacking; its applicability is context specific. Data storage practices must ensure the security of personal details as hacking and human error are also risks.

Areas for Further Research and Engagement

Expand the evidence base. More research is needed to compare the effectiveness of different approaches to P/CVE and different implementation modalities (direct, indirect, co-implementation etc.) to security and violence prevention and to compare the financial costs, as well as examine intended and unintended impacts of each approach. This should build on existing evidence and experiences in development, peacebuilding, organized crime programming, and include case studies, monitoring of pilot projects that are designed with experimental design, and meta-evaluations of existing P/CVE evaluations.

Further inquiry into the role of Governments as (intended or unintended) drivers of VE – both at the level of conflict-affected state governments, as well as the possibility of unintended negative consequences of foreign Government-driven counter-terrorism approaches for long-term peacebuilding and stability.

Learning. Investigate what conditions enable policy makers and practitioners to more effectively learn from past mistakes towards making better policy decisions and developing programmatic DM&E approaches.

While initiatives that focus on addressing structural drivers of VE often benefit from established DM&E knowledge and experience in development and peacebuilding communities, the more security focused initiatives are often planned and implemented with little technical DM&E understanding or support, and the levels of scrutiny of different donors and partners vary. There is more learning that needs to happen in relation to DM&E at both levels, as well as some cross-fertilization between the different areas of engagement.

Engage donors and local partners more in design processes, the development of theories of change and engagement with local partners to create a more realistic and nuanced understanding of the pace of change and levels of feasible impact.

Engage donors and local partners in discussions about M&E best practices, and about the scope of what project- and program-level M&E can demonstrate in complex operating environments.

Test the applicability of innovative methods, such as Developmental Evaluation, to inform the development of P/CVE programming strategy at the national or regional level.

TPM providers typically monitor humanitarian aid. Further consideration is needed regarding the risks inherent in hiring a non-specialized TPM firm to conduct research on P/CVE and CVE outcomes.
