Constraints and opportunities

What role for media development in the Countering Violent Extremism agenda?

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Introduction

"Missiles may kill terrorists.
But I am convinced that good governance is what will kill terrorism."[1]

\- UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon

"Without communication, terrorism would not exist."

\- Marshall McLuhan

Media developers around the world work with institutions, organizations and individuals to ensure reliable and professional information is available to communities and to spark and encourage responsible debate that is key to good governance. Media development involves change related to freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity of media, media ownership, media education and a positive enabling environment; it is often associated with playing a role in democracy – effective democratic discourse is often enabled through the support of free and independent media.

The recognition and acknowledgement that information and access to information clearly relate to good governance is stated in SDG 16.10. By extension the fight against both terrorism and countering violent extremism (CVE) stresses the importance of media development but also increasingly puts this work in the spotlight.

As such, it is imperative that there is consideration of the linkage of media and media development and what role they may play in the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism. This work has already begun (see section 2) and CVE-related activities are now making their way into the field of media development.

There are, however, fears that CVE work could eat into media development funding for institution building and other core activities. "The current hype surrounding CVE/ PVE, and the associated availability of funding, means that traditional peacebuilding and development programs are in danger of being subsumed to CVE/PVE concerns."[2] A recent Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD) meeting suggested that "there is anecdotal and off-the-record evidence suggesting that some of the funding previously dedicated to support for media development is being shifted to approaches involving strategic communications (stratcomms), or calling for journalism that actively counters extremist propaganda".[3]

In March 2016, for example, the OECD's Development Assistance Committee changed the definition of foreign aid to include spending on preventing and countering violent extremism. Yet care must be taken not to blur the line between development and security.[4]

Should media development organizations decide to accept funding related to CVE-related mandates they "could compromise themselves by collaborating with what some may consider questionable security/ military initiatives while at the same time endangering both the safety and credibility of their field staff and those who work for the organizations they support on the ground."[5] This is not only a safety issue but could also lead to the perception that our work has more sinister or negative reasons behind it.[6]

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[1] Ban Ki Moon, 22 April 2015. http://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sgsm16691.doc.htm

[2] Owen Frazer and Christian Nunlist, The Concept of Countering Violent Extremism, CSS Analyses in Security Policy, No. 183, December 2015, p. 3.

[3] Global Forum for Media Development, CVE Summary (Internal Document), April 2016, p.2.

[4] Norwegian State Secretary's remarks 14 March 2016. https://www.regjeringen.no/en/aktuelt/preventing_extremism/id2479779/

[5] http://gfmd.info/en/site/news/926/Countering-Extreme-CVE.htm

[6] There is already some very serious mistrust in the work that media development organizations do in some parts of the world and one need only look at the NGO trial in Egypt – in which NGOs were seen as agents of their donor.

As such, it behoves those working in media development as well as security agencies, policy makers and donors to understand CVE and violent extremism (VE), what is currently being done in the field and how this may impact the work of media developers and how best (and most effectively) to meet these new challenges.

This paper seeks to provide some initial guidance as to what CVE is and what it means for the media development sector, its donors and other organizations that work with media developers. The paper also discusses challenges and implications of VE and CVE for media development and how media development work is relevant to CVE and CVE efforts.

1. What is CVE?

The notion of CVE has been around for over ten years. In Europe it was introduced after the London and Madrid attacks of 2005 and 2004 in response to the fear of home grown Islamist terrorism. Indeed, CVE was usually referred to in the same breath as terrorism and generally referred to ways of tackling the "root causes of terrorism".[7] The concept gained increasing traction and has now found its way into development aid and international cooperation and for better or for worse "has come to be perceived as a crucial component of a sustainable counterterrorism strategy in responding to IS and the phenomenon of so-called Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF)."[8]

It is important to note that violent extremism is a global phenomenon and exists in a large variety of backgrounds and geographic areas and can range from domestic and homegrown to international terror groups. Such groups are not only relegated to radical Islam – there are white supremacists, neo-Nazis, right-wing radicals and a myriad of hate groups around the world – many of whom subscribe to the use of violence. To focus CVE efforts only on radical Islam and Muslim extremists serves only to foster what is a growing culture of Islamophobia and hostility that leads to discrimination.

In addition, because violent extremism is not only associated with individual terrorist attacks but also with conflicts, CVE means there needs to be closer cooperation and exchange between security services and actors in the fields of conflict management and prevention as well as development.[9]

1.1 Defining CVE

But what exactly is CVE? Despite the uptick in programming and funding focusing on CVE, there is no agreement on a definition of "violent extremism". Neither the UN nor the EU has an official definition – this despite the fact that earlier this year the UN introduced its Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (using the term "prevent" rather than "counter") yet without defining what precisely "violent extremism" is – is it doctrine, tactics, outreach, aspirations?[10]

The lack of a clear definition or understanding of CVE means that it has evolved into a "catch-all category that lacks precision and focus; reflects problematic assumptions about the conditions that promote violent extremism."[11] Particularly concerning for media development practitioners is that there are no clear boundaries "that distinguish CVE programs from those of other, well-established fields, such as development and poverty alleviation, governance and democratization, and education".[12]

In addition, "the lack of a clear definition for CVE not only leads to conflicting and counterproductive programs but also makes it hard to evaluate the CVE agenda as a whole and determine whether it is worthwhile to continue."[13]

Despite this, there have been some attempts at defining violent extremism. One Australian academic suggests that VE is "an **ideology** that accepts the use of violence for the pursuit of goals that are generally social, racial, religious and/or political in nature."[14]

USAID defines VE as: "Advocating, engaging in, preparing, or otherwise supporting ideologically motivated or justified violence to further social, economic and political objectives."[15]

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[7] Frazer and Nunlist, p. 2.

[8] Frazer and Nunlist, p. 1.

[9] Frazer and Nunlist, p. 1.

