Almizan Advisors

Final Report

For the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) funded project: "A" implemented by Organisation A

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1. Executive summary

This evaluation examines the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) funded project: "A". The project was delivered by Organisation A from July 2019 to September 2021, with the overarching objective of preventing violent extremism, by building community resilience in and through religious groups, in governorates A and B. The evaluation used an Outcome Harvesting approach to analyse project impact, through the lens of behaviour change on the ground. The evaluation was participatory (involving project stakeholders) and delivered between November 2021 and January 2022.

<u>All outcomes (change stories) identified by the evaluation were positive</u>, and all but one were intended project effects.[1] Nearly all these change stories involved religious leaders who directly benefitted from the programme, for example by participating in capacity building workshops or receiving financial support for community initiatives and relay workshops. The outcomes are centred around two types of behaviour change: new ways of communication and the development of personal networks.

Religious leaders and actors have adopted new methods of communication by:

   a) using culture as a communication tool,
   b) solving conflicts, and
   c) applying "active listening" (non-violent communication) skills.

Religious actors/leaders changed the way they make and improve relationships with people in the community by:

   a) reaching out to people outside of the mosque (as in, engaging outside of the "religious" domain); and
   b) establishing new relationships with groups of people they did not have meaningful contact with previously.

Changes in communication were primarily driven by an increase in capabilities, obtained through capacity building workshops on communication techniques. Regarding personal networks, the drivers behind the behaviour change were notably individualised, and not one-size-fits-all.

Project activities effectively encouraged religious leaders and actors to change their behaviour. Concept was proved for one hypothesis of the project's theory of change: providing religious leaders and actors with tools and material support will encourage them to apply these concepts and tools independently (i.e. behaviour change). The changes identified were personally significant – and at times "life changing" – for religious leaders and actors, and indicate small, individual-level steps toward prevention of violent extremism (PVE) impacts. In some cases, religious leaders and actors appear to have delivered "Prevent"-relevant support, to a small number of people who experience risk factors relevant to violent extremism (VE). However, the change stories do not evidence broader PVE effects, like "increased community resilience" to violent extremist influence.[2]

The evaluation team developed the following recommendations for GCERF and Organisation A, to strengthen the impact of future phases of programming:

<u>Project Design</u>

   1. Hone the project theory of change (TOC) to clear and realistic, initial hypotheses, to be tested and refined over time. Statements that clarify causal logic – often formulated as "if…then", "and if…", "because…", "therefore…", "thereby…", "assuming that…", "contributing to…", and so forth – can be very useful, particularly if used as a tool to align expectations between Organisation A and GCERF about which specific hypotheses the project is testing (and which it will not test), over time.
   2. Ensure that "community" target groups are clearly understood and more narrowly defined, to sharpen the TOC focus: where, how and why should "these" activities effect "those" changes in "these" specific people (actors)?

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[1] As noted in the limitations section, due to the lack of proper reporting documentation, the 2.25-year period of project implementation, and participant selection during primary data collection, this finding may be impacted by social desirability bias.

[2] The evaluation could not substantiate most of the limited number of examples of behavioural change at the community level. (See Section 3.5)

3. Enhance sustainability by developing a simple and achievable plan at project outset. Ideally, this plan would be developed in cooperation with institutional actors and include milestones that can be evidenced and monitored.

4. Strengthen engagement with institutional actors to enhance the behavioural change. Effectiveness from PVE communication programming is significantly increased when tapped into systems and concrete actions that: i) materially address real/perceived grievances, and ii) increase vulnerable audiences' agency and choice.

5. Strengthen existing conflict sensitivity mechanisms. The foundations exist for a sound approach, but their implementation is unclear/inconsistent.

6. Ensure project deign reflects the particular role gender holds in PVE programming, by moving the focus beyond women's participation to gender-sensitivity factors that are PVE-specific.

Monitoring framework

7. Right-size monitoring and reporting systems, by having fewer, <u>key</u> performance indicators, mainly emphasising outcome-level change. Revise and adapt as needed.

8. Employ OH techniques to monitor intended/unintended outcomes throughout delivery – not just at project close.

Implementation

9. Consider adopting tools (such as the COM-B framework, though there are others) that can help the project respond to individual religious leaders and actors' needs and incentives. Such tools can help maintain a problem-solving focus: what are the bottlenecks, and what particular support does an actor need to change their behaviour? How you achieve high-level objectives is not one-size-fits-all. The ways religious leaders developed new behaviours was markedly individualised; therefore, to maximise uptake and sustainability of new behaviours, project activities should understand and meet direct beneficiaries' specific needs.

10. Complement training with mentoring support: more frequent contact (one-to-one or in pairs/small groups), which is problem-solving oriented, has been shown to be more effective at supporting sustainable behaviour change. Mentoring could refresh and strengthen the delivery team's understanding of beneficiaries' needs and roadblocks, creating a virtuous circle with above recommendation. This method can also increase positive reinforcement by helping beneficiaries identify "quick wins", (i.e. daily situations where they could succeed, or have already succeeded, in behaviour change). This may mean reallocating or increasing project resources to enable more frequent engagement with beneficiaries on a personalised basis, while complimenting that engagement with better monitoring of individual needs, bottlenecks, and desired outcomes as the project progresses.