

Assessing Progress made, and the Future of Development Approaches to Preventing Violent Extremism

Concept Note

In March 2016, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Oslo Governance Centre organised a global meeting on "*Preventing Violent Extremism by Promoting Inclusive Development, Tolerance and Respect for Diversity*". Bringing together 135 experts and practitioners from national governments, civil society, multilateral institutions, academia and think tanks from across forty-seven countries, this meeting contributed to UNDP's development of this area of work, serving to validate a strategy paper, [Preventing Violent Extremism through Inclusive Development and the Promotion of Tolerance and Respect for Diversity](#). This strategy paper subsequently informed the development of the UNDP Global Programme on Development Solutions for the Prevention of Violent Extremism (2017-2020), currently being implemented. It also provided the framing discussion for the development of an ongoing research agenda on Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE).¹

Two years on, UNDP and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs will be convening a second global meeting to take stock of progress made, share experiences and distill lessons on policy-development, research and programming on PVE. This meeting will take place in Oslo, Norway, from 23 to 24 May 2018, hosted by UNDP's Oslo Governance Centre.

I. Context

No country or region is immune from the negative impacts and threats posed by violent extremism. Data derived from terrorism studies suggests a global decline in the number of fatalities associated with terrorist attacks but the breadth of the threat is expanding. Deaths caused by terrorism decreased by 13 percent from 2015 to 2016 representing an overall global decline by 22 per cent since 2014. Four of the five countries with the highest impact from terrorism recorded a reduction in the number of deaths. These four countries are: Afghanistan, Nigeria, Pakistan and Syria. According to the [2017 Global Terrorism Index](#), these countries together with Iraq accounted for a third of deaths from terrorism. At the same time, there is an increase in the number of countries that recorded at least one terrorism related death, from 65 countries in 2015 to 77 countries in 2016. In addition, OECD member countries accounted for one percent of global deaths from terrorism in 2016, a substantial increase from 0.1 per cent in 2010.

Terrorist groups such as Al-Qaida, Boko Haram and the so-called Islamic State (IS) have been mostly responsible for these attacks. These groups are responsible for spreading social, cultural and religious intolerance, both within the territories that they operate, and by using media for global and real-time communication to spread their destabilizing ideas. Millions of people including young people,

¹ See "Preventing Violent Extremism through Promoting Inclusive Development, Tolerance and Respect for Diversity" Global Meeting, 14-16 March 2016, Oslo Norway, http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/ourwork/global-policy-centres/oslo_governance_centre/pve.html accessed on 1 November 2017.

women and children have fled areas controlled by terrorist groups. At the same time, large numbers of foreign fighters from around the world have been attracted either to join them in combat in areas where they wield territorial control; or to launch 'home grown' terrorist attacks. On the other hand, there have been a spurned growth of actual and/or potential violence by right-wing extremist groups.²

Even though violent extremist organisations such as Al-Qaida, Boko Haram and IS are losing territorial control, threat of fragmented and persistent insecurity remains high. To date, counter-terrorism measures, including intelligence gathering and offensive military operations, have been the most prominent dimension of global response. While successful in reducing terrorism and violent extremism in specific locations, counter-terrorism operations have not succeeded in eliminating threats posed by extremism. When conducted insensitively, counter-terrorism interventions have been shown to risk exacerbating grievances that fuel recruitment by extremist groups. And, terrorist groups have proved themselves to be skilled in adapting their tactics to maintain influence against the dominance of the use of force by national, regional and international actors.

Violent extremism represents a diverse and evolving phenomenon, which necessitates a more comprehensive approach to achieve lasting prevention. There is growing international consensus that there is an urgent need to advance and scale-up peacebuilding and development-driven approaches as part of wider multi-sectoral responses going forward. Integrating and expanding development and peacebuilding approaches will be essential both to assisting the recovery and promotion of sustainable peace in the global epicenters of violent extremist related conflicts; and to curbing and transforming the wider threat posed.

II. Progress Made and assessing the Future of Development Approaches to Preventing Violent Extremism

There has been some progress in advancing development-driven approaches to preventing and addressing extremism. This progress is discernible through recent policy-development, research studies, and programmes on PVE.

