The Peace and Conflict Tool Box gathers knowledge material and method support on an integrated conflict perspective and peaceful and inclusive societies, in the form of Tools, Briefs and Thematic Overviews.

[With an integrated conflict perspective opportunities to con-tribute to conflict prevention and inclu-sive peacebuilding are identified, and risks of conflict insensitive practices are mitigated.]

[THEMATIC OVERVIEW]
Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) through development

INTRODUCTION

Violent extremism comes in different forms and take different expressions depending on the context where it grows. As stated in the UN Plan of Action on Preventing Violent Extremism, "Violent extremism is a diverse phenom-enon, without clear definition. It is neither new nor exclusive to any region, nationality or system of belief."[1] In recent years, terrorist groups such as ISIL, Al-Qaida, Al-Shabab and Boko Haram are nevertheless those most commonly understood as violent extremist groups, but the concept could equally be ap-plied to i.a. certain extreme right groups in the Western part of the world. The lack of a clear definition implies that the concept is debated and can be easily exploited or misused.

Until the mid-1990s, violent extremism was primarily linked to national and regional conflicts. Since 2003, the global level of incidents has risen from ap-proximately 3,000 fatalities to 25,000 in 2016.[2] Yet, only 1% of these fatalities happened in OECD countries.[3] The remaining part occurred in developing countries and in many cases where Sida has development cooperation. Behind these figures are i.a. ISIL, Boko Haram, Al Qaida and Al Shabab. These groups are however also engaged in conflicts with either government or other non-state armed groups, which means that the total number of casualties is much higher than just the deaths through terrorism.

The cost of conflict and armed violence, including violent extremism, always reach beyond the number of lost lives. The economic and social impact of violent extremism has long-lasting effects that are mostly felt in develop-ing countries,[4] for example related to health costs and decrease in tourism and trade. Heavy investments in militarized security responses also tend to divert funds away from development. The presence and operations of violent extremist groups affect livelihood possibilities and food security, especially in the most marginalized areas, where porous borders and the absence of central government facilitate the establishment, movement and cross-fertilization of these groups, as well as the organized trade in weapons, drugs and other goods that are prerequisites for their existence. The consequences are disproportion-ately impacting education possibilities and job opportunities for children and

Purpose and intended use:

This Thematic Overview aims to give guidance to how Swedish de-velopment cooperation interprets the concept of "preventing violent extremism" (PVE), explain the difference and overlap between PVE and peacebuilding, the rela-tion between PVE interventions and ODA,[1] and examine some of the opportunities and risks for engagement. It does not aim to give a clear definition to or explain the difference between violent extremism and terrorism. It focuses on the expressions of violent extremism in countries of Sida's concern.

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1 Official Development Assistance as decided by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to measure aid.

youth, making young people at risk of becoming more marginalized from power and influence and thereby at risk for recruitment. A study by UNDP shows that 53 % of recruits to African extremist groups where between 17 and 26 years old at the time of recruitment.[5]

The operations of extremist groups have so far mostly been followed by militarized counter-terrorism response. Such an approach may temporarily halt the most radical manifestations, but has proven incapable of addressing the complexities behind the drivers of extremism. The connection between conflict, marginalisation and violent extremism therefore calls for development actors to define the linkage between peacebuilding, development and the prevention of violent extremism in the work towards achieving Agenda 2030.

WHAT IS PREVENTION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM (PVE)?

In February 2016, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) updated its guidelines for defining how development aid can be used and officially recorded, and determined that activities undertaken with the purpose of preventing violent extremism are eligible as Official Development Assistance (ODA). According to the Swedish Government's report on Human rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law,[6] the Government intends to (1) strengthen the rule of law nationally and internationally to counteract and prevent violent extremism, (2) act for the fight against terrorism with full respect for international law, human rights and legal certainty, and (3) counteract that countries use terrorism as a pretext for enforcing unauthorized restrictions. Similarly, the Swedish national strategy to counter terrorism clearly states that "preventive work [should] form the focus of Sweden's international counter-terrorism efforts".[7] How, then, can we explain and interpret the concept of preventing violent extremism – PVE?

