

RESEARCHING THE EVOLUTION OF COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM



FARANGIZ ATAMURADOVA AND SARA ZEIGER | EDITORS

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ABOUT HEDAYAH

Hedayah was created in response to the growing desire from members of the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF) and the wider international community for the establishment of an independent, multilateral center devoted to dialogue and communications, capacity building programs, research and analysis to counter violent extremism in all of its forms and manifestations. During the ministerial-level launch of the GCTF in New York in September 2011, the U.A.E. offered to serve as the host of the International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism. In December 2012 Hedayah was inaugurated with its headquarters in Abu Dhabi, U.A.E. Hedayah aims to be the premier international center for expertise and experience to counter violent extremism by promoting understanding and sharing of good practice to effectively serve as the true global center to counter violent extremism.

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LESSONS LEARNED ON PVE-E: THE EXPERIENCE OF GLOBAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND RESILIENCE FUND-FUNDED PROGRAMS IN BANGLADESH, KENYA, KOSOVO, MALI, AND NIGERIA

André Alves dos Reis

Introduction

Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) provides grants to community-level initiatives on preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE) that are led and implemented by local partners. This approach's main logic is that P/CVE interventions need to be tailored to the local context. Despite the contextualisation, due to their common focus on P/CVE, GCERF-funded programmes share some similarities. Most of the grants, for example, have prevention of violent extremism through education (PVE-E), the component in which the grantees engage directly with the educational sector (formal and informal).

The primary purpose of this essay is to provide an overview of the lessons generated on PVE-E of GCERF-funded completed programs in Bangladesh, Nigeria, and Mali (2016-2019) and active grants in Kosovo and Kenya. The aim is to consolidate current learnings and suggest ways in which projects on the PVE-E can be enhanced by identifying common denominators across the country programs.

The essay starts with a very brief discussion of the literature on education, violent extremism, and PVE-E. It is followed by methodological considerations on how these lessons were generated and identified, and then those lessons are presented in the next section. Finally, some concluding considerations are discussed in the final section.

(P)VE and Education

The relationship between education level and violent extremism is unclear. Some studies indicate that education level has no direct impact on terrorism and violent extremism (Krueger & Malečková, 2003). Others found a positive correlation between secondary and higher educational levels (and a higher standard of living) and the likelihood of supporting VE groups (Berrebi, 2007), while another set of studies support the notion that although education level has no direct effect, unemployment among educated youth can be a factor increasing vulnerability to radicalization (Bhatia & Ghanem, 2017).

In a more recent study, trying to disentangle the relationship between education and violent extremism, researchers examined the expansion of the educational sector in primary, secondary, and tertiary levels in 50 African countries and its effects on terrorism (Danzell et al., 2018). The results were mixed: the expansion of primary and secondary education seemed to reduce terrorism, whereas tertiary education did not have any significant effect. Furthermore, the relationship between education and terrorism levels displayed non-monotonic effects on societies whose populations of youth were rapidly increasing. Thus, the relationship between education level and violent extremism is still up for debate, but it seems unlikely that there is a direct relationship between education and violent extremism.

On the other hand, education's potential contribution to preventing violent extremism is recognised, primarily through education that promotes civic values and citizenship (UNESCO, 2017; Veenkamp & Zeiger 2015). Moving away from formal aspects of education (years and degrees) towards a focus on educational methods, content (curriculum and extra-curriculum activities), and educational environment, research, and practice has increasingly shown that proper education can assist in building resilience against violent extremism at the individual level by enhancing cognitive capacity, values, and personality traits (Stephens et al., 2019; Global Counterterrorism Forum, 2019).