[10] International Crisis Group, Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, Special Report. 14 March 2016, p. 48.

[11] Steven Heydemann, 'State of the Art: Countering Violent Extremism as a Field of Practice', Insights, United States Institute of Peace, Spring 2014, p. 1.

[12] Heydemann, p. 1.

[13] http://www.fpri.org/article/2012/12/u-s-strategy-for-countering-violent-extremism-an-assessment/

[14] Jason-Leigh Striegher, Violent-extremism: An examination of a definitional dilemma. Australian Security and Intelligence Conference, 2015, p.6.

[15] USAID, The Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency. September 2011, p. 2.

If we can accept these definitions for VE this should guide our understanding of CVE and help clarify the activities associated with CVE. There is largely agreement that CVE involves the **use of non-coercive** means with coercive kinds of "countering" activity better left to law enforcement and military. As such, one proposed definition may then be: the use of non-coercive means to delegitimize violent extremist ideologies and thereby reducing the number of terrorist group supporters and recruits.

But what means? What methods? What tools can be and are being used? What does this mean for media development practitioners? These are some of the questions that will be explored in this paper.

1.2 Related terms

There are additional terms that are relevant to VE and CVE. Many of the definitions below are drawn from the Brave Program and Kenya's *"National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism"* by the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC).

Extremism is the strict adherence to a set of narratives or belief systems (whether political or religious) that constitute assaults on the mainstream values, orientations and principles of the Kenyan society. Extremist narratives exist on a continuum – at the extreme right and extreme left of ideological spectrums across political, racial, tribal and religious lines. When extremists resort to acts of coercion in the pursuit of their objectives, it degenerates to violent extremism ["This includes terrorism and other forms of identity-motivated violence from hate crime to genocide"[16]]

Radicalism is to stand at a distance from mainstream political or religious thinking. Radicalism is seen as open-minded and open-ended as opposed to extremism which is close-minded. Extremists harbor distinct willingness to use violence while radicals do not, at least along the trajectory path of radicalisation, until towards the end when it transforms into violent extremism.

Radicalisation is a *process* through which an individual or groups of individuals are transformed by an ideology or belief system shifting mind-sets away from the mainstream. Radicalisation helps to fulfil a sense of meaning, belonging, acceptance, purpose, value, having special power, dignity and respect as well as being a defender of a religion, race, tribe, political thinking or a cause. When the process leads to violence, then it is referred to as Radicalisation into Violent Extremism (RVE) process. In itself, radicalisation is not harmful. It could actually be a useful process if it brings about positive change, and destructive if it brings about negative change. Radicalisation may have many causes or factors with many different pathways to violence; it is a dynamic psycho-social process.[17]

Counter-Radicalisation refers to the efforts to delegitimize violent extremist ideologies, and to deter recruitment into terrorist groups or campaigns. It involves targeted efforts to reduce the access to citizens by influential individuals and groups whose deliberate mission is to expand support for terrorism.

De-radicalisation refers to concerted efforts directed at radicalised individuals to cause them to change their views to reject violent extremism. It is often aimed at prisoners convicted of terrorism or violent extremist crimes, or voluntary returnees from active participation in terrorist groups.

Disengagement refers to individuals deserting, defecting or demobilizing from terrorist groups and activities. This is a behavioral or declarative act and does not necessarily include the psychological and social dimensions of de-radicalisation.

Reintegration refers to actions that support the social, ideological, psychological, and economic wellbeing of rehabilitated individuals as they return to live with their families and communities, and that ensure that they remain peaceful and law-abiding in the long run.

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[16] Kate Ferguson, Countering Violent Extremism through Media Communication Strategies: A review of the evidence, Partnership for Conflict, Crime and Security Research, University of East Anglia, March 2016, p. 4.

[17] For further discussion of this see: Striegher, p.4.

Self-radicalisation refers to the process whereby an individual becomes a violent extremist without any specific terrorist group engaging him directly; it often occurs through access to extremist propaganda via media and the Internet. These are also referred to as "lone wolf" terrorists.

1.3 Drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism

In order to effectively understand CVE and the current approaches in addressing it, it is important to understand the drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism and the wider context in which such violence occurs. There is no consensus on drivers and it is likely more prudent to see this as a highly variable, context-driven process with many different causes, factors, motivators all played out in a nonlinear fashion.

One common understanding of drivers is that adopted by USAID which distinguishes between push and pull factors. Push being "important in creating the conditions that favor the rise or spread in appeal of violent extremism or insurgency", whereas pull factors are "associated with the personal rewards which membership in a group or movement, and participation in its activities, may confer."[18]

Yet this framework may be too simplistic and does not accurately portray the complexities of radicalisation which are highly variable. Khalil and Zeuthen, for example, suggest that there is a need to identify structural motivators, individual incentives and enabling factors thereby addressing the micro, meso and macro levels.

Structural motivators would include repression, corruption, unemployment, inequality, discrimination, a history of hostility between identity groups, external state interventions in the affairs of other nations.

Individual incentives include a sense of purpose (which may be ideological but often is not), adventure, belonging, acceptance, status, material enticements, fascination with violence, fear of repercussions by VE entities and expected rewards in the afterlife.

Finally, **enabling factors** include the presence of radical mentors (including religious leaders and individuals from social networks, among others), access to radical online communities, social networks with VE associations (e.g in prisons), access to weaponry or other relevant items, a comparative lack of state presence and an absence of familial support.[19]

This latter framework encourages the adoption of a holistic analysis that brings together a variety of factors, causes and motivators. Recent events support this and show that typical stereotypes of violent extremists are ill-founded. For example, the attackers in the Bangladesh bakery attack were "products of Bangladesh's elite".[20]

Another example is that of Jordan which has the highest number of foreign fighters per capita in the world. The findings of research conducted by international agencies such as MercyCorps[21] point to the existence of a more multifaceted and diverse story of why Jordanians join violent extremist groups[22] and that the origins of these foreign fighters are far-reaching both in geographic and socio-economic scope.

