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Developmental Evaluation: Youth and Community Resilience Against Violent Extremism

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The Sharekna Project to Support Youth and Empower Local Communities

- Sharekna (“engage or participate with us”) is a pilot project in Tunisia under the *Countering Violent Extremism in the Middle East and North Africa (CoVE-MENA)* Task Order.
- ~ 2.5 year, \$4.2 million project funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development.
- The project applies the theory of change that:
 - ***If*** youth are engaged and empowered to identify and address economic, political and social stresses, particularly drivers of violent extremism, in their communities, ***and if*** the capacity of community-level actors to collaborate with youth in addressing these drivers is strengthened, ***then*** youth and their communities will be more resilient to those stresses, including violent extremism.

A Positive Youth Development-Centered and Community-Led Approach

The project began with two approaches:

- Community Youth Mapping (CYM), through which youth gather the perspectives of other youth, community leaders and stakeholders to identify youth needs, aspirations and access to services and opportunities
- FHI 360's SCALE+ methodology, through which youth and community stakeholders come together in a Whole System in the Room (WSR) workshop to share findings and develop collaborative action plans that address priorities for engaging youth.

The Complexity of Fostering Resilience

- Sharekna also supports youth and community actors — through grants and technical assistance — to jointly implement local resilience activities.
- But community resilience, especially when related to violent extremism, is a complex issue.

The Need for Highly Adaptive Programming

- Interventions have a heightened risk for unintended consequences, both positive and negative.
- To navigate this exact situation, the Sharekna project (which was set up as a pilot) used the targeted testing of new approaches to progressively modify and improve programming.
- Programming had to be designed, implemented, and monitored with a strategic approach that supported learning and allowed for adaptation in response to contextual changes and emergent opportunities and risks.

Use of Developmental Evaluation

- Developmental evaluation (DE) “is grounded in systems thinking and supports innovation by collecting and analyzing real-time data in ways that lead to informed and ongoing decision-making as part of the design, development, and implementation process.”

Michael Quinn Patton, *Developmental Evaluation: Applying Complexity Concepts to Enhance Innovation and Use*

- This resembles a situation where one maps an environment, while in the middle of traveling to a general destination, *and* without a clear path (but with an open mind) of what might be found.
- The DE approach fit our need to address and examine how the Sharekna grants programs could be created, and then finessed and improved, as they were under way.

Mapping when the Trajectory is Unknown

- Sharekna moved from formative to developmental to summative evaluations.
- This was essentially our “exploratory map”- monitoring and evaluating the project when its trajectory was unknown.
- Our team had to pay close attention to the emergence of new patterns and to understand the context in which they emerged.
- During the grants/DE phase, the project operated in a situation of low certainty and low agreement.
- The DE came into play when there were many unknowns and there was not a tested intervention, as was the case with the CYM and WSR.

Same Tools of Observation, New Insights

- The DE utilized the same tools as the CYM and WSR—such as interviews surveys, observations, “community echoes,” ***but the tools served another purpose and answered different questions.***
- These tools were utilized for adaptive learning; M&E tools were not (only) used for summaries and observations but also scrutinized for emergent patterns.

Spontaneous Adaptation: Analogy of a Jazz Ensemble

- The short feedback loops of the DE allowed for a spontaneous adaptation, to glean and distill findings of how the grants were having an impact.
- This spontaneous adaptation can be seen in the analogy of a jazz ensemble, i.e. there is a degree of improvisation or “playing by ear” within a melodic structure.
- Examples:
 - The Sharekna team queried grantees about their approaches to issues like communication and attendance; and based on grantee responses would give targeted guidance to improve strategic planning and project implementation.
 - The Sharekna team learned that earlier community stakeholder workshops had major issues with youth attrition; based on this experience they created specific measures to keep youth engaged in between project planning and implementation phases.
 - The Sharekna team discovered that community stakeholders required basic conflict resolution skills to ensure that workshops proceeded smoothly; as a result, later initiatives included this very training.

A Focus on Actionable Information

- In the DE phase, we operated on principles more so than on the basis of a set plan.
- The focus was on attaining *actionable information*, but not on executing a bounded or set M&E framework.

Mirroring but not Duplicating Roles

- In practice, this meant that the Sharekna Developmental Evaluator and the M&E Officer did not have mutually exclusive roles.
 - During the DE phase, the two positions often mirrored (but were not in fact duplicating) each other.
- In practice this meant that both staff members were asking the same questions and interviewing the same people, *but they were not doing the same thing*.
 - The M&E Officer was not only looking at output indicators and the Developmental Evaluator was not only focused on learning.
- In a situation of extreme fluidity, in which community changes were under way, emerging patterns had to be measured via traditional M&E and also had to be analyzed in the DE.

Measuring, Sleuthing, Measuring

- The original roles of these two staff members remained but another mindset developed as to how they could work on the project.
- This involved a kind of sleuthing, i.e. not only doing traditional M&E but a willingness to investigate the unknown.
- But the sleuthing never displaced or overrode rigorous measurement—it accompanied the process.

Data
Tracking
Mechanisms

- The Developmental Evaluator additionally used a participant observation journal (such as ethnographers use), to track the following in relation to the local resilience activities:
 - What was said? (And what *wasn't* said)
 - What decisions were made?
 - Why were these decisions made?
 - Upon what evidence were the decisions made, or were they made on a hunch?

Managing Incoming Information in a Dynamic Context

- Communication was vital.
- The field team was in constant touch with local stakeholders and grantees.
- The interaction was crucial to ensure that the partners understood the program methodology and community-driven approach (and not just take the grant and disengage).
- Observations and findings were recorded and routinely analyzed.
- We established a system of regular check-ins between the FHI360 Washington DC and Tunis teams, in order to discuss and unpack significant findings.

Lesson Learned: Role of Active Listening and Knowledge Management Skills

- The DE involved voluminous information—i.e. summaries of meetings with community stakeholders, social network analyses, pre/post surveys.
- The Development Evaluator needed to be a calm and even-keeled person to deal with information overload, as well as be humble enough able to ask for a second-opinion at times.
- We also learned that the Technical Advisor must also have strong active listening and knowledge management skills, to help colleagues interpret and reduce variations of the same phenomena.

Lesson Learned: Intuition Must Come in an Organized Framework.

- Returning to the Jazz analogy—a musician can improvise but s/he still must know how to play an instrument!
- We found that fidelity to the CYM and WSR Methods, as well as DE protocols was absolutely essential.
- At the same time, the highly embedded nature Developmental Evaluator and M&E Officer translated into a kind of intuition—their knowledge of the communities combined with their deep familiarity of program goals to shape their sense of the changes in resilience that were under way.
- Intuition always came within the guiding frameworks of the project.

Lesson Learned: Be Prepared to Unpack and Discuss Linkages of Other Security Challenges Related to Programming

- We asked the Developmental Evaluator to monitor *external* shocks, such as actions by VEOs in other parts of Tunisia, as part of reporting and ongoing assessment of the grants/resilience activities.
- Because the Developmental Evaluator did not have a professional background in policing or public safety, it was often necessary for the Technical Advisor to relay how VEO actions have affected community resilience endeavors in other countries and contexts.
- The Developmental Evaluator and the Technical Advisor would then co-explore how similar occurrences might manifest within the communities participating in Sharekna programming, and plan appropriately.