If education can assist in building resilience, what are the possible modalities of implementation? According to UNESCO (2017, pg 54-63), PVE-E interventions can be implemented through different modalities: cross-sectoral partnerships (e.g., National Plans on PVE with educational components), curriculum-based approaches (e.g., through traditional subjects or cross-curricular projects), teacher training and support (e.g., training on PVE), whole-school

approaches (e.g., comprehensive interventions that deal with schools and its policies, teaching, activities, relationship with communities), non-formal education and community-based approaches (e.g., arts and sports, awareness-raising to parents), and intersectoral partnerships (e.g., interventions that work on the nexus between an educational institution and community leaders, local governments).

Project and Methodological Considerations

The lessons learned presented in the next section are the result of an in-house GCERF project conducted over seven months from May/2019 to December/2019. In this period, the author reviewed documents from both completed and active grants in Bangladesh, Kosovo, Kenya, Mali, and Nigeria with components on education; and led a learning event workshop at HQ level with GCERF grantees in December 2019.

The grants surveyed included:

- **Bangladesh:** five completed grants (2017-2019) in the west and southeast of Bangladesh and Dhaka;
- **Mali:** six completed grants (2017-2019) across the whole country, especially in the central part of Mali;
- **Nigeria:** four completed grants (2017-2019) in North Central Nigerian states;
- **Kosovo:** five active grants (2017 - present) across the country, including the capital Pristina; and
- **Kenya:** three active grants (2018- present) in Nairobi, and the north-east and east of Kenya.

All those grants had an education component within their programs. Following the modalities presented by UNESCO (2017), the interventions were mainly on: non-formal education and community approaches, and teacher training and support; and to some extent on whole-school based approaches and intersectoral partnerships.

However, they did possess essential differences. All Nigerian and Kenya grants had a PVE-E component that was inserted into a more comprehensive PVE-community-level approach. Mali had a similar approach, with the difference being that its PVE-E component was more heavily focused on vocational training and Qur'anic Schools. Both Bangladesh and Kosovo had both types

of projects: PVE-E embedded in broader PVE interventions, and programs entirely focused on education: university students in the case of Bangladesh, and high school students in the case of Kosovo.

The lessons were identified through a process of reviewing relevant documents from the grantees:

- programme reports submitted by GCERF grantees every quarter, in which they report the activities implemented in the last quarter as well its learnings and challenges;
- reports that result from third-party monitoring or end-of-grant evaluation exercises conducted by external and independent consultants contracted by GCERF. The third-party monitoring and evaluation follow OECD-DAC criteria and standards, evaluating the programs regarding their relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability;
- baselines, mid-line, and end-line surveys conducted by GCERF grantees, usually involving independent consultants or external research institutions and primary data collection;
- end-of-grant completion reports, and results in framework submitted by the grantees, in which they report at the completion of the grant how much was achieved compared to the goals and targets set at the beginning of the program, the overall impact of the program, unintended consequences, and learnings;
- stories of change gathered by GCERF grantees, which are personal stories of beneficiaries. Although anecdotal, such stories are important as examples of the plausible causal mechanisms linking GCERF-funded programs and the impact achieved;
- presentations that were done by GCERF grantees during the GCERF Forum 2019 (a global learning workshop hosted by GCERF with representatives from its grantees).

In terms of how these lessons were collected and identified, the documents were first sorted by the grant. Each document was reviewed, and each paragraph was coded regarding its relevance to the object of the investigation: PVE-E. Every paragraph in which educational approaches, educational institutions, or education-related population groups (students, parents of students, teachers, principals) were mentioned was coded as PVE-E relevant.

After this coding, the author collated a separate document all the excerpts related to PVE-E, one for each grant. Paragraphs that were not classified as PVE-E but were essential to provide meaningful context to the PVE-E content paragraphs were also included. After this process, the author summarised the learnings for each grant. Then, the author identified common themes of learnings on PVE-E across the grants at a global level. After three rounds of categorisation and adjustment, six categories were developed:

- Research (needs assessments and baselines)
- Access and trust
- Engaging critical stakeholders
- Curriculum and extra-curriculum activities
- Gender
- Leveraging PVE-E

The section that follows will provide an overview of GCERF lessons learned on PVE-E under six lessons that dialogue with those six categories identified and developed. It is vital to notice, as a cautionary note, that the findings and learnings are more policy-oriented and based on qualitative and quantitative data gathered by different actors, using different data collection methods; that is why the purpose of this article is to show lessons that seem to be valid across different contexts, rather than comparing programs. The paper does provide early findings and lessons that could be applied and, more importantly, should be further tested and verified by research.