Various policies have been developed at the global, regional, national and local levels to address and prevent the scourge of violent extremism. A crucial aspect of policy formulation is in the development and implementation of Plans of Actions on PVE. On 15 January 2016, the Secretary General presented his *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism* to the General Assembly. The Plan of Action encouraged each member state to consider "developing a national plan of action to prevent violent extremism, which sets national priorities for addressing the local drivers of violent extremism and complement national counter-terrorism strategies". It also called for a strengthened role of regional and sub-regional organisations including through the provision of technical assistance to member states in their respective sub-region or region in building capacity for preventing violent extremism and support effective cooperation. On 12 February 2016, the General Assembly adopted resolution 70/254, which *inter alia* welcomed the initiative by the Secretary-General and took note of his Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism. In a subsequent resolution, 70/291 adopted on 1 July 2016, the General Assembly

² RAVNDAL, J. A. (2017), Explaining right-wing terrorism and violence in Western Europe: Grievances, opportunities and polarisation. *European Journal of Political Research*. Vol. 56

recommended that “member states consider the implementation of relevant recommendations of the Plan of Action, as applicable to the national context...”.

Several States are increasingly establishing their respective Plans of Action on PVE. Some examples include Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Jordan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Nigeria, Lebanon, Tajikistan, Tanzania and Somalia. In developing their respective national plans on PVE, many of these countries have collaborated with the UN, civil society including youth organisations, movements and networks, and research institutions in diverse ways based on national capacity and needs. In addition, regional organisations such as the African Union (AU),³ Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN)⁴ and the European Union,⁵ have developed or are developing regional plans consistent with the UN’s Plan of Action on PVE. Despite the progress made in the development of national and regional plans either specific to, or relevant to PVE, there have been some gaps such as: limited consultations and inclusivity especially with local communities; inherent risks of adopting Plans of Action as a reinforcing tool for maintaining the predominance of security focused approach; and various coordination challenges associated with multi-stakeholders providing support to states and regional organisations on Plans of Action.

On research, there is a growing body of empirical evidence on the pathways of individual radicalization and violent extremism. The 2017 UNDP report, [Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment](#) provides one of the latest research findings on what drives extremism. The report was based on interviews with 495 former fighters from Al Shabaab, Boko Haram, IS and other terrorist networks. Seventy-one percent of respondents identified ‘government action’, including ‘killing of a family member or friend’ and ‘arrest of a family member or friend’ as being the critical event that finally pushed them to join a violent extremist group. The role of the state as a push factor to violent extremism, while controversial, points to the limitations of a security approach to address or prevent violent extremism, especially where this takes place with little regard for adherence to human rights and international humanitarian law in security interventions. Other factors found to correlate with the ‘journey to extremism’ in Africa relate to depth of understanding of religious texts as well as overall level of education; economic need and aspiration; as well as identification with the nation-state and civic participation.

Some research findings have also emerging on the conditions conducive to, and the structural context of violent extremism. In this respect, there is a recognition that the breakdown or absence of a social contract between state and citizens, is a critical area of concern creating the conditions that are conducive to multiple factors contributing to violent extremism. In addition, there is evidence to suggest that prolonged and unresolved conflicts allow violent extremist groups to exploit deep seated grievances, find safe havens and to wield territorial control, that could allow for planning, recruitment and resourcing of terrorist acts. Other PVE-specific or relevant research studies that have been conducted relate to the analysis of youth perceptions and the recognition of the roles of young people in PVE⁶ reintegration of

³ See UN Secretary General Report on “Strengthening the Partnership between the UN and African Union on peace and security in Africa, including on the Work of the UN Office to the African Union”, dated 30 August 2017 <http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents/sgreports/2017.shtml>

⁴ On 20 September 2017, ASEAN member states adopted a Declaration to “Counter the Rise of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism” in Manila, Philippines.

