CREST
CENTRE FOR RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE ON SECURITY THREATS

COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM II:
A GUIDE TO GOOD PRACTICE

This guide provides an overview of what best practice in CVE should look like, giving examples that help explain the need for an evidence-based theory of change, as well as targeting, delivery and evaluation.

KEY POINTS

Efforts to counter violent extremism (CVE) are implemented at different stages of the journey into and out of extremism. They include broad ranging efforts to tackle the root causes of extremism; work with those considered at risk of radicalisation; and interventions seeking to reintegrate those engaged in extremism or convicted of terrorism offences.

- CVE programmes should be informed by an evidence-based theory of change which clearly states how the aims of an intervention are linked to its methods and intended outcomes.

- Multi-agency efforts involving collaboration between statutory and non-statutory organisations are better able to address the complex range of factors implicated in countering extremism.

- Careful consideration should be given to the most appropriate metrics and benchmarks by which to determine the success of CVE programmes.

CVE interventions are directed at a range of factors believed to influence involvement in extremism. These operate at structural, social, and individual levels, and include enabling and protective factors which interact to drive engagement in extremism.

- Because of the number of factors implicated in extremism, it is important to have clear boundaries around what factors are considered CVE-relevant and why.

- Interventions should balance a structured approach with the flexibility to respond to emerging issues and changing local dynamics.

- Understanding local context is vital. Because of the range of settings, regimes, experiences of conflict, and religious and identity dynamics at work, meaningful and transparent engagement with local communities is important. Rather than targets of interventions, communities should be partners in developing and delivering CVE programmes.

- CVE programmes are funded, designed, and delivered by a range of actors including central government, civil society, international bodies, and criminal justice agencies.

- Governments have an important role in developing capacity and providing financial support for CVE and building the capacity of community-based actors.

- Some potential participants in CVE interventions can be distrustful of government influence. This can impact the ability of programmes to engage those about whom they are most concerned. Interventions that can demonstrate credibility and legitimacy in the community may be more accepted by their participants.

- Evaluation should draw on existing research, an understanding of the local context, and engage with community partners to determine whether and how a programme is working.

COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM: CONTEXT

Efforts to prevent extremism began to gain traction in the early 2000s. Since then, more than 50 countries have developed initiatives to counter violent extremism (CVE). One of the earliest formal commitments to prevention came from the UK when it became part of its counter-terrorism policy, CONTEST, in 2003. Subsequent milestones in the evolution of CVE include the European Union's 2005 counter-terrorism strategy which incorporated a commitment to prevention, and 'Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States', launched in 2011. This was followed by the implementation of a CVE taskforce in 2015.

In addition, several multilateral networks, including the Global Counterterrorism Forum, and Hedayah, an international centre for excellence on CVE, have been established. Most recently, action plans to counter violent extremism have been developed by the G7 and United Nations.

Despite the increased attention being paid to CVE, challenges remain. Most importantly, CVE has yet to develop a strong evidence base, making it difficult to determine which interventions are effective. In addition, because the factors which drive violent extremism are complex and wide-ranging, the boundaries of CVE are often unclear.

At its most inclusive, CVE has been defined as 'all actions that strengthen the resilience of individuals and communities to the appeal of radicalisers and extremism' (European Commission, 2015). As a result of this broad scope, a growing number of interventions are being categorised as 'CVE-relevant' without a clear understanding of how they are supposed to impact violent extremism.

Nevertheless, over a decade of CVE has produced valuable learning. The case studies in this guide include a range of models and reflect different aspects of good practice, relating to programme design, delivery, and assessment. Ongoing research and evaluation is a priority, as there remains much to learn about the impact of initiatives designed to counter violent extremism.

DEFINITIONS

Radicalisation is often seen as the process by which a person comes to hold extremist ideologies. There are other definitions, for example the UK Government states that it '*refers to the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and forms of extremism leading to terrorism.*'

Deradicalisation is a term commonly used to describe attitudinal and ideological change associated with a reduced commitment to extremism.

Disengagement refers to behavioural change connected with the move away from extremism.

> *Countering Violent Extremism encompasses programmes and policies intended both to prevent individuals and groups from radicalising and mobilising to commit violence and to disengage individuals and groups who are planning to commit, or who have already engaged in extremist violence.*
>
> **US National Counter Terrorism Centre, 2014**

WHERE ARE CVE PROGRAMMES TARGETED?

