

PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM: THE ROLE OF GCERF

In 2016, emphasis on preventing violent extremism (PVE) reached unprecedented heights, with a new understanding of the critical role of local communities. This is precisely what is unique about the approach of the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF), which emphasises the potential of local communities to respond to violent extremism. Since its creation in 2014, GCERF has quickly become an essential component of the international effort to prevent violent extremism as part of a comprehensive, holistic, whole-of-society approach to this relatively nascent field. International recognition of the relevance of GCERF is reflected in the 2016 United Nations Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Elevating Communities

GCERF elevates the role of communities in PVE, by supporting local solutions to global challenges. As a multilateral funding mechanism, the primary objective of GCERF is to provide grants for community-level initiatives to address the local drivers of violent extremism by raising awareness, mobilising action, and offering positive alternatives. Local actors understand what drives recruitment and radicalisation to violent extremism in their communities and may have some of the solutions, but are often unable to access the funding they need to start to make a difference.

Filling a Funding Gap

Local PVE initiatives may be overlooked by traditional development funding, or they may lack the capacity to access and manage international donor funds where they are available. Traditional development donors have tended to focus on communities at risk of poverty, not at risk of recruitment and radicalisation to violent extremism – and often these communities are not the same. GCERF aims to fill this funding gap in a sound and sustainable manner, including investing in building the capacity of local initiatives to better serve their communities, to improve their potential to access and manage donor funds in the future, and to secure innovative partnerships that reinforce their stability.

Focusing on Prevention

GCERF supports initiatives focused on the preventive end of the preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE) spectrum. Funding is directed toward communities at risk of recruitment and radicalisation to violent extremist agendas, empowering local actors to launch initiatives that provide innovative, lasting, constructive, and positive alternatives to what violent extremist groups might claim to offer vulnerable communities.

Access That Matters

Financial contributions to GCERF are, on the whole, non-earmarked and pooled – to ensure that national contributions are not identifiably directed toward particular activities, populations, or countries. GCERF's apolitical, independent, neutral, international, multilateral funding enables access to recipients and communities that are not always accessible to national or bilateral funding. Further, it helps to ensure the operational security of our grantees, who are conducting sensitive, and often taboo, work in highly politicised environments.

Understanding Drivers

GCERF is committed to responding to national needs and locally specific drivers of recruitment and radicalisation to violent extremism. Potential recipients of GCERF funding are requested to identify the intended social transformation of an initiative to prevent violent extremism. This local knowledge helps to fill an evidence and research gap. GCERF's investment cycle means that our understanding of the drivers of recruitment and radicalisation to violent extremism is updated every year, providing a dynamic and longitudinal perspective.

Identifying Solutions

GCERF is solutions-oriented. Funding is provided to help launch, reinvest in, and extend successful local initiatives to build community resilience against violent extremist agendas. As the reach of GCERF funding expands, the lessons learned from our monitoring and evaluation of PVE initiatives will contribute to good practices in this currently underdeveloped, complex, and highly challenging field.

Convening Stakeholders

GCERF's Core Funding Mechanism (CFM) convenes a unique set of stakeholders – ranging from the consortia of grant recipients at the local level, the Country Support Mechanism (CSM) at the national level, an international panel of experts in the Independent Review Panel (IRP), to a multi-stakeholder Governing Board. The structure of the Fund provides the opportunity for all stakeholders to interact, share experiences, bridge trust deficits, learn lessons, and gauge impact. As GCERF matures, we expect robust engagement from the private sector, which can play a pivotal role in PVE initiatives – and in ameliorating some of the real or perceived grievances that may feed into recruitment narratives.

Supporting National P/CVE Strategies and Action Plans

Through its work in beneficiary countries, GCERF is supporting the implementation of inclusive, national P/CVE strategies, action plans, and programmes (which place increasing emphasis on the role of local communities). By bringing together security and development actors, GCERF Country Support Mechanisms (CSMs) are multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder platforms for collaboration and coordination on PVE. The existence of these CSMs helps to reinforce beneficiary country government accountability to its citizens and the international community when addressing the violent extremist challenge in country. Moreover, it illuminates the linkages between the violent extremist challenge and the structural conditions that engender grievances.

Advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Violent extremism is a significant impediment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as it undermines development, violates human rights, and results in the loss of life and denial of opportunities. GCERF contributes to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – especially **SDG 16**, which calls for promotion of peaceful, inclusive, and just societies, and significant reduction of all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere (achieving Target 16.1). Operating at the nexus of security and development, GCERF's activities are closely aligned with several other SDGs. For example, the majority of GCERF-funded initiatives in Bangladesh, Mali, and Nigeria are focused on women and youth in vulnerable communities, including efforts to improve Quality Education (**SDG 4**), Gender Equality (**SDG 5**), Decent Work and Economic Growth (**SDG 8**), and Reduced Inequalities (**SDG 10**). A multi-sectoral global fund that convenes government, civil society, the private sector, and academia, GCERF is an example of an innovative partnership to achieve the SDGs (**SDG 17**).