The UN Secretary General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (UN Plan of Action) describes PVE as systematic preventive measures which directly address the *drivers* of violent extremism. It emphasises "tackling conditions conducive to terrorism" while "ensuring respect for human rights for all and the rule of law while countering terrorism". Thus, it stresses the "application of justice", "the social compact between the governing and governed" and the reasons "why individuals are attracted to violent extremist groups", arguing that "the creation of open, equitable, inclusive and pluralist societies, based on the full respect of human rights and with economic opportunities for all, represents the most tangible and meaningful alternative to violent extremism."[8]

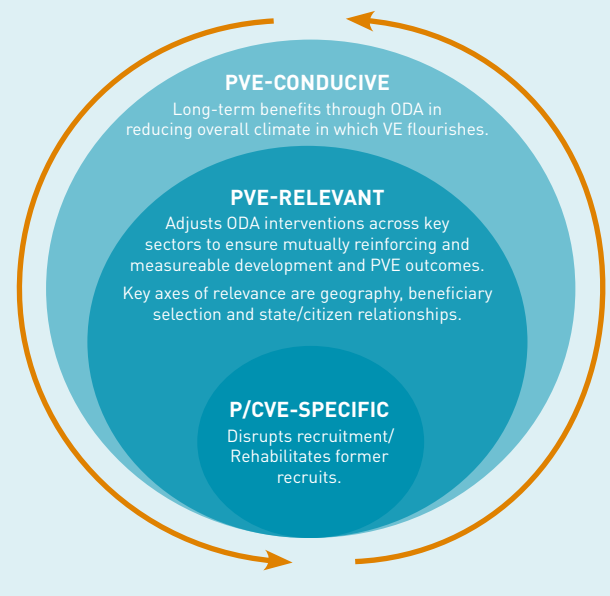A distinction can therefore be made between Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), where the latter in most cases is associated with tackling conditions conducive to terrorism on the grounds of military and political interests. PVE, on the other hand, is understood as initiatives that are framed with the ambition to contribute to stability, inclusiveness and accountability by transforming the drivers of violent extremism and reintegrate those that have already actively engaged. PVE is therefore a broad concept that can be translated into programming options that address both grievances at the individual and community level, as well as state-centred initiatives. The concept thus has clear linkages to, and sometimes, overlaps with broader peacebuilding initiatives.

WHAT ARE THE ROOT CAUSES OF RECRUITMENT TO VIOLENT EXTREMIST GROUPS?

Similar to other expressions of armed violence, factors motivating violent extremism are driven by multiple causes that vary significantly between different contexts, groups and individuals. The UN Secretary General's Plan of Action states that "Nothing can justify violent extremism but we must also acknowledge that it does not arise in a vacuum". Violent extremism becomes an attractive option "where human rights are being violated, good governance is being ignored and aspirations are being crushed."[9]

Framework for Clarifying Relevance of ODA to PVE

UNDP's Journey to Extremism in Africa presents a useful three-layered framework for understanding how development cooperation can relate to PVE. It divides between PVE-conducive, PVE-relevant, and PVE-specific.

PVE-CONDUCIVE
Long-term benefits through ODA in reducing overall climate in which VE flourishes.

PVE-RELEVANT
Adjusts ODA interventions across key sectors to ensure mutually reinforcing and measureable development and PVE outcomes.

Key axes of relevance are geography, beneficiary selection and state/citizen relationships.

P/CVE-SPECIFIC
Disrupts recruitment/ Rehabilitates former recruits.

A study by Royal United Services Institute on the drivers of violent extremism[10] describes the importance of understanding the alignment of situational, social, cultural and individual factors. The study found support for the following theories:

1. Search for personal and group identities, among those who feel this has been undermined by rapid social change, can increase vulnerability of the young to radicalisation.
2. The growth of religious and ethnic identities (particularly if they compete with loyalties to the state) can be exploited by extremist ideologies. Where inequality and institutionalised discrimination coincide with religious or ethnic fault-lines, there is an increased likelihood of radicalisation and mobilisation.
3. Government failure to provide basic services (health, education, welfare) allows extremist groups to meet these needs and build support as a result. In the absence of peace and security, populations are often ready to accept any entity that offers stability.