Lessons Learned on PVE-E

The lessons presented in this section are organised across the common six themes identified during the review process of identifying lessons learned. In general, GCERF programmes have been quite successful in their PVE-E components. More than 75% of the outcome indicators related to PVE-E from the four completed rounds of grants (Bangladesh Round 1, Mali Round 2 and 3, and Nigeria Round 1) successfully reached the target. The programmes were most successful in achieving targets on raising awareness of students and teachers on VE and PVE.

Lesson 1 - Research: Conduct a thorough context analysis before the programme starts

Working on PVE-E requires a good quality understanding of the context, drivers, and characteristics of the population and educational institutions engaged during the programme, especially testing common assumptions. For example, findings and patterns found in one country or locality do not necessarily translate to other contexts; thus, the importance of proper needs assessments and baseline studies.

In Pakistan, researchers found that in comparison with secondary school students, madrassa students tended to hold more extreme views and that religiosity was a good predictor of sympathising or not with the Taliban (Hanif & Shaheen, 2019). However, in the research supported by GCERF in Bangladesh with students from madrassas, private and public universities in the greater Dhaka region, the results were quite different.

Using an adapted BRAVE-14,¹ a metric developed to measure youth's resilience against violent extremism, the research found that students from private universities had lower resilience to violent extremism than their public university or madrassa counterparts. Also, the research commissioned by GCERF found that religion and religiosity were a factor of resilience for those students, especially on discrediting violence.²

Such insights have clear programmatic implications and show that rather than assume the context, risks, and factors of resilience, the practice of PVE-E (but also PVE in general) benefits from a thorough assessment that informs the projects. In this case, the project developed by the grantee in Bangladesh developed its PVE-E approach based on such findings, rather than assuming a group was more vulnerable than others.

Lesson 2 - Gain access through trust and tailored approaches

Even if the PVE-E design is based on the best evidence available, PVE-E work's success relies on securing access and building trust with institutions (e.g.,

schools, universities, madrassas) and individuals (e.g., principals, teachers, students, parents).

It is especially the case for religious, educational institutions that may be cautious about engaging with non-religious actors (as observed in Mali) or a perception that specific approaches usually included in PVE-E, such as cultural events, are actually entertainment and thus not appropriate for a religious institution (Bangladesh).³

In this case, the first important consideration is the timeframe of the intervention. Projects that had a short timeframe for implementation and were implemented by partners without a robust previous relationship with these institutions experienced difficulties securing access and gaining cooperation, as was observed with madrassas in Bangladesh.⁴ It seems that in other cases, in the same context, in which the projects had a more extended timeframe or were implemented by an organisation with previous ties with the religious institution, there were fewer problems in securing access and collaboration.

Beyond building trust, longer timeframes and long-standing relationships also help civil society actors to understand the worldview of those institutions, its teachers, and students, facilitating the design of an approach that considers their particularities.

For example, instead of focusing directly on the content, working on less controversial activities such as vocational training, which has tangible benefits and address poverty, has proved an excellent entry point for working and build trust with Qur'anic Schools in Mali,⁵ where collaboration with external non-religious actors mainly when funded by international organisations, are sometimes viewed with skepticism. With trust built, the grantees were then able to start discussions on P/CVE.

In another example, in Bangladesh, the rebranding of activities as social change or professional/personal development was more effective in engaging previously reluctant institutions and motivating students in madrassas and private universities.⁶ The ethical challenge here is not to disguise PVE, as transparency is also critical to build trust.