Recent examples in the United States include attacks by an apparently militant anti-theist, another by a white supremacist and still another by a neo-Nazi. Clearly, violent extremism is a global issue.

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[18] USAID, pp. 3–4.

[19] James Khalil and Martine Zeuthen, Countering Violent Extremism and Risk Reduction: A guide to programme design and evaluation. Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, 2016, p. 9. For a further discussion of this see their full paper.

[20] http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/04/world/asia/bangladesh-dhaka-terrorism.html?_r=0

[21] See MercyCorps. From Jordan to Jihad: The Lure of Syria's Violent Extremist Groups, Research and Recommendations, 2015. https://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=9810

[22] https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/countering-violent-extremism-jordan-time-rethink-noor-ali?trk=hp-feed-article-title-share

2. CVE: A shift towards the development paradigm

Traditionally, countering violent extremism has drawn from counter-terrorism approaches and has been addressed through security channels – i.e. police and security forces largely using **coercive approaches** and tactics (violence against violence). However, more recently there has been a shift and CVE is now focused predominantly on a broad range of non-coercive and preventative activities such as the use of community policing as well as the use of communications, specifically strategic communications. The latter continues to develop and evolve to include the use of media and media developers.

This shift has been so significant that some, including development practitioners, are calling for a **holistic approach** by targeting the individual and the social milieu of the individual (such as intolerance and political, economic, and social marginalization) and government actions including foreign policies and development support.[23]

In fact, as the domain of CVE continues to mature and expand to address root causes of extremist violence, much of the work touches the realm of peacebuilding and conflict prevention.[24] As one researcher has noted: "Many measures that serve to eliminate breeding grounds for violent extremism are also worthy aims for peace and development policy in their own right, independently of counterterrorism efforts. These include respect for human rights, good governance, strengthening the rights of women, and inclusion in the political, economic, and social spheres."[25] As such, **peacebuilding and CVE work increasingly intersect** though approaches and practice in the two areas often differ.

Such peacebuilding efforts must then include civil society. With the help of "peacebuilding organizations, civil society can develop effective programs to increase community awareness of the dynamics of radicalisation and teach the skills associated with building resilience and resistance to the drivers of violent extremism."[26] Some of this type of work is already going on as part of community policing efforts both in the United States and some European countries.

The peacebuilding community and civil society already contribute to the prevention of extremist violence and the CVE agenda with programs designed to prevent conflict, strengthen rule of law, and promote peace, tolerance, and resilience. Activities range from working to counter the narrative of terrorist recruitment messaging to development projects designed to mitigate the more structural causes that make an individual vulnerable to recruitment.[27]

If such efforts are to be effective, however, it is essential that civil society has a non-securitized space within which to operate. This is important because in certain fragile environments it may be counterproductive, inappropriate or even dangerous to collaborate with the security sector or other state actors.

To date, the most common uses of media in CVE have been strategic communication activities - "the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfill its mission."[28] These have largely been based on one of two approaches: **behavioural change communication (BCC)** and **alternative or counter-narratives**.

Perhaps most relevant to media practitioners and media development specialists is the meso level where BCC theory and practice are used to either **prevent** radicalisation or deradicalise. Media may also provide both **alternative and counter narratives**. Alternative narratives emphasize positive attributes including shared social values, tolerance, openness, freedom and democracy. Counter narratives contradict violent extremist messaging by deconstructing, discrediting and demystifying.[29]

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[23] Frazer and Nunlist, p.1.

[24] Georgia Holmer. Countering Violent Extremism: A peacebuilding perspective. United States Institute of Peace Special Report 336. September 2013, p. 1.

[25] Frazer and Nunlist, p.2.

[26] Holmer, p.6.

[27] Frazer and Nunlist, p.1 and Holmer, p. 3.

[28] Kirk Hallahan et. al. Defining Strategic Communication, International Journal of Strategic Communication Vol. 1, Iss. 1, 2007.

[29] Rachel Briggs and Sebastien Feve, Countering the Appeal of Extremism Online, Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2014, p.13.

There are **other ways to engage the media** that are related to CVE. Media can play a key role in diminishing the lure of violent extremism by covering/reporting on terrorist attacks in a manner that is conflict sensitive, avoids stereotyping and promotes the values of tolerance and cohesion. This can be done in a variety of ways by engaging the media and is discussed further in section 3.2.

3. Challenges of responding to the CVE agenda

There are numerous challenges in responding to the CVE agenda for both media developers and press freedom organizations.

First, it is imperative that independent media be protected and fostered as local journalists and media outlets are more likely to be able to build credible (and professional) counter narratives in a precarious environment (if that is the objective). But we must be cautious for the work we do can easily be confused (or viewed) as government-sponsored strategic communications putting our **credibility** and that of our local partners as well as media workers at stake.

The International Crisis Group, for example, warns that "re-hatting as CVE activities to address 'root causes', particularly those related to states' basic obligations to citizens – like education, employment or services to marginalized communities – may prove short-sighted. Casting 'violent extremism', a term often ill-defined and open to misuse, as a main threat to stability **risks downplaying other sources of fragility, delegitimising political grievances and stigmatising communities** as potential extremists. Governments and donors must think carefully what to label CVE, **further research paths of radicalisation** and consult widely across the spectrum of those most affected."[30]

Second, it is unclear **where (and perhaps how) CVE fits into the development agenda**. In a recent speech, the UN Secretary-General noted, "We must **break down the silos** between the peace and security, sustainable development, human rights and humanitarian actors at the national, regional and global levels – including at the United Nations."[31] Yet this suggestion flies in the face of humanitarian efforts, particularly in situations of armed conflict, which "are purposely distinct from security and development efforts. There are UN actors and INGO and NGO implementing partners whose missions – and staffs – could be put at tremendous risk if they are required to "mainstream" CVE, whatever that might mean, and integrate with security efforts."[32]

