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QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT OCTOBER 1 – DECEMBER 31, 2014

Countering Violent Extremism in the Middle East & North Africa (CoVE-MENA)

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**Countering Violent Extremism in the
Middle East & North Africa**

(CoVE-MENA) Task Order (TO)

CONTRACT NO. AID-OAA-TO-14-00048

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List of Acronyms & Abbreviations

CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
CSO	Civil Society Organization
FOG	Fixed Obligation Grant
GCTF	Global Counter Terrorism Forum
IS	Islamic State
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
OTI	USAID Office of Transition Initiatives
VE	Violent Extremism
VEO	Violent Extremist Organization

I. Introduction

This first Quarterly Performance Report for the Countering Violent Extremism in the Middle East and North Africa (CoVE-MENA) Task Order covers the period 1 October to 31 December 2014 (known hereafter as Q1 in this report). Highlights from the reporting period include:

- Quick start-up of the Task Order with USAID and Task-Order team kick-off and coordination meetings held within three weeks of award, and all subcontractors and key personnel in place by early November;
- Regular coordination meetings established and held with USAID and the Task Order team; SharePoint site established to facilitate document and information-sharing among team members;
- Research study topics proposed and two topics approved, and concepts being developed for, research in Year 1 on governance and violent extremism (VE), and women and VE;
- Draft agenda developed and submitted to USAID for the USAID workshop anticipated in March/April of 2015;
- Draft RFA and grant templates and timeline developed for anticipated Maghreb/Sahel;
- Ongoing CVE literature reviews and interviews of experts and key informants by Task Order team members; and
- Project Manager participated in Global CVE Expo and Research Conference in Abu Dhabi, December 7-11th.

II. Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Context in MENA

In short, during Q1, the threat of VE in the MENA region continued to grow even more serious, with political crises looming in Libya, Yemen, and possibly Tunisia, and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) - otherwise known as the Islamic State (IS), Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, ISIL, or Daesh - continuing to capture territory in Syria and Iraq, forcing more refugees into neighboring countries including Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. In December 2014, Project Manager Jen Heeg traveled to the CVE Research Conference and Global CVE Expo at Hedayah in Abu Dhabi, where the extent and reach of the global threat posed by the Islamic State was made clear by approximately 300 participants from six continents. The idea of the creation of a so-called Caliphate has inspired many extremists from groups as remote as *Jemaat Islamiya* in Indonesia to pledge allegiance to ISIS, and send members to join the fighting.

One theme highlighted at the Hedayah conference was the start of a Muslim-led discourse to take back Islamic vocabulary and sacred concepts, including the words *jihad*, *hijrah*,¹ and *sharia*. There seems to be a growing perception that the United States Government (USG) and the mainstream media's use of these terms plays into extremist groups' hands, and demonstrates to moderate Muslims a fundamental misunderstanding of their religion—after all, *jihad* (rightfully understood as “struggling in the way of Allah”) is a major tenet of Islam, and there appears to be a growing perception that non-Muslim states' adoption of these terms as used by extremists will

¹ For example, ISIS has been calling for a hijrah to the territory they currently control in Iraq and Syria, and for years, the USG and other governments have been referring to extremists as “jihadists.”

further alienate moderate Muslims around the world. This phenomenon was mentioned in at least three presentations at Hedayah, and was discussed in several side conversations.

Other takeaways relevant to CoVE-MENA from the Hedayah conference include:²

- Youth who are likely to join violent extremist organizations (VEOs) are radicals, so CVE should also be radical.³ The CVE community should be cognizant of the sense of adventure, belonging, and purpose that VEOs provide, and should develop programs and messaging with this in mind. The development of a Muslim hero narrative through comic books, online videos, television, and radio may also provide positive inspiration.
- ISIS in particular has a massive online presence, and has used the tech skills of European foreign fighters to create an “online army” to post extremist content to YouTube and Twitter, and to recruit individuals to travel to Syria on a one-by-one basis. ISIS also produces a very polished English-language recruitment magazine called *Dabiq*, which is widely available. They have a three-tier communication strategy: central messaging, provincial messaging, and the online volunteer army.
- ISIS is also quite adept at opportunist online offenses. For example, pro-ISIS online warriors swarmed around the Ferguson decision, and said to African Americans “come and join our jihad, here you will be treated equally.” This is happening online within minutes, and governments have so far been unable to counter with any meaningful speed. Online initiatives have been inadequately funded, too controlled, too short-term, too identified with the state, and missing in messages that appeal to the radical mindset.
- Research in Kenya suggests that women in their communities are utilized for recruitment, and to establish support (both financial and acceptance) through engaging with other women. Programming lesson: capacity building of women’s organizations in this area requires very specific focus and interventions. The EU is funding a pilot program to train women’s organizations, and the CVE community needs to continue to understand better the role of women.
- In most Western countries it’s estimated about 10-20% of foreign fighters are female. The Internet has become quite important, and provides a means for women to become involved in a movement where face-to-face interactions are quite difficult. Whereas in the past women couldn’t go to these meetings, now they can interact through social media. On extremist YouTube channels, female participation is almost 50%. Now that a significant number of women are foreign fighters, you can then have these traditional peer-to-peer processes happening.
- People going to Iraq and Syria to join ISIS and *Jabhat Al Nusra* are from different places and they have very different reasons for going. People from Jordan more motivated by economic reasons; from Saudi Arabia and Yemen, they tend to be more ideological.