CVE programmes are directed at different stages of the journey into and out of extremism.

- **Primary interventions** have the broadest scope. These target whole sections of a community in an effort to raise awareness about extremism and try to address its 'root causes'.

- **Secondary interventions** engage with those considered at risk of involvement in extremism, aiming to disrupt the process of radicalisation.

- **Tertiary interventions** are concerned with individuals already involved in extremism and seek to support disengagement, deradicalisation, and reintegration.

'BEING MUSLIM': KENYA, PAKISTAN, UNITED KINGDOM

Primary interventions can include community cohesion and civil engagement projects, training, or educational initiatives such as the 'Being Muslim' programme. Originally developed in England as 'Being British, Being Muslim', this school-based intervention has subsequently been developed for delivery in Scotland, Kenya, and Pakistan. The programme has also been adapted to address sectarian views in Northern Ireland.

Designed to build resilience to violent extremism amongst young Muslims, 'Being Muslim' was based on research which suggested that support for violent action was associated with low levels of 'integrative complexity' (the ability to recognise and integrate different values). The programme sought to build resilience to

extremist ideologies through a series of activities that aimed to increase recognition and respect for different values (or 'value pluralism'), and foster collaborative approaches to conflict resolution.

A core strength of 'Being Muslim' is its well-developed **theory of change.** A theory of change is the underlying framework that links a programme's aims with its methods, and specifies how and why an intervention is designed to work. The evidence base underlying the programme could be strengthened by further specifying and testing the mechanisms that mediate between integrative complexity and violent extremism.

However, understanding how the intervention was supposed to work meant the evaluation could assess specific measures associated with extremism. An evaluation of the programme in England found that value pluralism and integrative complexity increased significantly, and that participants' approach to conflict resolution became more collaborative.

SOMALIA: YOUTH FOR CHANGE/YOUTH AT RISK

CVE is increasingly considered relevant to Demobilisation, Disarmament, and Reintegration (DDR) work in post-conflict or fragile states. In Somalia, the **Youth at-Risk/Youth for Change** projects were predominantly a **secondary intervention** that sought to support the economic, political, and social reintegration of at-risk youth through what has been described as a hybrid DDR/CVE approach. Supported by the Government of Japan, the UN Development Programme, the International Labor Organisation, and the UN Children's Fund, this initiative began in 2011.

The programmes worked with several thousand people whose social circumstances, or history of criminality or low-level militancy meant they

> **Working with these different groups reflected an understanding that criminality and extremism were closely linked in Somalia.**

were considered at risk. Working with these different groups reflected an understanding that criminality and extremism were closely linked in Somalia. It also sought to avoid stigmatising ex-al-Shabaab members. Operating in prisons and in the community, the programme was informed by ongoing consultation with civil society organisations and statutory bodies. The intervention's curriculum included peacebuilding and mediation; leadership and communication; religious morals; sports, art and drama; literacy, numeracy, and English classes, and community volunteer projects, as well as employing individual mentors.

A series of evaluations suggested that **engaging with local bodies** and devolved decision making is beneficial providing there is **support for capacity building** at the grassroots level. Lower levels of aggression were associated with participation, and a context-specific approach which integrates efforts to support social and economic integration was considered valuable in supporting positive outcomes. Evaluation also highlighted the importance of carefully selecting participants and ensuring that the programme is appropriately tailored for their needs. Pre-programme, and follow-up assessment would have enabled a stronger interpretation of the intervention's impact, as would a more robust set of measures by which to determine its effects.

POST-CONVICTION PROGRAMMES: INTERNATIONAL

Some of the best known international programmes are **tertiary interventions** directed at those convicted of involvement in terrorism. **Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Pakistan,** and others have developed interventions delivered in prisons or dedicated rehabilitation centres with the aim of deradicalising militants.

The main **outcome** measure of these programmes is re-offending or re-engaging with militant networks. Some tertiary interventions have reported positive results. For example, Saudi Arabia's **Mohammed bin Nayef Centre** claims an 80-90 per cent success rate. The lack of independent evaluations makes comparative or detailed analysis of programme outcomes difficult.

One publicly available evaluation of a **Dutch intervention** with convicted terrorism offenders found higher recidivism rates than the Saudi programme. Two of the five offenders on the programme absconded to Syria; two made positive progress and returned to the community; and the fifth was less committed to violent extremism than the authorities had initially believed.

