



COUNTRY PORTFOLIO REPORT BANGLADESH

Prepared for
11th Board Meeting
21-22 November 2019
Geneva, Switzerland

1. Introduction

Violent extremism in Bangladesh has intensified since 2013, with increased targeting and killing of foreigners, secular bloggers, and religious minorities across the country. Against this background, Bangladesh became one of GCERF's first three partner countries. Since 2016, GCERF has invested in three consortia led by three Principal Recipients (PRs) – MJF, Rupantar, and YPSA – launching 20 initiatives with 89 activities addressing the local drivers of violent extremism (VE) under the Core Funding Mechanism (CFM). Each of the three PRs led a consortium of local and community-based organisations to implement preventing violent extremism (PVE) programmes in Chapai Nawabganj, Cox's Bazar, and Satkhira.

Baseline studies from GCERF grantees highlighted the impact of increased violent extremism on local communities. Analysis identified the most recurrent drivers of violent extremism in Bangladesh: the lack of education; poverty and unemployment leading to perceived marginalisation; promises of perceived financial gains; lack of critical thinking skills; and lack of tolerance.

After the Holey Artisan Bakery attack, GCERF launched a short-term micro grants programme under its Accelerated Funding Mechanism (AFM). The AFM funded 39 grants working on P/CVE among students from religious, public, and private universities. The AFM Bangladesh is not included in this paper, but more details can be seen in Board Paper on Results (BM.11/DOC.05), under the section *Lessons & Insights*.

2. Activities by GCERF Leverage Point

a. Social Cohesion

Throughout their programme, the grantees targeted 537,944 direct beneficiaries, including 262,822 men and 275,122 women. Grantees organised activities to strengthen social cohesion, particularly working with youth and women. They also brought together groups from different generations and faiths.

Grantees organised activities to strengthen social cohesion, particularly through youth groups and youth forums. They noted higher involvement of participants to learn and disseminate knowledge on PVE following the activities. The members of youth forums took the opportunity to create community projects.

One consortium organised and conducted **5,424 court yard meetings** throughout the project **involving 110,182 women.** They had the opportunity to discuss and learn more about PVE. Following the implementation of activities, the consortium found that **95% of participants were able to identify VE drivers,** and 98% had a better understanding of their role in PVE within their families.

Radio programmes to raise awareness on PVE were also a success. 117 radio episodes were organised to explore VE drivers and PVE narratives. The consortium received important audience feedback and support, including through text messages and letters sent by the listeners. The radio programmes received a wider reach than expected.

The grantees also supported intergenerational dialogues between youth and elders; and interfaith dialogues among religious leaders. One consortium found that the 491 dialogue sessions between youth and elders enabled them to address the perceived lack of purpose that leads to marginalisation and to create a culture of tolerance.

b. Community Agency

The grantees engaged 145,992 direct beneficiaries, including 81,477 men and 64,515 women, through activities under the leverage point of community agency. They observed that engaging with youth to empower them as change agents was a key factor to reinforce community agency, especially through cultural activities.

One consortium set up ToT (Training of Trainers) to 324 student leaders, who then conducted 423 PVE orientation sessions among 21,150 students. Following these trainings, 96% of the participants were aware of their role to prevent violent extremism, **and 69% of the students participated in events organised by their peers on PVE.** The 6,000 students who participated in 526 life-skill sessions benefited from PVE motivational stories, messages, and narratives. Following the sessions, students engaged in co-curriculum activities and socially positive voluntary actions.

Another consortium set up **School and Madrasa Management Committees.** The committees **enabled teachers and committee members to become mentors for youth** and promote tolerance through events. Students who participated in these events learned more about the importance of diversity, team spirit, and tolerance.

Cultural activities attracted wide-spread attention and were instrumental to unlocking the potential of youth and other beneficiaries. One grantee organised 678 folk music events, which attracted over 82,000 people who benefited from PVE messages and narratives in a comprehensive way. The cultural and sports programme among madrasa and schools provided the opportunity for madrasa and non-madrasa students to attend events together. It also represented a unique opportunity to engage diverse segments of society, including the local government.