² Dr. Heeg prepared about 50 pages of notes from the research conference and Expo for the CoVE-MENA team; these notes are available on request.

³ In the words of one former extremist who created an online character, he kept in mind that the character “has to be real, he has to be raw, and he has to be radical.” A peace, love, flowery message wouldn’t have gone anywhere. He had to sound “street,” be someone you could fear but respect, with theological knowledge.

Increasingly, people from Europe and Asia are traveling to Syria because they are genuinely excited about the creation of a supposed Caliphate, and want to be a part of its creation.

- Just as modern science and mathematics has its origins in Islamic scientific inquiry, in modern times Islam and the West are not mutually exclusive. CVE experts need to promote the narrative of interrelationships and connectedness.
- Ex-political prisoners (“violent extremists”) in Northern Ireland have been used in innovative programs to talk with at-risk teens. The message is not “don’t be radical,” but rather “don’t be violent, right now.” The idea is that teens may outgrow their impulse to be violent, if it is made clear it’s not in their immediate interest. These programs may be worth exploring to see whether they could be adapted to the MENA context.
- It is possible to run an internet search of “how to join ISIS” (or similar) and hear directly from those in the group. Returned foreign fighters suggest some counter-messages, including:
 - Syrians don’t want you here. The VEOs are telling Syrians how to live their lives, not to smoke, etc, and are taking the best villas, causing resentment.
 - You will spend your time and possibly die fighting your own kind (other Sunni groups, also fighting against Assad).
- The families and friends of individuals who become radicalized tend to know there is a problem, but may not have anywhere to turn. Community-based and family-based CVE programming may help support networks in stopping vulnerable youth from going fully down the path to radicalization. This can and should include psychosocial support.
- Research on “what works” in CVE media is promising. There is a growing body of research on what’s working and what’s not. Words are important, but pictures, images, video are much more important. We need the 45-second video version of the long pamphlets and letters, and we need to amplify the voices of the community. We can use humor and satire, if it’s done in an authentic way by people with legitimate, credible voices. Ideas include tele-novellas with stories of families harmed by terrorism, YouTube videos, “transmedia” campaigns where one story plays on television, radio, and on social networks—these all have CVE potential. In many cases, speed is more important than slick packaging. Youth can best engage other youth.

III. Task Order Management and Coordination

The Task Order contract for the “Local Solutions to Address Transition and Security Challenges in the Middle East and North Africa: Engaging local institutions to address conflict and violent extremism”, now known as CoVE-MENA, was awarded to FHI 360 on September 30, 2014. Immediately following award, the FHI 360 Task Order team mobilized to coordinate with USAID, and launched internal coordination and contractual processes needed to finalize agreements with subcontractors and task order personnel. In the month of October 2014, a kick-off meeting was held with the Contracting Officer’s Representative (COR) and other representatives of USAID/ME/TS/DGPS on the 17th and a coordination and planning meeting was held with Task Order partners and personnel on the 23rd to introduce the team members to one another, and

to the Task Order Scope of Work and activities, and to develop a proactive work plan for activities to enable a smooth and responsive launch of the research, training, and field pilot components. By early November, letters of authorization had been issued to Mercy Corps and SSG Advisors, and all key personnel were in place.

After assuming her position on November 10th, Project Manager Jen Heeg took over the role of Task Order management, with support from the FHI 360 PEACE IQC Manager, Anne Salinas. Dr. Heeg has facilitated weekly coordination meetings with the Task Order team, and maintained regular communications and weekly meetings with the USAID COR and her team. FHI 360 set up a SharePoint Site with shared documents and task lists accessible to relevant team members and partners in order to facilitate communication and coordination across the team.