Recent research by UNDP[11] based on interviews with individuals who have been recruited by violent extremist groups on the African continent gives insights into the drivers, incentives and tipping point for joining extremist groups. The study concludes that:

1. Most recruits come from borderlands or peripheral areas that have suffered generations of marginalization. Voluntary recruits tend to report less parental involvement in their lives as children and fewer years of secular education. They also express moderate to severe frustration of their economic conditions. Employment was the most frequently cited need at the time of joining.
2. More than half of the voluntary recruits cite religious reasons for joining an extremist group – yet a majority admit that they either do not read or have little to no understanding of the religious texts or interpretations.
3. Those who are most susceptible to recruitment demonstrate a significantly lower degree of confidence in the potential for democratic institutions to deliver positive change. Voluntary recruits believe that the government only looks after the interests of a few and had an acute sense of grievance towards government. They generally place little or no trust in politicians or in the state security apparatus. Government action was often identified as the final trigger that motivated them to join the organisation (most commonly "killing or arresting of a family member or friend").

Understanding how the status of women and men, and norms about femininity and masculinity, feature in the motivations for joining extremist groups, as well as their roles in and the recruitment patterns of such groups, is also central to tailoring effective prevention measures. Research from Uppsala University has found that men who endorse certain ideas about masculinity and honour ideology, i.e. that 'a real man' equals patriarchal values (i.e. that men should be privileged in society and have control over female sexuality) and ideals of masculine toughness (i.e. that men must be fierce and willing to use violence to defend their status), show higher probability of using violence.[12]

These conclusions call for preventive measures that are adapted to and address grievances related to the structural level (country or community), middle level (smaller communities or identity groups) and individual level. The fact that 93% of all terrorist attacks occurred in countries with state sanctioned killings, torture, disappearances and political imprisonment,[13] emphasises the need for a wide approach.

WORKING 'IN' VE CONTEXTS OR 'ON' VE?

Sida's approach to an integrated conflict perspective offers two levels of ambition, depending on the intended objective of the intervention. A distinction is made between working 'in' conflict (any intervention implemented in a conflict setting/cycle) and working 'on' conflict (any intervention aimed at contributing directly to peace and human security). A similar distinction could be made in the PVE context.

When working 'in' conflict settings where violent extremism is present, a risk analysis should be made of how conflict factors, including violent extremism, could affect the development interventions, as well as of how the intervention may affect the conflict dynamics. Negative impacts should be minimized and positive impacts should be maximised, such as opportunities to contribute to more peaceful and inclusive societies.

In contexts where violent extremism is identified as a key obstacle to poverty reduction, there might be a need to assure that development cooperation has a more direct effect on the drivers, by working 'on' violent extremism and addressing the drivers at structural,

> Peacebuilding initiatives targeted at marginalized areas and risk groups in countries with active violent extremist groups are usually **PVE relevant**. There is therefore – and should be – an overlap between **peacebuilding** and PVE relevant interventions.
>
> **PVE specific** interventions are short term initiatives that aim at disrupting recruitment processes and limit the space for 'messages of intolerance' – religious, cultural, social – that violent extremist groups use for recruitment purposes. These initiatives buy time for development and peacebuilding to take hold.

community and/or individual levels. This can be done through different development cooperation interventions and within various sectors. In these cases, there is a clear link between development interventions, peacebuilding initiatives and PVE. The distinction is that *PVE relevant* interventions are explicitly designed to target and/or assure inclusion of risk groups (beneficiaries) and risk geography, i.e. borderlands and traditionally marginalized areas, whether urban or rural, as well as state-citizen relationship. It aims to sharpen the focus from the broader category of 'marginalized' to a narrower focus on actual risk groups. However, in some contexts, a peacebuilding perspective might lead to the same programming priorities and it is therefore not necessary to distinguish or label these initiatives in one or the other way.

PVE relevant initiatives can be paired with more targeted interventions – *PVE specific* interventions, which aim directly at disrupting the recruitment cycle and limit the space for 'messages of intolerance' – religious, cultural, social – that violent extremist groups use for recruitment purposes.