Grantees found that engaging with local authorities, government officials, and law enforcement agencies was essential to enhance community agency. **An end-line survey conducted by one consortium highlighted that 82% of the respondents believed that the involvement of the local government in PVE has increased,** against 35% at the beginning of the programme.

c. Equal Access to Opportunities

GCERF grantees engaged 6,517 direct beneficiaries, including 2,920 men and 3,597 women, under this leverage point. One consortium provided skill-development trainings to 2,000 unemployed and marginalised youth. The participants had the opportunity to develop vocational skills, including 500 trained youth who received small grants as a start-up capital. These activities were a real success, as **71% of the participants are now involved with income-generating work.**

d. Sense of Purpose

Grantees reached 88,542 direct beneficiaries, including 44,808 men and 43,734 women through activities geared towards building participants' sense of purpose. Several types of activities were implemented such as communication skills and leadership training, cultural development workshops, knowledge and quiz competitions, and debates.

They also provided several ICT (Information and Communication Technology) trainings for 360 students in schools and madrasas, addressing the misuse of ICT and social media as one of enablers of violent extremism. Participants built their capacity to identify VE online messages, increased their ICT skills and became mentors for their peers. Teachers shared that their students became more aware of the potential negative impact of social media.

3. Lessons Learned and Insights

a. Pre-conditions: creating “fertile ground” for PVE

Lesson 1: Effective PVE programming requires a whole-of-community approach

To effectively build resilience against violent extremism, it is essential to include the whole community. Bangladesh grantees identified this as the most important lesson learned from the grant cycle. Grantees reported that **all stakeholders** – youth, parents, teachers, religious leaders, local authorities, journalists, academics, business leaders, civil society organisations, etc. – were **highly appreciative of opportunities and platforms to voice their opinions.**

Grantees also found that stakeholders from all sectors of society were **interested in the issue of violent extremism**, eager to learn more, express their views, and play a role in prevention. Participants in the roundtables and dialogues recommended scaling-up the activities from Upazila to Union level. The approach helps to **re-integrate all community members** so that everyone has space to express their opinions and feel a sense of belonging.

This creates a **fertile environment for PVE** by **making space for open dialogue** about difficult or taboo social issues. It also addresses a full range of psychological, social, political, and ideological factors coupled with cultural and identity issues that lead to violent extremism. Furthermore, it ensures the acceptance of and **support for initiatives at all**

levels and **prevents any resistance**. It can also create opportunities to scale up the impact from the **community to the national level** through the support of influential individuals.

Lesson 2: Intergenerational dialogue is essential

Grantees found that **intergenerational dialogue was a vital pre-condition** for building community resilience to PVE. By bringing together members of the community that do not usually interact - such as students and local government officials - intergenerational dialogue allowed different groups to feel their voices were being heard, becoming a powerful enabler.

It also helped **bridge the generation gap that often leads to misunderstanding and frustration** and to reduce barriers and resistance to PVE programming. Annual Sharing Meetings in schools and madrasas, for example, facilitated dialogue between students and their parents and teachers, giving them the opportunity to better **understand the frustrations and needs of youth**. In turn, this **increased support for PVE activities** such as cultural and sport events, to which they had previously been resistant.

b. Leveraging members of the community to disseminate positive messages

Lesson 3: Youth are proactive on PVE and can be empowered as change agents

Young men and women enjoy being engaged directly and proactively on PVE. They are **eager to design, develop, and implement their own initiatives**: all three consortia in Bangladesh observed the eagerness of youth to engage their creativity and arrange their own events.

Youth **trained as change agents** were **particularly passionate and enthusiastic**: providing training to empower youth to facilitate their own activities was highly successful. The results were also extremely positive, with 94% of participants gaining a better understanding of VE following a life skills programme facilitated by trained youth. **Change agents are also particularly interested in arranging public-awareness events**: they wish to increase their visibility and be role models in their communities. The consortia saw great improvements in the **confidence and communication skills** of these young men and women.

Lesson 4: Empowering youth requires long-term, holistic intervention

These **positive impacts on youth were observed over the long-term**: short-term interventions were found to be less effective. The consortium saw a significant increase in the interest and enthusiasm of young people for activities over the three-year period: over time, activity attendance increased accordingly. In the third year, grantees observed that youth had developed the skills and confidence to create their own initiatives for promoting peace and raising awareness.