Personnel: During the reporting period, the following key personnel were hired:

- Project Manager/Technical Advisor Jen Heeg started on November 10, 2014. Dr. Heeg is an SSG Advisors employee, seconded to FHI 360 and co-located with the rest of the DC-based Task Order team in the FHI 360 office.
- Maghreb/Sahel Field Program Representative Adnane Raiss was hired under a consultant agreement (up to 68 days between 11/3/14 and 3/31/15) on November 3, 2014.

In mid-December 2014, a position description was released in Morocco for a mid-level Program and Grants Officer to support the Maghreb/Sahel pilot activity. The application period closed on 12 January 2014 and we will conduct interviews in February 2015. In total, 86 applications were submitted for the position and approximately 15-20 met our minimum requirements. The selected Program and Grants Officer will be hired when USAID grants permission to proceed with the Maghreb/Sahel pilot activity.

Contractual Issues: During the reporting period, FHI 360 raised corresponded with USAID on three contractual issues. The COR confirmed that all key personnel were approved as part of the Task Order award, and the Contracting Officer (CO) was notified that changes to the Task Order deliverables had been requested related to the planned USAID workshop. One issue that was raised with the COR but has not yet been address is the determination of Grants Under Contract (GUC) authority for the Task Order.

Coordination with USAID: The CoVE-MENA Project Manager established weekly meetings with the COR and others in ME/TS. In general, the weekly meetings have been held since November, with exceptions around the holidays and in shortened weeks. USAID/ME/TS has also been very accommodating in hosting CoVE-MENA's Project Manager in the RRB in order to read SBU project documents from OTI/Libya, OTI/Syria, and VE/I Risk Assessments for Jordan, Morocco, and Libya.

It was discussed in the November 23rd and December 4th coordination meetings to re-activate Dr. Heeg's Secret-level security clearance; she has consulted with AAAS (the holder of her dormant clearance) and they have agreed that transfer is possible. If USAID remains interested, the next step would be for the COR to discuss with OAA.

Coordination with other USG agencies: Dr. Heeg’s participation in the Global CVE Expo, “Breakthrough Communications Solutions,” sponsored by the Global Counter Terrorism Forum (GCTF) and Hedayah was jointly financed by CoVE-MENA and the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) which paid for the Research Conference portion. While there, Dr. Heeg had many conversations with Africa Bureau (USAID), GCERF, the Global Center, State CT/CVE and NEA, USIP, Hedayah, and several representatives from other governments and international NGOs to learn about related CVE initiatives in the region and to explore potential synergies and collaboration.

IV. Task Order Activities

Research Studies

During this quarter, the Task Order team made progress in planning for the two research studies planned for Year I. In early November, FHI 360 and its research partner Mercy Corps met with USAID and presented a research plan for CoVE-MENA, highlighting seven proposed research studies on CVE over the 3.5-year period. The research plan was revised after this discussion and finalized in December. Three research topics were identified for Year I: Governance and VE in Iraq, Women’s Role in VE, and Foreign Fighters. It is anticipated that the Governance and Women studies will be drafted in Year One, and research on Foreign Fighters will commence.

In December (and January), Mercy Corps developed a research plan and concept note for Research Study 1, on Governance and VE in Iraq, in addition to a preliminary literature review and data analysis plan. For Research Study 2, on the role of Women in VE, we have developed a preliminary set of research questions, in consultation with USAID (including the ME Bureau Gender Advisor) and experts in this field. A summary of what has been achieved this reporting period is listed below:

- Submission to USAID of overall Research Plan for CVE Research (submitted to USAID on Nov. 19th)
- Development of work plan for YI studies
- Development of Research Study 1 (Governance and VE) Concept Note
- Preliminary review of literature and data analysis plan for Study 1 completed
- Data coding and cleaning underway for Study 1
- Discussions with potential research partners

Training and Knowledge Generation

In the CoVE-MENA-USAID joint coordination meeting on December 17th, it was communicated that USAID would like to change the deliverable for the USAID training from a 2.5-day training in Rabat based on USAID/AFR/SD CVE trainings, into a 4-day CVE workshop for Missions and other USG representatives across the MENA region to be held in either Jordan or Cyprus. FHI 360 notified the USAID CO of this proposed change to the contract’s deliverables. This expanded 4-day workshop will cover the fundamentals of VE and CVE, provide context for the rapidly evolving conditions in the MENA region, and allow each Mission team to develop an action plan to be implemented upon return.