One of the pillars of CVE policy and practice is the promotion of cooperative and trust-based relationships between civil society and local police. However, significant risks are associated with this particularly in fragile states where unreformed security services lack oversight and may persist in violating human rights. "In certain environments, **civil society actors are at risk of being instrumentalized by security services** in the effort to prevent extremist violence, and the relationship is used more to collect intelligence than to work cooperatively. This reality demands thoughtful implementation of this particular CVE strategy".[33]

While the overlap between CVE and peacebuilding work is clear, CVE is still most often tied to security policies and practices. As such "**peacebuilders and their local partners need to maintain a certain level of neutrality to be effective and safe**. The concept of neutrality, however, can be a false construct in an increasingly polarized world, especially when dealing with subjective issues such as extremist ideologies. It is more important to be transparent in intentions and objectives, and peacebuilders must be afforded that space".[34]

Third, it is important that interventions "be **tailored to the specific local context**. Programs cannot simply be copy-pasted from one context to another."[35] A recent report from the Samir Kassir Foundation stresses the importance of hyper-local factors when it comes to radicalisation and counter-radicalisation.[36]

In addition, if one is to effectively counter current narratives then it is essential to identify the messages of the VE agenda in that particular context as well as how those messages are being sent out – is it social media, videos, rallies, etc. Are the messages a "call to action" or something else? This will **require substantial research** and a level of investment in order to design effective interventions. Research is also needed to evaluate the impact of CVE measures.

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[30] ICG, p. iv.

[31] http://www.un.org/apps/news/infocus/sgspeeches/statments_full.asp?statID=2884#.V37Q_PmU270

[32] https://www.lawfareblog.com/if-its-broke-dont-make-it-worse-critique-un-secretary-generals-plan-action-prevent-violent-extremism

[33] Holmer p.4.

[34] Holmer, p.6.

[35] Frazer and Nunlist, p.3. See also Holmer, p. 4.

[36] Samir Kassir Foundation. Reception and Perception of Radical Messages: Pilot Study, June 2016, p.8.

Related to this is the **cross-border nature of violent extremism** which suggests that any response would also have to be cross-border which increases complexities, logistics and likely has funding implications as well. Yet, this becomes extremely complicated when trying to address both hyper-local and cross-border factors.

There is also the issue of **safety in addressing countering violent extremism** because **war is the biggest contributing factor to the spread of violent extremism**. "Conducting military operations against extremist groups without a broader political plan only deepens the chaos that allows extremism to spread. CVE efforts must therefore focus less on 'defeating and destroying' and more on **conflict prevention and mitigation**. This will in turn help to contain violent extremism and prevent it from spilling over into other parts of the world."[37]

Social media sites have also begun to address VE concerns and have adopted a number of techniques, one of which is the creation of "**super flaggers**". Super flaggers flag content that violates the sites guidelines including content that is considered extremist. In 2012, Google gave "roughly 200 people and organizations, including a British police unit, the ability to "flag" up to 20 YouTube videos at once to be reviewed for violating the site's guidelines."[38]

Another example, involving Facebook, was in December 2015, when the social media site removed a profile page used by one of two people suspected of killing 14 people in San Bernardino, Calif. A spokesman said the page violated Facebook's community standards that, among other things, bar posts, photos or videos that support terrorism or glorify violence. The suspect, Tashfeen Malik, had published a post around the time of the shooting, but Facebook declined to disclose its contents.[39]

The move underscores the growing pressure on sites such as Facebook, Alphabet Inc.'s YouTube and Twitter Inc. to monitor, and sometimes remove, violent content and propaganda from terror groups. It is unclear how closely each company works with governments, how frequently they remove content and how it is identified. "I worry that giving more power to companies – which are undemocratic by nature – to regulate speech is dangerous," said Jillian York, the Electronic Frontier Foundation's director of international freedom of expression.[40]

Perhaps even more concerning is how governments are cracking down on journalists and human rights defenders in the name of national security, throwing journalists in jail and limiting access to information. Governments have called for internet platforms to remove accounts and/or content that promotes or supports extremism. They have also expanded surveillance efforts and called for restrictions on encryption – all in the name of CVE. Actions of the Erdogan government in Turkey after the recent July 2016 attempted coup are just one example.

There are also challenges tied to funding. Because there is not yet clarity on what works and/or how to **measure efficacy** of CVE activities, media developers (among others) are unable to cite evidence in their arguments for funding. Kate Ferguson in her important piece on CVE and media says there is simply "insufficient evident [that is] able to demonstrate the efficacy and effectiveness of counter-narrative strategies in CVE".[41] She goes on: "The potential for mass media to influence communities, societies and individuals is clear yet precisely how this capacity can be employed by democracies and NGOs in pursuit of peace and security remains largely unknown."[42]

In some respects we are also discussing an issue that is multi-sectoral and includes elements of security, human rights, governance and legislative and as such the development of CVE approaches should include elements of all of these. And of course actors include both state actors (governance and security) as well as non-state.

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[37] From: http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/markaz/posts/2016/03/21-countering-violent-extremism-events-hadra

[38] http://blogs.wsj.com/digits/2014/03/17/youtube-enlists-trusted-flaggers-to-police-videos/

[39] http://www.wsj.com/articles/social-media-sites-face-pressure-to-monitor-terrorist-content-1449448238

[40] http://www.wsj.com/articles/social-media-sites-face-pressure-to-monitor-terrorist-content-1449448238

[41] Ferguson p. 17.

[42] Ferguson p. 27.

3.1. Implications for media development

The challenges outlined above have implications for the media development sector and must be considered for a number of reasons.