⁵ The EU has long been working on Counter-terrorism but the basis for its PVE work is its May 2014 “Revised Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism”. See <https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs>

⁶ UNDP Global Study on Youth Perceptions and Youth-led solutions to PVE drawing on case studies of Kosovo (as per UNSCR 1244(1999)), Pakistan and Yemen.

disengaged fighters, the role of media including online pathways to radicalization, gendered analysis of violent extremism as well as the role of women and youth. These research areas look set to expand and will continue to define knowledge production, policies and programmatic interventions on PVE.

At the programmatic level, promoting safer and inclusive communities as well as supporting resilience against violent extremism especially at the local level have been prioritized. Through its “All-of-UN” approach, the UN is working with national authorities and other relevant stakeholders on PVE-specific projects/interventions in various countries. Projects cover a range of priority areas such as engagement with religious leaders, job creation, outreach and prevention in prisons, strengthening early recovery, community resilience including through youth and women empowerment programmes amongst other initiatives. Based on the progress made in these areas of policies, research and programmes, the second UNDP global meeting on PVE will take stock of lessons and propose recommendations on how to enhance future development solutions on PVE.

III. Rationale for Second UNDP Global Meeting on PVE

Since the first global meeting in March 2016, the UNDP has significantly contributed to, facilitated or supported PVE through evidence-based research, policy support and programmatic interventions. As a result, there is a growing repository of cutting edge research findings, and lessons learned on the implementation of PVE-specific or relevant policy and programmatic support. Amongst other initiatives, UNDP has conducted a review of progress in the development and implementation of national Plans of Action on Preventing Violent Extremism, conducting research across 15 countries. Research and programmes have also been undertaken by UNDP in collaboration with research think-tanks and civil society organisations on reintegration of former terrorist fighters, media and counternarrative programming, linkages between the private sector and violent extremism, online radicalisation, and the roles of women and young people in preventing and addressing violent extremism, amongst others. UNDP has developed guidance for the measurement of the effectiveness of its PVE programmes at the national level.

A second UNDP global PVE meeting therefore provides an opportunity to convene a broad community of relevant stakeholders, and take stock of new evidence and experience to assess what has worked well, identify challenges, and generate new insights as well as specific recommendations aimed at enhancing UNDP’s future efforts and global drive towards PVE research, policy-development and programmatic interventions. It is against this backdrop that the UNDP will be hosting the second global meeting on PVE under the theme, **“Assessing Progress made and the Future of Development Approaches to Preventing Violent Extremism”**.

IV. Aim of the Second UNDP Global Meeting

The second global meeting will bring together high-level policy-makers, researchers, civil society representatives including women and youth networks and, practitioners from across the world, to

disseminate and discuss cutting edge research findings, generate lessons learned on programmatic interventions and policy support on PVE. It will provide an opportunity for UNDP and other development practitioners as well as research institutions, practitioners and civil society organizations to exchange views on the progress made, challenges encountered and generate new perspectives on how to strengthen UNDP as well as global efforts towards the prevention of violent extremism.

Two overarching themes will inform this meeting:

- a. Assessing progress made on the practice of PVE
- b. Strengthening development approaches to addressing and preventing violent extremism.

Based on these main themes, the following sub-themes will inform discussions:

- Global and regional trends and prospects for success of the development and implementation of National and Regional Plans of Action on PVE
- Transformative leadership and role of young people in reducing and preventing violent extremism
- Lessons learned from the role of women in violent extremism
- Reintegration of disengaged terrorist fighters in different contexts
- Methods and tools for measuring effectiveness in UNDP PVE programming
- Reassessing the role of media and violent extremism

V. Expected Outcomes

The second UNDP global meeting is expected to contribute towards enhancing UNDP's future approach to PVE and contribute to global knowledge on the topic. Deep insights from field-based evidence, exchange of views, and knowledge products on PVE, from the varied stakeholders shared at the meeting, will be synthesized into policy relevant guidance to:

- a. Deepen analysis of lessons learned and promising practices on PVE;
- b. Enrich UNDP's developmental approach on more effective programmatic interventions and context-relevant policy support on PVE;
- c. Consolidate partnerships with research institutions, civil society networks and movements, regional organisations and other relevant stakeholders on PVE work;
- d. Inspire strategic thinking on the linkages between PVE and the 2030 Agenda, especially SDG16.