They also found that the **interventions needed to be holistic**: youth were particularly receptive to interactive activities that engaged their **critical thinking skills**, such as debates, knowledge quizzes, and trainings. One consortium found that **debate festivals in schools were the most popular events** among youth for this reason. However, the grantees emphasised that **sport and leisure events** were just as important, as they **built solidarity**

and improved the overall wellbeing of the young people. They helped to **reduce stress and develop mutual understanding and respect**.

Lesson 5: Religious leaders can be powerful advocates for peace

Bringing **religious leaders together for interfaith dialogue was highly successful** and effective, especially in areas where no platforms for cooperation previously existed. Religious Leaders from these areas were nonetheless keen and able to find common ground. These activities were particularly effective because of the **respected role of the religious leaders in communities**.

The collaboration among leaders of different faiths helped to **promote coexistence in the wider community**. Communities took interest in the outcomes of the dialogues and the messages were disseminated positively by local media. Furthermore, religious leaders readily committed to becoming advocates for PVE, taking oaths for standing against violence and promoting harmony. They were also generally willing to speak openly about violent extremism in front of their congregations.

However, one consortium could not arrange such an event themselves because of concerns for reputational and security risk. Religious leaders also faced barriers in attending some of the trainings because of accusations against them.

Lesson 6: As respected members of the community, parents and teachers are powerful awareness-raising tools

Reaching parents and teachers is essential to working with youth, as they are not only a support network for the youth but can also act as powerful dissemination tools for positive alternative narratives and awareness-raising on PVE. Inviting parents and teachers to **observe and help facilitate activities with youth increases the awareness of adults**, who can then use their agency and status to disseminate what they learn in the wider community.

One consortium supported parents and teachers to implement **Social Action Plans (SAPs)** in their communities and found they were highly effective. Another consortium set up **School/Madrassa Management Committees**, initially to facilitate access to the education institutions. **Unexpectedly, the committees became a monitoring tool**: they helped the consortium monitor dynamics within the schools and madrasas, and the impact of activities on students. They also became systems for **monitoring early warning signs** – a space where parents and teachers could share and discuss any repeated absences or changes in behaviour of students.

Lesson 7: More to be learned about the role of women in PVE in Bangladesh

The grantees observed that women are effective agents for sharing PVE messages with their households, neighbours, and relatives after attending courtyard meetings. However, activities did not really tap into the potential of women beyond their role as mothers. **Large, non-interactive women's gatherings were not perceived as an efficient way** to raise

awareness about violent extremism, as they did not resonate with local customs. Small groups are considered more effective.

c. Reaching the harder-to-reach

Lesson 8: Effectively engaging madrasa teachers and students takes time and patience

The consortia initially experienced several barriers to working in madrasas. By the end of the grant period, they reported having successfully implemented several activities in madrasas, integrating madrasa students into several events.

The **key to working with madrasa communities was time and patience**, as well as **relationship and reputation building**. For example, the Madrasa Management Committees built trust between consortia, teachers, parents, and students, lessening the barriers. Institutions shared amongst themselves and gradually, there was less resistance to change.

Madrasa students sometimes felt uncomfortable mixing with non-madrasa students, particularly girls. Again, time and patience broke down this barrier. Taking part in **cultural and sport events alongside the non-madrasa students** encouraged team **building and acceptance for diversity**. The “Mother Language Day” was particularly effective: the **focus on a national symbol** helped the students to **find common ground** and feel united in their citizenship. **Progress was made over the three years**, and attendance and enthusiasm increased. One consortium even managed to encourage madrasa girls to engage in outdoor games alongside boys.

This social change was due to a **holistic approach**. Alongside the cultural, sport, and social events, students were empowered with knowledge: **life skills sessions** in Madrasas enabled facilitators to **introduce the concepts of diversity and gender disparity** and increase their interest in these issues. **ICT sessions enhanced their analytical skills** and **taught them be more critical**. It was also critical to produce the session material in Arabic, which increased the acceptance of the activities among madrasa students.

Lesson 9: Promoting equal access to opportunities requires adequate investment and ongoing support

Grantees providing young men and women with small grants found that, with support, the participants spent the grants wisely and are now mostly self-employed. However, small grants need to be large enough for beneficiaries to be able to invest in lucrative and sustainable livelihood activities. One consortium found that grants below 100,000 BDT were not enough to meet those needs. Furthermore, providing **ongoing support and financial advice is essential for sustainability**. It is important to increase youth access to capital and financial services, possibly by linking them to the microfinance sector.