One of the first imperatives is to undertake **additional research**. To date there has been little research conducted that addresses CVE and media development. CIMA is expected to release a report later in 2016 that discusses the implications of the CVE agenda for media development. Ferguson outlines some areas of research that should be undertaken to better understand appropriate media or communication-based responses or solutions. For example, why do some individuals find engaging with certain VE narratives online so appealing?[43] There is also a lack of research "related to audiences that consume let alone produce extremist information and little is known about how and why the initial transgression occurs."[44] This may be of particular relevance to countries in which IMS currently works as it requires further understanding of the narratives local media produce regarding global issues, terrorism, the "West", etc.

Traditionally, CVE is prone to government manipulation in the name of national security which can, for example, lead to co-optation of media workers. In addition, CVE approaches can risk conflict sensitive approaches that emphasize values such as impartiality (particularly important when we are talking about reliable, professional media). It is therefore incumbent on media developers to **consider conflict sensitive approaches to CVE**. It may also be how CVE is framed with regards to media development work.

The trend of CVE approaches evolving and using communication, strategic communication and media is worrying for media developers as it puts the credibility at stake of the work we do, the partners we work with and the independent media we are trying so hard to develop, professionalize and improve.

The context in which we find VE is also of particular importance for "the **vast majority of violent extremism is found in the context of entrenched and unresolved conflicts**, where violence begets violence."[45] This also suggests there is a place for media development particularly use of media in conflict societies.

In addition, the **structural drivers of violent extremism** bring CVE "into contact with what has traditionally been the realm of those working on human rights, development, and peacebuilding."[46] Clearly, this will have implications for media development, particularly in many of the countries IMS works in. How can or should this be addressed? There are no clear answers but there does need to be some serious discussion around this.

As mentioned above, one of the current challenges is that counter-terror or CVE is often used as a pretext for regimes to clamp down on free speech and civil society. One option would be to find avenues to keep political space open for debate and to look for ways to constructively address such issues for too often suppression simply serves to push grievances out of the political space where "they translate all too easily into violence."[47]

As such, it is incumbent on those of us working in media development, particularly in conflict and crisis countries to understand how the media are already being used for CVE activities and further to consider how our efforts may have a positive (or negative impact) on VE and CVE. However, there must be great attention paid to ensure that we do not mix strategic communication efforts and independent media.

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[43] Ferguson p.3.

[44] Ferguson p. 12.

[45] Madrid +10, Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism: Conclusions. October 2015, p. 27.

[46] Frazer and Nunlist, pp.2-3.

[47] http://www.saferworld.org.uk/news-and-views/comment/204-countering-violent-extremism-is-gaining-ground-in-the-state-department-a-hereas-how-to-make-sure-thatas-a-good-thing

3.2 Opportunities for media development

Given these challenges and the associated implications for media development, it would appear there are a number of opportunities for media development. However, the first order of business may need to be the adoption of alternative terminology and separating media development from, among other things, strategic communications. In a recent presentation to GFMD, Bill Hinchberger cautioned that: "By accepting CVE-related mandates, media development organizations could compromise themselves by collaborating with what some may consider questionable security/military initiatives while at the same time endangering both the safety and credibility of their field staff and those who work for the organizations they support on the ground."[48]

Yet, one could argue that much of the work media developers have been conducting over the years, particularly in conflict and post-conflict areas, could well be considered CVE-relevant and viewed as having positive side effects that are relevant to those working to counter VE. Some of these activities include: conflict sensitive journalism, media-military dialogues and simply improving the professionalism of media workers who report in areas prone to VE.

Ultimately, it would seem that we need to consider **media as a "change agent"** to counter violent extremism effectively. Perhaps this is one of the first areas of opportunity for media developers – the need to examine more thoroughly the literature regarding media as change agent. Pursuing such research and placing it within the media development framework would then better enable us to pursue the argument with donors that independent, professional media is a critical element in societies prone to VE.

Another key component to any CVE programming is the absolute necessity to fully understand the messages that are used to recruit and incite and how these messages are disseminated. One can only counter messaging if we know what the original messaging is. As such, another area media developers have been working in for years is **media monitoring**. However, one caution here: at what point does monitoring become surveillance (with more sinister objectives?) or have the potential to degenerate into blatant surveillance.

In their piece "Countering the Appeal of Extremism Online", Briggs and Feve suggest several so-called "positive" approaches to counter the appeal of VE online, two of which are highly relevant to media development.

• Strengthen **digital literacy** and critical consumption to help consumers understand how the internet works, how SEO works and how to use various online tools to refine their searches. Source verification is also important in this context, particularly for journalists so that they have the skills to assess the validity, reliability and authenticity of the information they use and consume, on or offline. (how: build capacity to enable users to critically engage with extremist content [or I would argue to understand who is sending the message and understanding the message as a whole]

• **Build capacity of credible messengers** could include assisting civil society and media workers to provide credible alternatives to violent extremism online.[49]

In fact, media literacy, writ large, is critical so that those exposed to extremist propaganda, be it online, on air or in person, are able to see it for what it is.

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[48] http://gfmd.info/en/site/news/926/Countering-Extreme-CVE.htm
[49] Briggs and Feve, p.12.

How technology is being used is also of critical importance. "Extremists have shifted their tactics over the past couple of years in line with shifting Internet patterns more generally, and this change of approach has potential benefits. There is less emphasis placed on bringing core target audiences to dedicated forums and websites (although this does still occur) in favour of operating within mainstream platforms, such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram."[50] As such, media developers must not only be aware of the technological environment in which they are working but also maintain a level of flexibility that allows for changes in approaches.

Also particularly relevant to media development is the connection between a strong, independent media and good governance. If **violent extremism can thrive where there is poor or weak governance**, or where the government is seen as illegitimate and these conditions persist, grievances are often left unaddressed, and frustrations can easily be channeled into violence then working to support a strong, independent and professional media sector could help to prevent VE and perhaps even counter it.[51] In fact, to address these grievances, government and other authorities must be held accountable and a strong and independent media can play a crucial role in covering issues of **accountability**. As such, media developers should continue to focus on professional, reliable and fact-based content and ensuring access to the skills and an enabling environment to allow for such content.

