

**Countering Violent Extremism and Development Cooperation:  
Identifying Synergies and Opportunities in the Horn of Africa**

**Expert Roundtable Meeting**

7 December 2015, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, London

**Meeting Summary**

On 7 December 2015, the Government of the Netherlands and the Global Center on Cooperative Security hosted an expert roundtable meeting on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) and Development Cooperation. More than thirty representatives from a range of national governments, multilateral donors, implementing partners, and civil society organizations (CSOs) attended the meeting, which was held at the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in London. The roundtable meeting examined the nexus between CVE and development cooperation, looking concretely at opportunities and risks, different approaches taken by donor organizations, and the impact on programs and implementers. It highlighted lessons learned and emerging practices, as well as recommendations that could increase their efficiency and impact.

Violent extremism and terrorism are both security and development issues. While poverty does not have a direct causal relationship with violent extremism and terrorism, poor countries are the most affected by terrorist violence. Beyond socio-economic challenges, a lack of hope and future prospects, (real or perceived) marginalization and socio-political exclusion, and weak governance and rule of law are considered both conducive to the spread of terrorism and challenging to sustainable development. Violent extremism and terrorism are also direct threats to development as they impact economic stability, tourism, and the human security and basic human rights of citizens, including freedom of religion, freedom of expression, and right to life. Lastly, violent extremism is increasingly part of the context in which development organizations operate, with terrorist groups impeding, endangering, and diverting the delivery of development assistance and aid services. In certain cases, terrorism and violent extremism are the primary factors contributing to the need for continued assistance.

However, there remains a gap between the policies, practices, and tools used by those concerned with international security (e.g. ministries of interior, justice, foreign affairs and defense; law enforcement actors; regional and multilateral organizations, etc.) and those responsible for stabilization and development cooperation (e.g. bilateral and multilateral donor agencies; responsible national ministries and departments; international nongovernmental organizations; CSOs, etc.). The gap exists both at an organizational level within governments and other bureaucracies and in implementation of programming on the ground. Meeting participants agreed that CVE policies should be developed in an integrated fashion, in which a variety of actors work toward different but mutually reinforcing, coordinated, and commonly agreed end goals, such as strengthening community resilience against violent extremism and reducing some of its enabling factors, including relative deprivation and marginalization. Participants cautioned against including CVE objectives in all development work or simply re-branding current development programs as CVE initiatives, but they stressed the need to recognize the CVE-relevance of much ongoing development work, and the potential benefits of integrating targeted CVE interventions into some development programming, where appropriate.

Practitioners in the development field raised concerns about subsuming CVE initiatives into development projects and potentially shifting the end goal from key development markers to the

primary aim of reduced violent extremism. Many of the current aims of development initiatives are sufficient and necessary ends in and of themselves; given the shared drivers of conflict in both fields, CVE effects can be secondary or tertiary benefits of development undertakings and should be identified as such. From the CVE perspective, common terminology to illustrate this distinction would be “CVE-relevant” versus “CVE-specific” programming: interventions that are not explicitly targeted at preventing or countering violent extremism but may still contribute to it indirectly versus those that are designed to mitigate a particular extremist threat or community vulnerability. Some participants were concerned that broadly reframing development goals as CVE-specific goals risks diminishing their impact, while doing so may also neglect the importance of broader human security in favor of narrower state security—a shift that hurts both security and development. Therefore, at the very minimum, actors should apply the “do no harm” principle to ensure that CVE and development programming do no harm to either field.

Further differences between the two domains identified by the participants included preferences for short term versus long term approaches, employing measures that focus on symptoms versus underlying structural causes, dissimilarities in definitions of goals and results, and variations with regard to levels of risk-taking.

Throughout the meeting, the importance of context sensitivity, local ownership and capacity building were emphasized, as was the utility of, where possible, building on existing networks and traditional peace and dispute settlement structures. Participants were also very clear about the necessity of improved policy coordination and harmonization between different sectors, including diplomacy, security, criminal justice, and development, to improve efficiency and avoid duplication. In that regard, participants noted that being critical about certain bad governance and human development issues, while at the same time supporting the law enforcement or military capacities of corrupt governments, may undermine both development and security objectives.

Additionally, participants stressed the importance of recognizing that, traditionally, security and development programming target different groups. While security interventions tend to focus on populations and regions where violence is already rife, development interventions usually target the poorest, least developed, or most marginalized. This difference in focus often leads to overlooking those communities most at risk of radicalization to violence. CVE and development programming should therefore consider the breadth of potential stakeholders and ensure strategic clarity when identifying objectives and end goals, and make explicit which audience they are targeting, and whose security they are improving. Here, it may help to use a peacebuilding lens and language rather than a security framework, since this will likely enjoy more familiarity and credibility on the community level as it centers not on the state’s but the individual’s grievances, development, and security.

To better elucidate opportunities for synergies between security and development programs, participants agreed that both fields should continue to enhance their knowledge base on push and pull factors for violence (including violent extremism) versus development-related structural drivers. At the same time, the need to acknowledge the complexity of the issues means that there will always be contradicting research findings and project results was also stressed. Furthermore, participants concluded that there is a need to refine monitoring and evaluation tools for use in insecure environments, to adequately test assumptions on which programming is based and assess the impact of interventions. However, this should not by definition lead to favoring programs with a measurable, short-term impact over more sustained but flexible investments over a longer time period.

In January 2016, the Global Center on Cooperative Security will publish a paper on the nexus between CVE and development cooperation, in part informed by the outcomes of this meeting.