Lesson 10: Vocational training needs to be adapted to the local job market

It is essential to increase **consultation and collaboration with local private sector actors**. The consortia found that local private sector actors are keen to engage and offer employment opportunities. Moreover, **vocational training programs shall take into consideration the labour market needs to be relevant and effective**.

d. Scaling up: Involving diverse actors to ensure sustainability

Lesson 11: Involve parents, guardians, and teachers in youth activities

The grantees found that **parents, guardians, and teachers could be resistant to youth activities when they were not consulted and informed.** They discovered that consulting with them, informing them, or even involving them in the activities could ensure their support for the programmes.

Setting up specific platforms such as Annual Parent Gatherings and School/Madrasa Management Committees were effective ways to involve parents and guardians. **Inviting them to observe the activities**, such as drama productions and debate competitions, was another way of reassuring them. Parents who were resistant to the extra-curricular activities eventually saw the added value and became supportive of their children's participation. In some cases, it increased the enthusiasm of the youth.

Not only parents, but **also teachers should be involved.** One consortium found that once teachers became proactively involved in life skill sessions on PVE in schools, the sessions became more effective and student interest increased. Having the support of parents and teachers not only reduces barriers to reaching youth but is also a key resource for sustainability. One consortium found educational institutions to be particularly supportive of activities that encourage youth to be pro-active and lead their own initiatives.

Lesson 12: Involving local leaders and government officials in public and community engagement events adds value, extends reach and enhances legitimacy

Grantees observed that when local leaders and authorities attended public events such as rallies, human chains, processions, and discussions, the **enthusiasm of the community members for those events increased.** Asking local respected leaders to speak at events increases the reach of the messages and ensures they are received positively by the whole community. Their attendance and participation can, therefore, be a **key leverage point for community agency and social cohesion:** they add a **sense of popular approval and legitimacy.**

Nonetheless, local government representatives remain difficult to engage due to their high-profile and busy schedules. Grantees found that planning activities around them often led to delays and cancellations. Local Government Standing Committees, for example, proved difficult and inappropriate because of their politicized nature. Therefore, **inviting local government representatives to public events seems to be the best way to engage them:** if they attend, they add value; if not, the programme can continue regardless.

Lesson 13: Leveraging local arts and culture is the most effective way to reach a wider audience

Leveraging popular local arts and culture successfully enabled grantees to **spread awareness and positive alternative narratives to large public audiences** and to **attract wide-spread attention and approval.** Leveraging traditional Bangladeshi arts and culture also proved very useful in building social cohesion. One consortium saw almost **40,000 people attend its folk music events** in 2018 alone. Folk music events attracted more people

than anticipated, with communities expressing appreciation for them. Furthermore, events and performances that were **interactive** were popular.

Using **TV and radio and connecting with local journalists** enabled the consortia to **showcase their messages and initiatives to even larger audiences**. One consortium aired youth dialogue sessions on TV, which helped the sessions attract diverse guests including ministers, public administration officials, the chief of the counter-terrorism unit, academics, NGOs, journalists, celebrities, PVE experts, private sector, and other members of civil society alongside youth. Another consortium found that the reach of its radio shows was significantly extended when **the state-owned radio station** agreed to jointly air their programme. The programmes received a greater response than anticipated.

The grantees also discovered the importance of contextualising positive alternative narratives. Using **holy books and religious arguments was not deemed effective** as a counter-narrative, as it would often spark debate and counter-arguments.

On the other hand, using **popular arts and culture was hugely successful**. One consortium published small booklets (a popular media for public communication in Bangladesh) which are now distributed nationally. They used creativity and feedback from communities to craft narratives “*Ekhuni Thaman Pagla Ghora*” (“Stop the Mad Horse at Once”) and “*Shanti Obhidhan*” (“Peace Dictionary”). The narratives encourage readers to take their own initiatives for promoting peace and social cohesion. They have been so successful that teachers are considering using them in schools. **One consortium considered this to be their most successful activity in terms of reach and popular support.**

4. How GCERF and the grantees plan to turn their learning into action

The lessons learned during the last three years were multiple and valuable. For each of the lessons, the table below summarises what the adequate action should be. Some of these lessons and actions have already been incorporated in the Bangladesh CFM Round 2, ensuring that GCERF-funded PVE programmes are more relevant, effective, and sustainable.