Cooperation with civil society and security forces such as facilitated dialogues that bring together media and security forces can promote cooperation, enhanced relations and joint problem solving and better understanding of the role of media in CVE. Such dialogues can be opened to the broader community: security actors, religious and tribal leaders, government, business members and the community at large. Media can provide a non-judgmental space for dialogue, for debate and to help further understanding of the challenges a particular community may face.

Other relevant issues raised above include the need for **holistic** strategies, as well as ensuring **context-specific** interventions and support that may need to be **cross-border** in nature. Finally, issues related to media **safety** including psycho-social aspects of trauma cannot be ignored.

All of this would suggest then that there is a significant role and opportunities for the media development sector to respond to the CVE agenda, though perhaps not specifically. It is here, in part, where the challenge of lingo is important for we must stress the key element of strong and independent media – a media that is independent of the CVE agenda, of security forces and of government. For we cannot afford to be viewed as supporting any agenda, that of CVE or any other – the potential damage to credibility, as mentioned previously, is considerable and has the potential to harm not only media developers but the partners and media workers we work with around the world.

So, how do we overcome this and meet what may be donor demands to address VE? We need to change the narrative, we need to educate and we need to show that our work is important in the CVE agenda without being explicitly CVE. We need to show that our work is CVE-relevant rather than CVE-specific. In other words our work's primary aim is not to prevent VE but rather has positive side effects in the sphere of CVE.

Media development work has, in most instances, the overall objective of leading to better governance and specifically to provide information and to spark and encourage debate. Together such activities may lead to preventing radicalisation and violent extremism and perhaps is the more appropriate narrative media developers should consider when approaching donors.

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[50] Briggs and Feve, pp. 5-6.
[51] Madrid +10, p. 24.

4. IMS and CVE: Some examples of best practices

Perhaps it is most relevant for media development to remember that **VE is considered a driver of conflict**. As such, IMS' work in conflict and post-conflict zones is intrinsically related for one of the goals is to mitigate or reduce or prevent conflict and thereby addressing the drivers of conflict in all their myriad forms.

As such, much of the work IMS has done in the past and is currently doing, is aimed at conflict reduction or prevention or at the very least at reducing tensions and increasing understanding of conflict and the role of the media. There are numerous examples of this.

In **Togo**, prior to the 2007 elections, IMS (based on thorough assessments) conducted a media safety forum that brought together members of the media, military and government authorities, including media regulators. This led to the opening of a dialogue with officials in the areas of media policy and safety of journalists. The goal of this two-day forum was to foster understanding between journalists, government authorities and regulatory bodies and military and police forces and to create an opening for dialogue. The intention was that the media community would proactively and collectively work towards defending their rights through establishing an ongoing dialogue with the government, security forces and other groups. In addition, it was hoped that this would lead to less violence than in the previous election, increased access to government officials and at least some semblance of working cooperation between the various groups. Clearly, this was not CVE but rather was to address issues of violence and conflict and to further understanding. Yet the relevance of such dialogues to CVE cannot be understated.

This type of forum has been replicated by IMS in several contexts: South Sudan and most recently in Kenya and can be particularly useful in contexts facing VE as it focuses on the crucial relationship between security forces and media.

In **Kenya** a pilot project was undertaken mid-2016 that was clearly marked as CVE. The project had two main components: a handbook on reporting terrorism and forums bringing together media and security personnel. The handbook included content on terms (including VE and radicalisation), the rights, responsibilities and ethics of the news media, the public's right to information, interacting with security agencies and staying safe. It is still too early to gauge the impact of this; however, the project does provide some insight into the development and design of one CVE project.

The work IMS has done in **Afghanistan** has largely centred on safety – also relevant to CVE as media workers are often targeted for the work they do. Also, because VE is often related to terrorism and conflict, safety is paramount. One of the main components of IMS' activities in Afghanistan since 2008 has been to conduct training courses based on the IMS broad approach on safety: risk and conflict analyses; risk management; basic safety training (HEAT); first aid; conflict sensitive journalism; photojournalism; social media and digital safety/online security courses.

The safety package equips Afghan journalists with the skills to take care of themselves, report in a safe and conflict sensitive manner, avoid language and behaviour that fuel conflict or put their lives in jeopardy. The training has been tailored to the specific challenges and needs pertaining to the increasing conflict scenario and understanding the conflict as such. Best practices have been developed to ensure quality and diversity in media content and to enhance the capacity to report in a balanced and ethical manner so as to remain neutral, and safe in the conflict.

One relevant outcome of IMS' work in **Pakistan** was that a better understanding on the role of media was created among state agencies through dialogues between media leaders and government authorities held in Peshawar and Islamabad. The distribution of literature highlighting standard operating procedures and other safety tips among newsrooms and press clubs create awareness among journalists in the field as well as the gatekeepers in the newsrooms.

In **Iraq**, the importance of qualitative media monitoring that IMS supported cannot be understated when we consider its relevance to CVE. While the Iraq program had no CVE-specific activities, we can see how content monitoring can be effective. Iraqi Media House (IMH) produced a hate speech monitoring report which draws a complete picture of the Iraqi media scene in this area and provides a roadmap for media institutions and other CSOs for future projects on media (and CVE).[52]

In addition, the Iraq program brought together media and security forces which resulted in an increased awareness of journalists' rights as well as of freedom of media in general. This has been achieved through collaboration and MoUs with government officials on behalf of security forces, and has likely contributed towards a decrease in number of recorded violations against journalists from government officials and security forces in comparison to deadly periods such as 2011-2013.