¹ For more on BRAVE 14, please see Grossman, M., Hadfield, K., Jefferies, P., Gerrand, V., & Ungar, M. (2020). Youth Resilience to Violent Extremism: Development and Validation of the BRAVE Measure. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 1-21.

² Perception Study of university students in Greater Dhaka region (2018) commissioned by GCERF

³ Direct observation, interview conducted with students and teachers.

⁴ Independent end-of-grant evaluation report of AFM in Bangladesh (2019) commissioned by GCERF

⁵ Third-party monitoring report in Mali (2018) commissioned by GCERF, and direct observation

⁶ Independent end-of-grant evaluation report of AFM in Bangladesh (2019) commissioned by GCERF, direct observation, quarterly report (2019)

Lesson 3 - Engage critical stakeholders – especially teachers, parents, and youth

Once access to the institution and individuals is secured, the main challenge proved to be engaging the main stakeholders. Teachers and principals are still sometimes neglected or do not receive enough support. Successful programmes established positive relationships with teachers and teacher associations from the start.

The *GCTF Abu Dhabi Memorandum on Good Practices for Education and Countering Violent Extremism* points out the need to train teachers on educational methods, PVE, and other issues as successful good practices on PVE-E (Global Counterterrorism Forum, 2019). GCERF's own experience is that teachers should be supported, and that the projects that were more successful treated teachers and the staff not just as beneficiaries, but as co-creators or leading implementers.

In one of the projects implemented in Nigeria, the GCERF grantee provided support for the creation/strengthening of Peace Clubs in schools. While the GCERF partner provided support to convene such clubs, didactic materials, and training teachers, the teachers themselves were responsible for mentoring youth and leading the clubs. While the general knowledge on violent extremist drivers increased from 43% to 63% in the youth engaged by the program, the figure increased to 91% when considering only students engaged directly through these school-based peace clubs.⁷

In Kenya, teachers' engagement from the start was beneficial to the programmes, especially in facilitating the selection of vulnerable youth and de-escalating any tension among the participants.⁸ On the other hand, in Kosovo, activities in schools in which teachers were treated more as beneficiaries than co-implementers faced some initial difficulties in terms of getting engagement and creating sustainability.⁹

Parents are also critical for PVE-E activities, especially when there is reluctance from them or their children to engage and participate in PVE activities, due to cultural norms and practices. When engaged, parents can become important PVE 'change agents' themselves in the community, creating a multi-

plier effect for PVE-E activities. In Bangladesh, school/madrassa committees between teachers and parents were a valuable force in engaging both to function as an early warning system. It also helped reduce parents' resistance to extra-curricular activities.¹⁰

Finally, the most critical stakeholder, but often neglected, when designing and implementing PVE-E activities are youth. As happened with parents, the GCERF programs that involve youth from the start seemed to have achieved the results planned and generated some interesting dynamics in which the youth took up the initiative to continue some activities on their own.

One of the most promising avenues was to rely on the students themselves to convene and relay the PVE message to their peers. Following a Training of Trainers (ToT) design, some students in Bangladesh were selected and received life-skills and PVE training; then, they convened and relayed such information to their peers. The results were quite remarkable because not only it was identified that with that strategy the program could directly or indirectly train on the content more than 2/3 of the student body, but also for those trained, more than 90% seemed to have developed an awareness of their role on PVE.

Lesson 4 - Implement curricular and extra-curricular activities, going beyond curriculum design

As alluded in the section on consideration of the project and methodology (but also in the previous lessons), GCERF found that the most effective ways to mainstream PVE into the education sector goes beyond traditional approaches such as curriculum design and development. It would also need to include aspects that would fall on teacher training, non-formal education, and community approaches as well as whole-school approaches such as:

- Extra-curricular activities for students – within the school;
- Extra-curricular activities for students – outside the school;
- Educational activities that engage youth (and possibly adults);
- Awareness-raising and capacity building for teachers, principals, and parents; and
- Technical and vocational training.