Recidivism figures should be interpreted in the context of broader re-offending rates. Although recidivism for non-political crimes varies and is difficult to compare internationally, it is typically higher than the 10-20 per cent reported by Saudi Arabia. Research on the reintegration of non-politically motivated offenders also suggests that many desist from crime without the support of a formal programme.

By implication, tertiary interventions should consider how best to assess and communicate the success of reintegration programmes. They should also seek to determine the intervention's impact by comparing the outcomes of those who take part with those who do not.

KEY POINTS

- Programme design should be based on empirical evidence that informs a theory of change linking aims, methods, and outcomes.

- Multi-agency partnerships between statutory and third sector organisations are well placed to address the complex issues reflected in extremism.

- Those designing interventions should carefully consider what constitutes a successful outcome, and how this might be assessed and communicated.

The diversity of CVE interventions reflects the range of factors believed to influence involvement in extremism. These drivers operate at different levels. **Structural** factors relate to political, cultural or socio-economic issues such as political exclusion or inequality. **Social or group** drivers include a search for identity or belonging, whilst dynamics that operate at the **individual** level can involve a desire for adventure, revenge, the influence of extremist ideology, or material incentives.

Enabling factors such as extremist recruiters or propaganda interact with **protective** factors that might insulate the individual from violent extremism. The relationship between the drivers of extremism and involvement in actual violence is complex and typically involves an interaction between individual, social, and structural factors.

INTRODUCING NEW VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND SKILLS TRAINING: AFGHANISTAN

Mercy Corp's Introducing New Vocational Education and Skills Training (INVEST) programme delivered training and vocational education with the aim of reducing violence and support for militant groups in Afghanistan. To understand how effective it was, evaluators identified three ways in which support for militancy could be influenced. These illustrate how an intervention oriented towards the structural level interacts with social and individual factors:

- Facilitating employment, creating economic stability, and decreasing the financial incentives to engage in militancy;

- improving social connectedness within the community, reducing the social drivers associated with involvement in militant networks; and

- increasing confidence in the government's capacity to fulfil its mandate, reducing the likelihood that beneficiaries would turn to militant groups to address grievances.

The INVEST programme had positive effects across a range of economic outcomes, and led to an improvement on some social and political measures. However, it had little or no effect on support for political violence or the Taliban. This illustrates that the relationship between socio-economic circumstances and violent extremism is complex, and is most likely to be felt over the long-term. The potential impact on violent extremism of interventions that address structural issues, whilst positive in their own terms, should be treated cautiously.

KENYA TRANSITION INITIATIVE: KENYA

Directed at **social and group factors**, the USAID-funded Kenya Transition Initiative (KTI) provided flexible funding for groups, individuals, and organisations to deliver often small scale projects to develop 'stronger identity and self-confidence of youth to allow them to reject extremism'.

The programme's strength was mapping the 'push' factors believed to drive extremism in the local area, such as police harassment and racial profiling. The **flexible nature** of the funding also meant they could react swiftly to emerging events, such as the Westgate Shopping Mall attack.

Despite its strengths, KTI underlines the importance of clarifying how an intervention is designed to operate. Whilst recognising the programme brought benefits to the target population, evaluators suggested its broad scope

meant it did not always maximise its impact on violent extremism.

Project leaders also over-emphasised religious and ideological 'pull' factors they believed drew people towards violent extremism, neglecting non-religious drivers such as revenge or material incentives.

'AARHUS MODEL': DENMARK

A project focusing primarily on **individuals** was developed in Aarhus, Denmark. First established in 2007, the programme was extended in 2013 to include an exit programme for returning foreign fighters. Engaging with **local communities** is a core feature of the Aarhus programme. Managed by SSP Aarhus, a collaborative body representing social services, schools and the police, the model also includes dialogue with the Grimhojvej Mosque.

The programme involves mapping relevant local issues; embedding knowledge sharing processes locally and nationally; delivering awareness raising workshops; and establishing a hotline for people to report their concerns. However, it is best known for its work supporting individuals involved or at risk of engaging in extremism.

Where there is evidence someone is involved in extremism, the case is passed to a multi-agency taskforce which identifies appropriate forms of support. Participants are assigned a mentor whose work is informed by a 'life psychology' approach. Mentoring addresses triggering and moderating risk factors and supports participants' reintegration. Other forms of support are offered based on individual need, including education, employment, housing, psychological support, addressing religious or political issues, or medical care. Counselling is also available for family members.