In **Niger**, the government is struggling to find ways to avoid having the media report on military defeats and the war on Boko Haram. In 2015, reports on civil rights of IDPs and the government's lack of handling the situation after Boko Haram attacks led to the leader of the civil society organization which published the information being thrown in jail. In June 2016, a TV5 correspondent had her credentials revoked for reporting on a similar story. While there is currently no CVE-specific work being undertaken in the IMS program in Niger, there are elements distinctly related. CSJ training has been conducted and perhaps more significantly, the bolstering of media monitoring across the country could present an opportunity to monitor content and respond with appropriate activities.[53]

All of these are simply snapshots to illustrate the relevance of IMS' work regarding CVE. The work IMS has carried out in conflict sensitive journalism, media-security dialogues, safety and content monitoring can all be considered critical in CVE work. While CSJ focuses on root causes (and drivers) of conflict, the importance of understanding the conflict process and best practices in covering conflict, the dialogues and safety work focus on numerous aspects of CVE and conflict – and taken together represent an important holistic approach to conflict and potentially to CVE as well. The early warning aspect of rapid response work could also play a key role in CVE allowing for preventative work and gauging where VE may need to be addressed.

Ultimately, all of these should be considered as part of a holistic framework should IMS decide to venture into the realm of CVE. Should IMS decide to delve further into CVE, then the organization must agree on how it wants to pitch this – do we subscribe to the donor-driven concept of CVE, stick to what we've been doing and find ways to make it more relevant to CVE and try to educate our donors on this or simply keep doing what we've been doing?

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[52] IMH monitoring reports and its extensive report on hate speech in Iraqi media have become a source and a database for academics to rely on, for organizations that are working on relevant issues, and for media houses themselves as it created a type of self-censorship on their content in order to avoid the naming and shaming if they end up mentioned in IMH reports. Most of the reports are translated on into English and available on IMH website: http://www.imh-org.com/fourteenth-report-promoters-of-hate

[53] One interviewee for this paper suggested that such monitoring could potentially backfire if the monitoring equipment fell into the "wrong hands".

4.1 Best practices

The examples cited above provide some excellent examples of best or good practices. These include specific tools such as:

- Ongoing **CSJ** work that includes an examination and discussion of VE and understanding local drivers. This can include curricular work.

- Strengthen **digital literacy and media literacy** as a whole

- Continue to **build capacity of credible messengers**

- Work to build mutual understanding and **respect between security forces and media**

- Ensure **safety** and protection of media workers

- Tell the stories of **survivors of VE**, of returnees

- **Holistic strategies** that take into account all levels of society – individual, community and structural causes of VE

- Continue to include **local actors**. "CVE/PVE programs have largely refrained from reaching out to local actors who may espouse radical views outside of the "moderate" mainstream, but who are anti-violence. Among at-risk individuals, such people may have more credibility than moderate voices offering value-based "counter-narratives", particularly when the latter are perceived as backed by the government."[54]

- **Strengthen capacity of local partners** in areas such as research, peacebuilding and conflict management.

- **Facilitate communication** and further understanding between diverse groups through effective and professional reporting and debate

- Continue to **develop, test and refine tools** and adapt to context. Flexibility is key.

- Consider a **transnational approach**

- Need to be cognizant that many **drivers of VE are often contextually based** and therefore there is a need for solid research and project design to address this in each context

- Need for additional **research**

But we must also take care:

- Be careful of adopting a **lingo** that can lead partners (and staff) into difficulties or danger

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[54] Frazer and Nunlist, p. 3.

5. Current CVE efforts within the media development community

At this point in time, there is little information available regarding media development efforts addressing CVE; however, there are some efforts.

On the research front, Courtney Radsch of CPJ is conducting research for **CIMA** about **the impact of the CVE agenda on media development**. The report examines how media development is being impacted by the CVE agenda in terms of the types of programs being supported, the donor agenda and response by the media development community, and the response of technology companies, with consideration of the impact on the press freedom environment. The first section examines: counter narratives, propaganda and psyops, training and capacity building, and algorithmic assistance. The next section examines the impact of counter narratives and censorial pressure, in terms of account and content removal, with respect to independence, trust, credibility and censorship. If concludes by suggesting where greater resources and engagement are needed: audience reception studies, media and information literacy, training and capacity building for media organizations and journalists, and commitments to transparency in terms of policies, funding, and algorithms by both government and private companies.

Albany Associates out of the UK has long been known for their work in strategic communications. One example has been their work in Somalia in which they "assisted the nascent Somali government and African Union's Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) by providing strategic communications effects to help stabilise the state. A cornerstone of the project was developing positive messaging for AMISOM and the Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG), whilst employing a range of methods to undermine the attempts of armed opposition groups, in particular, Al-Shabaab, to gain wider support from the population or to terrorize it into submission."[55]

In addition, they ran a "fully integrated campaign to counter the radicalising effect of Al Shabaab" and "provided direct support to the AMISOM, as the Information Support Team (IST). Within a multi-stakeholder environment, tasks included media mapping and monitoring, polling, domestic and international outreach programmes, communication capacity building and direct support to the Somali media. The communications campaign also incorporated print, radio and TV production products, and we ran the AMISOM digital presence through social and web output. Political and military communications advice to the two sides of AMISOM was the mainstay of the campaign. Outreach events were organised on the ground in Somalia to bring together the civil society and support the burgeoning media."[56]

The **US-based NGO Equal Access**, in partnership with the US Embassy N'Djamena, is implementing the "Fostering Sustainable CVE Messaging Strategies through Locally-driven Community Radio" project with the aim to counter extremist messages in Chad. The "risk and vulnerability within local communities is exacerbated by lack of credible, community-based local-language information, and a lack of opportunity for moderate leaders and community members to share their opinions. While extremist messaging and recruitment efforts expand and become more sophisticated in the region, communities lack their own communication platforms to provide counter-messaging and express their priorities, grievances, and needs."[57]