Table 1: Lessons and Actions

LESSON	ACTION
a - Pre-conditions: creating “fertile ground” for PVE	
Lesson 1: PVE requires a whole-of-community approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Expand involvement of community-based organisations. ➔ Increase engagement with stakeholder groups such as journalists and professional organisations.
Lesson 2: Intergenerational dialogue is essential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Create more platforms for sharing between youth and community leaders. ➔ Organise regular sharing meetings between parents, teachers, and students to promote intergenerational sharing and understanding.

b – Leveraging members of the community to disseminate positive messages	
Lesson 3: Youth are proactive about PVE and can be empowered as change agents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Allow youth to take ownership of their activities, participating in the design and development of activities and materials. ➔ Provide ongoing support to previously established youth groups and change agents. ➔ Peace camps and youth conventions.
Lesson 4: Empowering youth requires long-term, holistic intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Do not treat youth as a homogenous group – disaggregate by age (12-17 and 18-24). They have different needs and interests. ➔ Provide psychosocial support to vulnerable youth – and consolidate by training teachers, parents and potentially religious leaders with the appropriate skills. ➔ Employ more ICT tools to engage young people online.
Lesson 5: Religious leaders can be powerful advocates for peace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Revise the process of religious dialogues to disaggregate different Islamic groups prior to bringing them together with other faith leaders to develop common messages of Islam.
Lesson 6: As respected members of the community, parents and teachers are influential change agents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Support youth to organise public events; and invite parents and teachers to participate and observe.
Lesson 7: More to be learned about the role of women in PVE in Bangladesh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Engage with women in smaller groups, giving them space for dialogue and action.
c – Reaching the harder-to-reach	
Lesson 8: Effectively engaging madrasa teachers and students takes time and patience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Continue building relationships with madrasas through Madrasa Management Committees. ➔ Continue a holistic approach to working with Madrasa students, enhancing their critical thinking skills whilst encouraging their integration within the wider community.
Lesson 9: Promoting equal access to opportunities requires adequate investment and ongoing support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Increase access to capital and financial services for youth that receive vocational training and input support – link them to microfinance sector.
Lesson 10: Vocational training needs to be adapted to the local job market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Increase consultation and collaboration with private sector actors to enhance vocational training activities, and adapt activities to the evolving job market.
d – Scaling up: Involving diverse actors to ensure sustainability	
Lesson 11: Involve parents, guardians and teachers in youth activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Expand teachers’ training to help them identify early warning signs. ➔ Train teachers, parents, and community leaders with skills to provide psychosocial support to youth.
Lesson 12: Involving local leaders and government officials in public and community engagement events adds value, extends reach, and enhances legitimacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Invite local government representatives to attend and speak at public events. ➔ Continue developing strong positive relationships with local authorities.

<p>Lesson 13: Leveraging local arts, culture, and media is the most effective way to reach a wider audience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Targeted media engagement and coordination – increase number of radio clubs, TV series, phone apps, and online platforms for dissemination of positive alternative narratives. ➔ Training of media professionals – “media fellowships” for local journalists and editors on reporting PVE. ➔ Design more creative popular dissemination methods for positive alternative narratives.
---	--

5. GPA Results (Grant Performance Assessment)

This section summarises the grant performance of the total three grants that were under management for Bangladesh CFM Round 1. The grant performance was assessed based on the Grant Performance Assessment (GPA) framework.

The GPA framework is a rating mechanism based on the below listed six criteria. Each criterion is subdivided into one or more equally weighted features. The GPA applies rubrics that describe and define four performance levels for each individual feature: Exceeds Expectations, Meets Expectations, Approaching Expectations, and Below Expectations. Some of the criteria are assessed quarterly, others semi-annually or annually. The criteria are: (1) Programmatic, (2) Operational, (3) Financial, (4) Consortium management, (5) Alignment and relevance, and (6) Outcomes and sustainability.