⁷ End-of-grant report and final Results-Framework (2019) submitted by GCERF grantees

⁸ Presentation on PVE-E from GCERF grantee at GCERF Forum 2019

⁹ Presentation on PVE-E from GCERF grantee at GCERF Forum 2019; Mid-line assessment (2019) commissioned by GCERF grantee)

¹⁰ GCERF Bangladesh Country Portfolio: Lessons learned (2019), direct observation

Looking beyond the curriculum with such analytical and refined understanding can help balance different priorities, entry-points, and approaches. For example, working on curricula demands close collaboration with the national and local educational authorities and probably an organisation with national reach and policy experience. In contrast, a program focusing on educational activities that provides youth with skills to improve livelihoods – such as vocational training – needs to establish a good relationship with training providers and local businesses.

As explained, influencing curricula was a real challenge because of the community-based nature of the work of GCERF grants. An exception was universities or madrassas, due to their higher capacity and academic freedom, where GCERF grantees were able in coordination with the administration of the institutions to include in the curriculum via course offerings the thematic of violent extremism and prevention of violent extremism.¹¹

Besides the level of the intervention, the relatively low capacity of teachers and schools at the grassroots to absorb and implement any changes of the curriculum was also a significant barrier, which encouraged GCERF grantees, in general, to take another approach to implement PVE-E activities. GCERF grantees worked with teachers and principals to create and institutionalize *quasi-curriculums*, enhancing ownership and sustainability. The interventions were tailored to the school's local context and needs - which is another benefit of a localised approach since sometimes the national curriculum is incapable of addressing such nuances - and regularly offered during or after school hours.

Extra-curricular activities included arts/drama/theatre/writing activities and have been simplified and successful across most countries and age groups. Sports activities were also useful in building social skills, especially among younger students¹², in alignment with the recent literature on sports and PVE that indicate the benefit of sports to an individual feeling of self-confidence, and development self-control in situations that could ignite conflict (Johns et al., 2014). As reported by all grantees, due to the often-interactive nature of these activities – cultural and sports- youth were highly engaged and participative. Another successful activity was celebrating certain national and international days at school with festivities and activities, fostering the sentiment of commonality and fraternity, in several projects across different countries.¹³

Students and parents widely requested and appreciated ICT skills (Information and Communication Technology), which was another key to sustainability and trust. In Kosovo, middle-year school students received training on the safe use of the internet while their high school counterparts were trained to use ICT professionally.¹⁴ In Nigeria, students and teachers assessed the combination of ICT and PVE as an exciting experiment in tackling issues like online radicalization and recruitment in a manner that was interesting and attractive to students due to the transference of essential skills on ICT.¹⁵ Again, going beyond PVE can be the most effective way to influence PVE.

One of the critical elements of PVE-E is to engage youth on topics such as peace, tolerance, and non-violent action. The lessons learned from the grants show that discussions on peace and tolerance are suitable for all student age groups. Discussions focusing on VE itself are better introduced at the high school level and seem to reach full potential only at the college/university level.

In fact, debates in colleges and universities were a critical tool to fully leverage these discussions on VE/PVE and were reported to develop the students' critical thinking and their capacity to express themselves. Debates were also an excellent vehicle to link students from different backgrounds and boosted their capacity to link with people from different backgrounds. That was especially important in Bangladesh, where the research identified the lack of social interaction, and often, prejudice against students from a specific type of educational institutions as a significant concern.¹⁶

In contexts in which violence is more prominently, such as Mali, the creation and nurturing of safe spaces were an excellent instrument to initiate conversations around conflict, violence, and PVE. In Nigeria, safe spaces were also a potent activity to start such conversations with girls, which, due to cultural norms, are more reluctant to engage in these discussions openly.