Aarhus has been designated a 'model municipality' by the Danish **government** for its work in preventing violent extremism. Its approach is comprehensive, and it is a good example of a multi-agency approach that works with the local community. It relates aims to methods and outcomes by training mentors in the life psychology approach. The emphasis on reintegration alongside supporting disengagement increases the chances of positive outcomes.

However, there remains limited evidence by which to judge the success of the Aarhus model, as results from previous evaluations are not publicly available. Aarhus has also faced criticism from those who favour a more punitive approach. This reaction reflects the importance of fostering community support, as success is more likely with a strong political will and commitment from wider society.

WHO DELIVERS INTERVENTION PROGRAMMES?

A wide range of actors are involved in developing and delivering CVE interventions. Some programmes are highly centralised, and are run and managed by central and local government, others are instigated by **civil society** actors such as faith or community organisations, NGOs, or former combatants. **International bodies** such as the European Union are also involved in CVE work. The extent of involvement from different actors varies; however, most interventions reflect a **hybrid approach** involving some form of cooperation between government and local actors.

USAID RADIO PROGRAMMING: MALI, CHAD, AND NIGER

Responding to concerns about militant Islamism in the Sahel, the United States has supported a range of initiatives in the region. Initially this involved a 'hard power' approach channelled through the Pan-Sahel Initiative. In 2008, recognising the potential for 'softer' CVE-oriented interventions, this evolved into the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership. Through this, USAID funded a range of projects which engaged in community development, youth employment and vocational training initiatives, as well as media outreach including **radio programming**.

USAID designed and supported radio content across Mali, Chad, and Niger. Working with national stations and dozens of community radio outlets, USAID promoted radio programming addressing issues of local governance, civic education, youth-relevant subjects, religious dialogue, and messages of peace and tolerance. There were also efforts to facilitate listening clubs where community members could engage with issues raised in the programmes.

The radio programming had a positive effect on many listeners' attitudes and behaviour. Programmes were popular and diverse, which increased the number of people listening to radio output concerned with peace and tolerance.

Deeper levels of civic engagement were reported by those who engaged with this type of content, and the more people listened to peace-oriented radio programming, the more likely they were to engage in local level decision-making and support international collaboration against extremism.

However, across all three countries, radio exposure had no impact on attitudes supporting violence in the name of Islam or for implementing Sharia. This may be because attitudes were already in line with programme aims before exposure to the radio content. However, it may be that the beliefs assessed for the USAID programme were hard to change through media campaigns: previous research has suggested that media content tends to have limited impact on beliefs relating to deeply-held religious, social or political commitments.

In some places, listener clubs evolved into community development groups which sought to address local issues. These were more likely to emerge in places such as Niger, which had far more community-based radio stations than Chad, and had a culture of youth-led chat groups. Remaining alert to **local dynamics, existing practices,** and drawing on relevant **research** is important in interpreting the potential and actual impact of CVE interventions.

WORLD ORGANISATION FOR RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION: USA

World Organisation for Resource Development and Education (WORDE) is a Muslim-led, civil society-based initiative based in the United States. Learning from previous CVE initiatives criticised because they were perceived to target Muslim communities, WORDE sought to demonstrate that 'CVE is about more than terrorism and Muslims' Launched in 2013, WORDE's approach is now known as '**Building Resilience Against Violent Extremism' (BRAVE).** BRAVE is organised around four ideas: engage with a wide variety of stakeholders; educate community members; connect stakeholders with appropriate services; and intervene to support those at risk of involvement in extremism.

WORDE promotes a **'whole of community'** approach, working with a range of stakeholders including law enforcement, social services,

> ## WORDE sought to demonstrate that 'CVE is about more than terrorism and Muslims'.

community members, youth, members of faith communities, and other civil society groups. Over 300 community and statutory organisations took part in the 'Montgomery County Model' pilot programme which delivered a range of projects, including community education, law enforcement collaboration, action programmes promoting volunteerism, and training young people to support those feeling isolated or facing personal crises.

In an assessment of its voluntary and multi-cultural programmes, positive outcomes were reported on 12 out of 14 'CVE-relevant' measures, and there were no unintended, negative outcomes. Community ownership was supported by multi-agency collaboration, including local government and law enforcement which extended the programme's reach. Programme design was shaped by existing evidence on potential drivers of violent extremism, and incorporated evaluation and review.