Table 2 below summarises the scores. The light and dark green areas show good to very good performance while yellow and grey show areas where there is a need to improve performance by providing additional support and capacity building and/or intensifying oversight by the Secretariat. The X-axis shows the percentage of grants (of the total of 3). The score on the X-axis corresponds to:

4- Exceeds Expectations

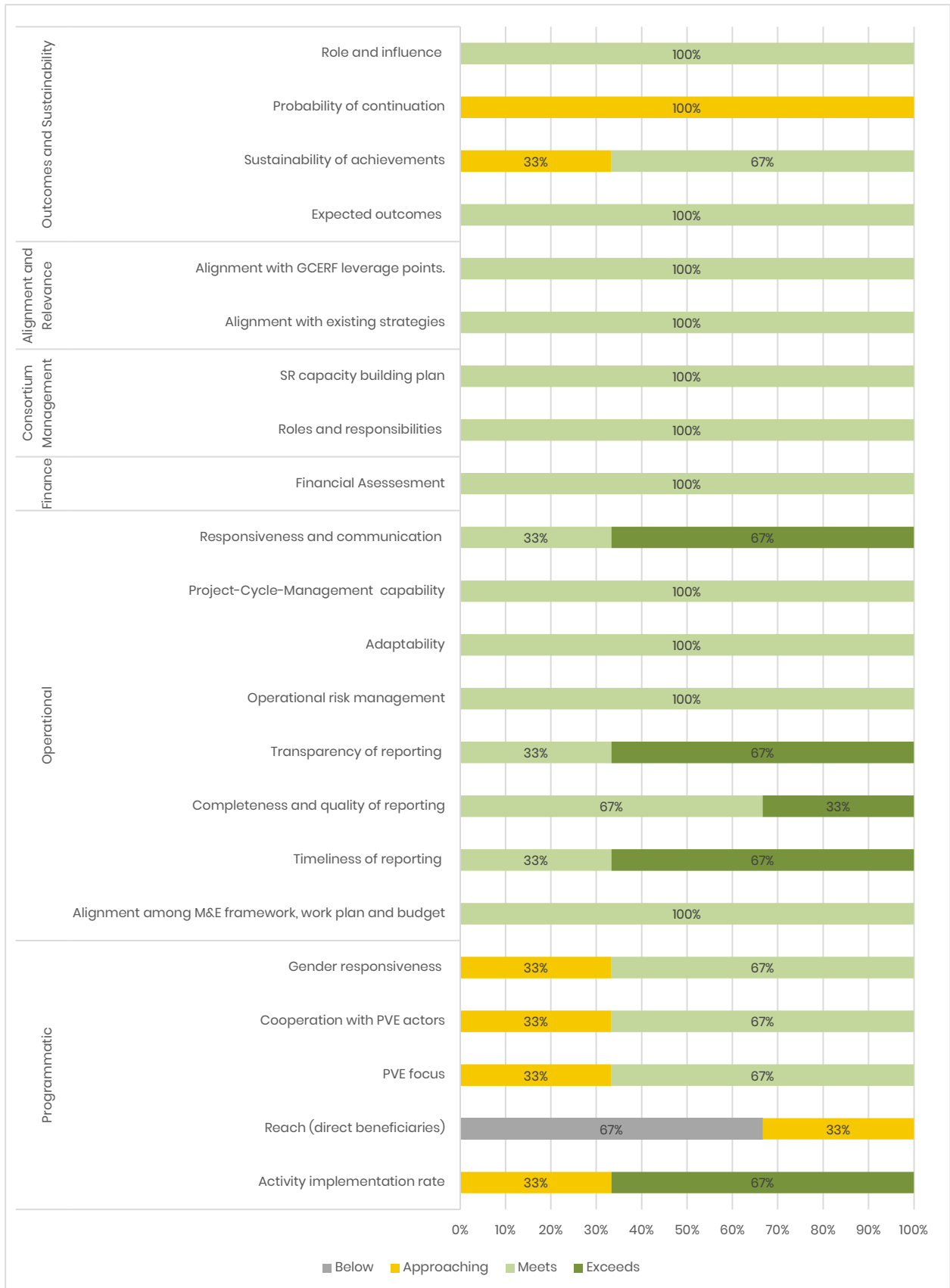
3- Meets Expectations

2- Approaching Expectations

1- Below Expectations

It shows a very positive picture about the three consortium performances across multiple criteria. The only criterion in which grantees scored below expectations was in criterion (1) Programmatic, while in (1) Programmatic and (6) Outcomes and sustainability, the grantees scored approaching expectations in some features.