Equal Access has created "two new community radio stations with the skills and technical capacity to counter violent extremism narratives and strengthening the capacity of four existing community radio stations to expand and deepen their CVE messaging and programming, EA is expanding the impact and influence of community radio stations in Chad in order to increase the dissemination of credible information and community resilience programming that counters violent extremist messaging and promotes community dialogue."[58]

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[55] http://www.albanyassociates.com/about-us/projects/somalia

[56] http://www.albanyassociates.com/about-us/projects/somalia

[57] http://www.equalaccess.org/success-stories/challenges/youth-life-skills-and-education/chadpeacebuildingmessagingradio/

[58] http://www.equalaccess.org/success-stories/challenges/youth-life-skills-and-education/chadpeacebuildingmessagingradio/

In addition, EA has been the media partner for the USAID-funded multi-year regional program Regional Peace for Development II (PDEV II) that operates in Chad, Niger and Burkina Faso and "uses a community-led approach to foster community harmony and stability with a focus on youth empowerment, vocational training, education, research, information dissemination via various channels including radio and good governance."[59]

The follow up to PDEV II, Moderate Voices for Peace, is now in the tender phase. It is a 5 year, USAID-funded, messaging and communications project. The project will aim to amplify moderate voices of peace and tolerance as part of a broader effort to reduce vulnerability to violent extremism in the Sahel. This is the language IREX is using in their call for candidates: IREX seeks a Chief of Party for an anticipated USAID-funded messaging and communications project to counter violent extremism and promote democracy, human rights and governance in West Africa. The approach of the project will blend media-development approaches with strategic communications and behavior change programming, leveraging both new and traditional media to reach populations most at risk to violent extremism in West Africa. The Chief of Party will lead a diverse team of conflict resolution, communications, media development, and peacebuilding experts across Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. IREX seeks a proven project director with experience leading major projects in this field, particularly in Francophone West Africa, and with a proven record of quality management and relations with USAID.[60]

USAID has also been running CVE programs in Kenya, Niger, Nigeria, Mali, MENA, Pakistan and Central Asia.[61] Many of these have some sort of communications component.

It is important also to note how USAID views the use of media and media development in CVE efforts. In their 2011 policy document "The Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency", communication is considered a development assistance priority. "Given the role of perceptions in radicalisation and recruitment, media and communications are central to development responses to the drivers of violent extremism and insurgency. This includes support for local media development to foster independent voices as a counterweight to extremist ones."[62]

The OSCE has also been active in the CVE area. One example is their recent conference and workshop in Bishkek organised by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Kyrgyzstan, OSCE Academy, American University of Central Asia, Internews, Soros, and the PromoTank Research Institute. The event addressed cooperation between media and civil society for Countering Information Threats and Promoting Transparency and Accountability. There was also a workshop on the media and counter-narratives.

Finally, the GFMD and some GFMD members have spearheaded efforts to examine and understand implications of CVE programming and funding on media development. As a result, numerous meetings have been held with a number of international organizations and security agencies including NATO, UNDP, OSCE, EU Parliament, EC, Club de Madrid and UNESCO. However, these meetings are only a start and much more effort and engagement is needed between the media development community and others including donors, security agencies and policy makers.

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[59] https://www.usaid.gov/countering-violent-extremism

[60] https://afrojobs.net/jobs/chief-of-party-media-program/

[61] https://www.usaid.gov/countering-violent-extremism

[62] USAID, p.5.

6. Recommendations for non-media development stakeholders

Clearly the importance of the CVE agenda extends far beyond the media development community and for any efforts to be successful they must include other stakeholders, namely donors, policy makers and security agencies. There are numerous ways that policy makers, security agencies and civil society can ensure successful CVE policies and strategies. In fact, those mentioned above related to media development can actually extend beyond that sector and these best practices can be adopted by others working in this area. There are also some additional recommendations including the following:

- **Coordination is key.** An integrated and coordinated approach that includes all stakeholders (security, government, civil society, media developers and other NGOs as well as local stakeholders) is potentially more effective in CVE-related strategies and policies than going it alone.

- **Avoid one note responses.** Responses to CVE should avoid being one note and rather should adopt holistic approaches appropriate to the (hyper-) local context. Not all violent extremists have the same drivers pushing (or pulling) them.

- **Do no harm.** CVE policies and activities can lead to discrimination, threats to safety, or result in other unintended negative consequences. Ensure that such policies or actions do not simply foment distrust or hostility to any community and that a solid risk assessment has been conducted.

- **Engage with targeted communities.** Policy makers and security agencies should be sure to engage with Muslim, Arab and South Asian communities to ensure their voices are heard but also to protect their civil rights.

- **Set clear goals and objectives.** Be clear about goals and objectives of policies and activities related to CVE – are we actually seeking to engage or are we seeking to gather intelligence. These are two very different agendas.

- **Monitor and evaluate.** Ensure that any activities related to CVE are constantly monitored and evaluated to ensure objectives are being attained. If not, adapt and change as necessary.

- **One size does not fit all.** CVE challenges are different everywhere and hyper-local approaches will need to be tried, tested and adapted depending on the specific context.

- **Donors must coordinate with grantees.** Donors will need to work closely with grantees to ensure objectives of both donor and grantee are coordinated and not in contradiction.

- **Benefits may be secondary in nature.** Understand that CVE effects may be secondary or tertiary benefits of (media) development undertakings and should be identified as such.

- **Support research of CVE.** Research is needed not only to evaluate efficacy of CVE programming but additional research is also needed with regards to gender and VE as well as drivers of VE in hyper-local contexts.

- **Encourage innovation and allow for flexibility.** CVE-relevant work often takes place in challenging environments and as such may require untested approaches and/or a level of flexibility that donors and others may not always be comfortable with. However, encouraging such approaches can also lead to breakthroughs and successes.

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