Finally, the work to support vocational training and entrepreneurship or small business creation is a resource- and time-intensive. Nevertheless, it can be a critical PVE tool, especially if it is not a stand-alone activity but directly complements other activities and focuses on vulnerable youth. It is a useful entry-point and can undermine the use of financial incentives as a method of

¹¹ Direct observation, end-of-grant report (2019)

¹² Presentation and learnings gathered at GCERF Forum 2019

¹³ Quarterly reports submitted (2017, 2018, 2019) from various grantees from Kosovo, Bangladesh, and Nigeria)

¹⁴ Third-party monitoring report of CFM in Kosovo (2019) commissioned by GCERF

¹⁵ End-of-grant report

¹⁶ Perception Study of university students in Greater Dhaka region, 2018, commissioned by GCERF

recruitment to VE groups. In this case, the selection of at-risk participants is a challenge but also the key to success.

As for the results of such activities, in qualitative terms, third-party monitoring and independent evaluations reported a successful engagement of students and teachers and the wider community. Some anecdotal evidence of a few cases also suggested that recruitment to violent extremist groups was averted in both Mali and Bangladesh due to the programs in the schools.¹⁷

In Kosovo, participants of the projects displayed a higher sense of purpose and belonging than non-participants.¹⁸ Although for this particular question there was no baseline data, in a midline assessment of a program in Kosovo that was particularly focused on drama and sports, 87.5% of the respondents that were participants reported that they did not think violence helped to earn the respect of the others, while the number was 64.9% for non-participants.¹⁹

There was also a substantial increase in participation of students in social activities within and outside the school after the projects: from 31% to 60% for madrasa students in one of the projects in Bangladesh; from 14% to over 80% for students in one of the projects in Nigeria; and 22% to 63% in one programme in Kosovo.²⁰ This suggested that the activities implemented by GCERF programs were likely contributing to an overall behavioural change for these students, increasing their interactions with their peers and the wider community. It is particularly important because violent extremist groups tend to prey on feelings of lack of belonging or inadequacy to recruit youth into their ranks.

However, those activities' success in promoting changes was not only due to the variety and due to the comprehensive nature of activities. Firstly, especially Bangladesh, there was an intention from the designing of the projects to promote activities that would build bridges between students from different backgrounds. Rather than being a school-only event, there was often cross-educational institution activities, or that involved teachers and parents, which likely contributed to the increase in social interaction outside the school.

Another reason was the grantees' decision, especially in Bangladesh and Nigeria, to re-invigorate or establish student clubs inside the educational institutions and use them as a basis for their activities, which provided a space for continuous social interaction within the educational institutions. The benefits of creating or strengthening these clubs became quite evident during the research. In both cases, it also facilitated connections between the students and with teachers.

More importantly, the club-centric approach ensured that the intervention was not based on one-off interactions with students. Instead, the same group of students received support and were followed-up throughout the project and were encouraged to use their network in their schools and communities to spread what they have learned, leveraging the impact of the program.²¹

Lesson 5 - Address the gender challenge

One of the biggest challenges that were consistently reported by grantees when implementing the activities listed in the previous lesson was the challenge to incorporate a gender-lens while designing and implementing PVE-E programmes.

On the one hand, activities tailored to engage women and girls, such as the provision of certain types of sports or engaging young women and young men in separate groups, were highly effective in increasing female participation in the PVE activities.²² For example, in Kosovo, providing soccer lessons for boys, and volleyball lessons for girls effectively engaged these population groups.²³ While in Mali, forming women-only groups before engaging in the activity per se ensured a high rate of participation and engagement.²⁴

On the other hand, however, such approaches carried the risk of reinforcing gender stereotypes (e.g., specific vocational training as more appropriate for a specific gender, gender segregation), which might hinder the effectiveness of the programme in the long-term. It represents a challenge for programming, especially in more conservative societies with ingrained gender roles.