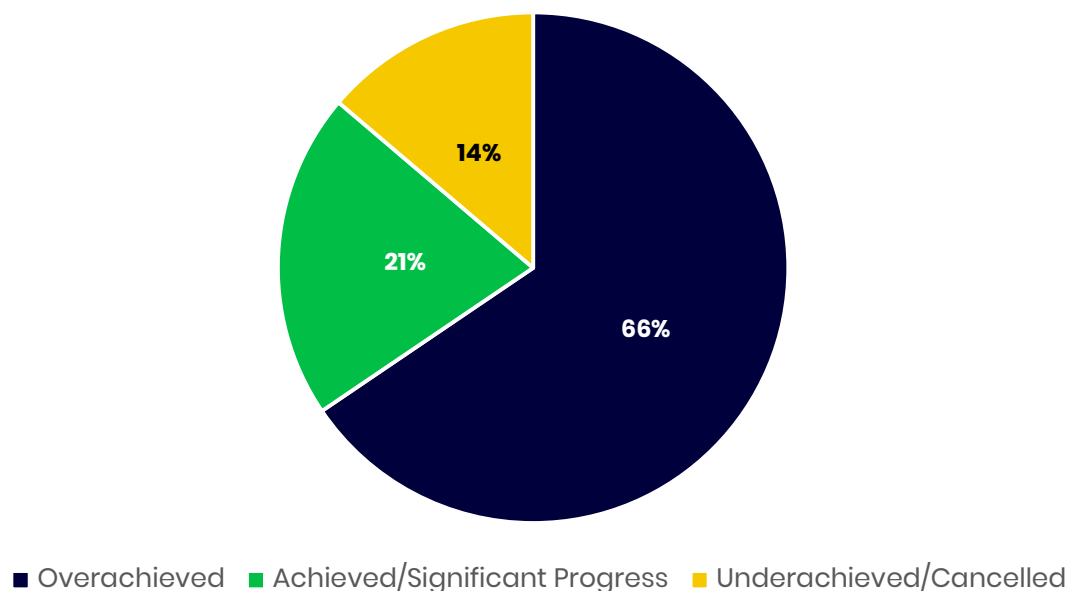
Table 2: GPA Results for Bangladesh CFM Round 1



Achievement of Results

In reference to the total number of outcome indicators (29), the following *Figure 1* summarises the achievement of results. *Overachieved* means more than 100%, *Achieved or significant progress* means 90-100% and *underachieved* below 90%. It is important to note that several targets were reviewed and adjusted during the program. This was necessary and useful as there was insufficient information and evidence available prior to the baseline studies. Also, the fact that PVE programming is relatively new and accepted benchmarks do not yet exist (e.g. for behaviour change), defining targets – especially for outcomes – can be very challenging.

Figure 1: Achievement of results – Bangladesh CFM portfolio



In the following, we would like to highlight some achieved outcomes that show GCERF grants making valuable contributions to PVE among different beneficiary groups in Bangladesh CFM Round 1:

1. 93% of youth are able to identify the threat of violent extremism for themselves, increased from 46.85%;
2. 96.1 % of students became aware about their roles and responsibility to prevent violent extremism within their student community, increased from 66.5%;
3. 30 Madrasas introduced nation-building events (e.g. observation of international mother language day) for their students; and
4. 60% targeted Madrasa students actively participate in different social activities, increased from 31%.

NAYEMA'S STORY

Nayema is a 17-year-old girl who lives with her paternal grandparents, having been left by her parents in early childhood. Throughout her childhood, Nayema felt like she had no sense of purpose. She became attracted to violent extremist ideologies as a teenager, often expressing intense interest when discussing the flaws in mainstream society with friends.

“There was time when, if I was given the opportunity, I would have joined them and done whatever they asked me to do.”

Nayema joined a training session by the PEACE Consortium, which facilitates various P/CVE activities at her school. She was able to recognise signs of radicalisation in herself and talk about this with teachers and PEACE Consortium staff, who consequently met her regularly to provide counselling and mentoring.

“I am grateful to PEACE Consortium for coming along at the right moment... I no longer feel isolated or excluded.”