WORDE's approach illustrates how bottom-up programmes can gain traction by engaging with a wide range of stakeholders, learning from community members, and taking on board existing research. Nevertheless, evidencing the effect of this kind of primary intervention will continue to be challenging given the indirect link between CVE-relevant outcomes and violence. Ongoing research will be important in determining this type of programme's long-term impact.

FAMILY COUNSELLING: GERMANY

Family counselling programmes have been instigated in a number of countries. Germany was one of the first to develop a family-oriented programme. Here, intervention providers typically work in partnership with state agencies and receive financial support from the government. **Hayat** is one such organisation and acts as a point of contact for concerned friends and relatives, and supports families through counselling and referral services.

Family counselling works with families to help them prevent their loved ones moving further into extremism or encourage them to leave radical settings. Where individuals have been involved in overseas conflicts, interventions help families to support the reintegration process by strengthening the affective, or social environment, the individual returns to. They encourage the family to act as a positive alternative which contrasts with ideologues' portrayals of life outside extremism. Family counselling acts as a bridge to religious authorities and statutory services; can provide information about radicalisation; and offer guidance about how to deescalate conflict.

An internal output evaluation of the first two years of Hayat's work with potential foreign fighters, indicated that of 53 cases, two individuals were prevented from travelling; two posed no cause for concern; 15 cases were improved through their intervention; one case was a failure, and seven were successfully closed. The remainder were still active.

A more recent process evaluation suggested that Hayat is working within a clearly defined framework and can act as an important interface between families, the authorities, and other civil society bodies. Pending an independent outcome evaluation it is not possible to determine the programme's impact, and there is much to learn about the mechanisms by which families can support disengagement. However, families are likely to remain an important potential site for intervention, knowledge about which can be helpfully informed by existing work in this area.

KEY POINTS

- Governments have an important role in designing, funding, and assessing CVE initiatives, and in building the capacity of community-based actors.

- Working closely with community-based partners, and families, understanding local context, and drawing on relevant research help both to support the success of interventions and evaluate their actual and potential impact.

- Being embedded in local communities enables interventions to demonstrate credibility and legitimacy in ways which help to mitigate the potential risks associated with government support for programmes.

The evidence base about what works in CVE is weak. Few programmes conduct systematic evaluations and many others do not make their assessments public. There are few verified benchmarks by which to gauge success, and determining appropriate outcome measures remains a work in progress. In the absence of a strong evidence base, interventions should carefully consider which outcome and process-oriented measures are most appropriate for their methods and aims.

A common approach to interpreting the impact of interventions designed to divert people away from extremism is by examining **risk factors** believed to operate across a number of levels, including:

- **Personal factors:** desire for adventure, status, revenge or material rewards; weak commitment to moral and social norms; difficulty coping with stress or strong emotions; desire for belonging, identity or meaning.

- **Political influences:** extent of identification with a political or religious cause; sense of grievance or injustice; disillusion with dominant political system.

- **Group dynamics:** peer group or family involvement in extremism; extent of exposure to settings that support extremism or enable contact with recruiters.

Whilst important, risk-oriented measures can neglect the context of people's lives. Measures of **reintegration** are therefore important to consider alongside those focused on risk. These include:

- **Economic integration:** employment, education or training.

- **Social integration:** identification with friendship groups and positive relations with family networks that do not support extremism.

- **Political integration:** involvement in the community; engagement with democratic systems; increased commitment to wider social and political norms.

Interventions can also be assessed by examining the **process** by which organisations develop and deliver their programmes. These can include measures which determine:

- **Programme integrity:** the extent to which a programme's aims relate to its methods and outcomes; the strength of the evidence that supports this theory of change; the development and implementation of an appropriate evaluation strategy.

- **Delivery agents:** the degree of legitimacy and credibility an intervention provider holds in the local community; the capacity the intervention has to deliver CVE and respond to a complex and dynamic landscape; the extent to which interventions are responsive to, and embedded in, the local context

- **Multi-agency working:** the scope of relationships with relevant statutory and non-statutory organisations; the degree to which the intervention is able and willing to engage with existing multi-agency collaborations.

GUIDES ON CVE

This guide is the second in a series of guides on Countering Violent Extremism. The first is an introductory guide to CVE initiatives, setting out the types of interventions and methods they use.

This introductory guide can be found on the CREST website under *resources* or directly at the following address: www.crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/countering-violent-extremism/

To see all current CREST resources on CVE:

www.crestresearch.ac.uk/tag/CVE

READ MORE

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