¹⁷ Third-party monitoring report of CFM in Bangladesh and Mali (2018) commissioned by GCERF

¹⁸ Midline assessment (2019), commissioned by GCERF grantee in Kosovo

¹⁹ Midline assessment (2019) commissioned by GCERF grantee in Kosovo

²⁰ End-of-grant report and final Results-Frameworks submitted (2019) submitted by GCERF grantee; Midline assessment (2019) commissioned by GCERF grantee in Kosovo

²¹ GCERF grantees' presentations at GCERF Forum 2019

²² Third-party monitoring report of Mali CFM (2018) commissioned by GCERF

²³ Quarterly report (2019) submitted by GCERF grantee

²⁴ Independent end-of-grant evaluation report of CFM in Mali (2019) commissioned by GCERF

Some GCERF grantees have tried to resolve this paradox by phasing in mixed-gender activities later in the programme after ensuring that girls and women feel encouraged and comfortable to join. However, this was only possible when the programmes had an extended timeframe, which allowed them to create this step-by-step approach.²⁵ Once again, this is a testament to the importance of long-term interventions for effective PVE-E.

Another successful approach was to plan activities suitable for both men and women, taking first the women's perspective into consideration. For example, in Bangladesh, due to some cultural norms, radio programmes were quite effective in generating buy-in from young women (while also attracting young men). They felt more comfortable engaging and expressing themselves through the radio in which they could use just their voice, than other forms of media in which they would be seen.²⁶

Lesson 6 - Leverage PVE-E as a bridge to the broader community and policy domain

Finally, PVE-E does not occur in a vacuum. Experience has shown that GCERF-funded grants working on PVE-E can be an excellent catalyst for engaging with the local government. Community members and grantees engaged and mobilised officials and staff of educational authorities to discuss PVE and other topics, restoring trust and strengthening community agency.

In Kenya, the alignment with the government from the start enabled the project to coordinate efforts and benefit from other interventions planned by the local government. It also helped increase youth access to relevant affirmative funds for youth development, enhancing the impact of GCERF-funded programmes.²⁷

Another way to leverage PVE-E is to create synergies. For example, in Bangladesh, the cultural and awareness-raising activities implemented in the communities proved essential to engage parents in PVE-E activities and thereby lowered resistance to addressing VE in schools with some parents becoming 'change agents' themselves.²

Conclusion

The relationship between education and levels of violent extremism is not unidirectional, nor monotonic. The valid and pertinent question when understanding the role of education on PVE is not precisely how many years of education or what level of education a person achieved, but rather, the methods, content, and educational environment provided to youth to facilitate their learning and personal development.

This paper has presented some of the lessons learned from GCERF-funded PVE-E programs. Applying a bottom-up approach, these programmes focused directly at the school level by designing and implementing activities that engaged students, teachers directly, and principals, often less institutionalised forms of intervention. These activities were introduced as extra-curricular activities.

This contrasts with the usual approach of focusing directly and solely on the curriculum. The logic is that if the programme changes the national curriculum, it trickles down change to the local level. However, this often does not work due to lack of capacity of teachers and staff, lack of resources, natural limitation in terms of scope for official curricula, and discrepancies between national and local understandings of certain events and issues.

On the other hand, the GCERF approach does pose a challenge in terms of scalability – it is resource-intensive. One promising avenue that some GCERF grantees are starting to work on is the relationship between PVE-E and local governance. The projects and examples developed in individual schools could be scaled-up, at least at the subnational level, through constructive engagement with local governments and their governance systems in education, using the schools supported by the programs as role models.

The lessons presented here should dramatically increase the chances of a successful PVE-E intervention. They serve as a sound basis for PVE-E projects, but more research is needed to distinguish the marginal effects of specific approaches compared to others when undertaking PVE in educational settings.

²⁵ GCERF grantees presentations at GCERF Forum 2019, direct observation

²⁶ Quarterly report (2017) submitted by GCERF grantee

²⁷ GCERF grantees' presentations at GCERF Forum 2019

²⁸ End-of-grant results reports (2019); Bangladesh Country Portfolio: Lessons Learned (2019)

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