CONFLICT ANALYSIS IN THE PVE CONTEXT

Sida's engagement in PVE should be guided by a conflict sensitive analysis and human rights-based principles and approaches. This includes developing an impartial understanding of all dimension of the conflict, using conflict

analysis as a basis. Some practical steps to achieve this ambition include:

- Undertaking broad and holistic analysis of the drivers of violent extremism and avoiding simplified assumptions pointing at certain ethnic groups, religions or ideologies.
- Taking into consideration the interconnections between local, national, regional and global dynamics, including political-economy dimensions and relation between war economies, organized crime, illicit financial flows and formal economies.
- Recognising local differences and the importance and influence of social networks in the recruitment process.
- Analysing gender norms, including glorification of violence, sexual violence and masculinity norms, and consider how to address them. For reintegration projects, an analysis should be made of consequences of reintegration on gender roles.
- Assuring that women are involved in shaping the strategies, approaches and definitions that underpin PVE efforts, while recognizing that women can also play an active role in conflict dynamics.
- Ensuring that objectives of interventions are framed within a development approach and serve to contribute to inclusive peacebuilding and improved human security in the most marginalized geographical areas, whether urban or rural.

Examples of PVE relevant programming options

- 'Education for all'-programmes, programmes on life skills and peace education with particular focus on supporting the development of critical thinking, social cohesion and civic engagement.
- Programmes transforming gender stereotypical roles and 'male honor ideologies'.
- Improvement of service delivery, economy and infrastructure of at-risk areas, including rural and urban peripheries and marginalised areas, livelihood programmes, removing obstacles to entrepreneurship and job-creation opportunities.
- Community-led prevention initiatives.
- Strengthen the functionality and legitimacy of criminal justice systems through security sector reform (SSR).
- Diversification of information, media support and support to social media programmes.
- Building state-citizen confidence through for example anti-corruption campaigns with emphasis on trust-building between state and citizens.

Examples of PVE specific programming options

- Creating exit-opportunities for recruits and investing in rehabilitation and reintegration programmes and economic alternatives for recruits while also engaging the wider communities.
- Initiatives to support Rule of Law, raise capacity to prosecute criminals, handle high risk detainees or strategies for reintegration.
- Supporting and amplifying the voices of traditional religious leaders who challenge misinterpretations of religion by violent extremist groups and preach religious tolerance and inter-faith cohesiveness, while capitalizing on research findings that religious literacy and knowledge can act as a source of resilience among risk groups.
- Prevention of illicit trafficking or PFM-related measures focused on preventing financing of violent extremist groups.
- Sensitization and advocacy among armed groups on not using children in armed conflicts.
- Trauma-counselling services, mental health programmes.
- Support research to strengthen evidence based PVE strategies and interventions.

IDENTIFYING AND MITIGATING THE RISKS RELATED TO PVE INTERVENTIONS

Development cooperation initiatives are never neutral, but rather become part of the conflict context and thus implies that risks of conflict insensitive practices should be considered and analysed. In the specific PVE context, the following risk factors could, amongst others, be considered:

- **Beneficiary selection, focus on risk groups or ex-combatants:** Focusing narrowly on risk groups may cause unintentional stigmatization or exacerbated feelings of marginalisation. Targeting ex-recruits, for example through reintegration programmes, can also imply the risk of creating tensions with those that are not benefitting, or signal that 'violence pays'. Interventions directed towards risk groups or ex-recruits should be implemented from a community-based approach to the highest extent possible.

- **Links with military-security agendas:** Interventions implemented in highly complex contexts by a donor government with geostrategic interests or that is involved in military/stabilization operations run the risk of being "hijacked" by the security agenda. Such interventions can exacerbate conflict or grievances. In such contexts, development cooperation can run the risk of being co-opted or assumed to serve national or international security concerns rather than local needs. On the other hand, cooperation with security agents within the framework of sound security sector reform is also an important contribution to preventing conflicts and recruitment to violent extremist groups.

- **Biased approach:** In some countries, governments are keen to frame conflicts or opposition groups as violent extremists or terrorist to justify a reinforcement of state authority. This is sometimes paired with restrictions on civil society, where only those groups that buy in to the governments counter-terrorism agenda are tolerated. Moreover, radicalization as such does not necessarily cause terrorism. Focus should rather be on the violent expressions of radicalization. The long list of terrorist-labelled Armed Non-State Actors also poses severe restrictions to any conducive negotiations with these groups towards e.g. greater respect for international humanitarian law and human rights law.

- **Narrowed focus:** Support to civil society in challenging the ideology and behaviour of extremists can run the risk of failing to empower them to also challenge other conflict actors or articulating legitimate grievances towards for example the government – grievances that are actually linked to the drivers of violent extremism. Likewise, a too narrow community focus risks diverting the attention from the structural causes of conflict and violence that pertain to the responsibility of the state.

- **Credible partners vs. 'instrumentalization' of civil society:** The effectiveness of initiatives to prevent recruitment depends on the perceptions towards those who are delivering them. According to the above-mentioned UNDP study, distrust in the organizations delivering the programmes were one of the primary reasons for not participating, which signals the importance of working with credible partners. Local civil society groups, broader peacebuilding initiatives and women's and youth's rights activists are therefore important actors for PVE, but also in their own right and thus should not be imposed a single agenda to receive funding. Furthermore, implementing PVE initiatives might entail exposure to security risks. This needs to be considered in the selection of partners.

- **Funds diverted to extremist groups:** When financing PVE-projects at the community level, risk mitigation measures need to be undertaken to assure that ODA funds are not misused or end up financing terrorist activities.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- Ris L. and Ernstorfer A. (2017); Borrowing a Wheel: Applying Existing Design, Monitoring and Evaluation Strategies to Emerging Programming Approaches to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism, CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, March 2017.
- Keen D. with Attree L. (2015); Dilemmas of counter-terror, stabilisation and statebuilding, Saferworld, January 2015.
- Institute for Economic and Peace, Global Terrorism Index 2017.
- Institute for Economic and Peace, Global Peace Index 2017.
- Brjarnegård E. et. al (2017): Honour and Political Violence: Micro-Level Findings from a Survey in Thailand, Journal of Peace Research, 2017, Vol. 54(6) 748–761.
- UNDP (2017); Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment, UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa, United Nations Development Programme Regional Bureau for Africa.
- Regeringens skrivelse 2016/17:62: Mänskliga rättigheter, demokrati och rättsstatens principer i svensk utrikespolitik.
- United Nations General Assembly; Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, A/70/674 Distr.: General 24 December 2015.
- Allan H. et. al. (2015); Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypothesis and Literature Review, Royal United Services Institute, 16 October 2015.
- Government Offices of Sweden: Prevent, pre-empt and protect – the Swedish counter-terrorism strategy, Government Communication, Skr. 2014/15:146, Stockholm 27 August 2015.

ENDNOTES

1 United Nations General Assembly; Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, A/70/674 Distr.: General 24 December 2015, p. 1.

2 Institute for Economics and Peace, Global Terrorism Index 2017, p. 15.

3 Ibid, p.4. Deaths from terrorist acts are however still relatively low compared to other battle related deaths and the global homicide rate is still 15 times the death rate from terrorism.

4 Ibid, p. 81.

5 UNDP (2017); Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment, UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa, United Nations Development Programme Regional Bureau for Africa, p. 27.

6 Government Offices of Sweden: Mänskliga rättigheter, demokrati och rättsstatens principer i svensk utrikespolitik, Government Communication, Skr. 2016/17:62, Stockholm 8 December 2016, p 52.

7 Government Offices of Sweden: Prevent, pre-empt and protect – the Swedish counter-terrorism strategy, Government Communication, Skr. 2014/15:146, Stockholm 27 August 2015, p 34.

8 Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, p. 2.

9 Ibid.

10 Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypothesis and Literature Review.

11 Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment, UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa

12 Bjarnegård E. et. al (2017): Honour and Political Violence: Micro-Level Findings from a Survey in Thailand, Journal of Peace Research, 2017, Vol. 54(6) 748–761

13 Institute for Economics and Peace, Global Terrorism Index 2016, p. 72.