The CoVE-MENA Project Manager worked with SSG Advisors to draft a workshop agenda which was submitted to USAID on December 31st. Coordination and further drafts will be ongoing into Q2 (January/February/March 2015). The workshop dates have not yet been established, but the latest information is that it will likely be held in April 2015.

In the area of Knowledge Generation, Project Assistant Rindala Mikhael has been actively collecting background reading documents and posting them to SharePoint for the CoVE-MENA team. She has also created a “CoVE-MENA Open Source” working document, where Task Order team members summarize articles on VE and CVE in MENA, particularly articles appearing in Arabic and French news outlets. We anticipate that the Open Source file will provide all members of the Task Order team with greater access to the foreign press coverage of VE and CVE in MENA.

In December 2014, Ms. Mikhael also traveled to Beirut, Lebanon, where she met with several peacebuilding practitioners and prepared a report for CoVE-MENA. The report was submitted in January 2015, and is summarized in the January 2015 Monthly Update for USAID.

Pilot Activities

Maghreb/Sahel Pilot Activity: According to USAID, the Maghreb and Sahel countries in which CoVE-MENA will launch its first pilot activity will be Morocco, Mali, and Niger, and we anticipate also training Libyan CSOs awarded grants by OTI/Libya. The Field Program Representative for the Maghreb/Sahel pilot, CoVE-MENA Field Representative Adnane Raiss has conducted research on the VE phenomenon in Morocco through literature review and informal consultations with key informants, in order to gain a better understanding of the drivers, to identify target geographic regions, and to select an initial roster of CSOs. The main findings of this research will be shared in the February monthly update, as part of a special highlight on Morocco. During Q1, Mr. Raiss undertook a search for CoVE-MENA office space in Rabat, and FHI 360 anticipates signing a sub-lease with Mercy Corps’ Rabat office in Q2.

FHI 360 has secured a local lawyer and has compiled required documents for its registration in Morocco. CoVE-MENA awaits USAID approval of their Project Description in order to complete the FHI 360 registration packet and submit its application to be registered as a Moroccan affiliate of an international NGO. There are some conflicting interpretations of the registration law but the FHI 360 lawyer has advised that visible, public activities can commence three months after the registration package has been submitted to the Government of Morocco.

While the launch of pilot activities has been delayed (for reasons outlined in Section V of this report), the CoVE-MENA team, particularly Grants Specialist Marty Galindo-Schmith, has been active in creating the following grant documents and templates so that we are able to launch the grant process as we receive the go-ahead from USAID:

- CSO Selection Criteria for pilot activities
- Draft Local Solutions Request for Applications for grants
- CSO Eligibility Criteria for pilot activities

- Selection Criteria for Target Regions
- FOG (Fixed Obligation Grant) Template
- CoVE-MENA Grant Process document
- CoVE-MENA Grant Approval Template
- CoVE-MENA CSO Selection Template
- Grant Timeline (see Annex I)

Other Pilot Activities: In addition to the Maghreb/Sahel pilot activity, and additional two or three pilot activities are anticipated to be implemented under the Task Order. USAID did not provide further guidance or information on future pilot activities during the reporting period.

V. Challenges Faced this Quarter

Delays in launching the Maghreb/Sahel pilot activity were the major challenges faced during the reporting period. As we interpret it, these delays, in hindsight, were inevitable and unavoidable for a few reasons: first, instability and geopolitics in the tumultuous MENA region pose an inherent challenge, particularly when there are evolving limits and prohibitions on working in several countries in the Maghreb region.⁴ Second, and not to be underestimated, violent extremism is a very sensitive topic throughout MENA. The growing and spreading territorial advances of ISIS, the growing threat of other extremist organizations throughout the region, and the fact that USG presence in the CVE sector is relatively new to the region require that CoVE-MENA tread lightly and carefully.

The delays have slowed the timeline for the initial pilot activity considerably, but all parties have been active in the meantime. In order to reach agreement on launch of the pilot activity, USAID/ME initially proposed a consultation meeting in Morocco for USAID Missions and OTI in the Maghreb and Sahel regions, other USG partners such as State/INL, and other implementing partners (including USIP). This consultation, originally scheduled for early January 2015, has faced delays due to coordinating schedules. In January 2015 CoVE-MENA learned that ME Bureau has decided to get around these scheduling challenges by coordinating a series of bilateral and multilateral teleconferences for February and March. Dr. Heeg will be involved in all conversations that are not internal to the USG.

As listed in Section IV (Task Order Activities), CoVE-MENA has been active in creating background, supporting, and preparing documents for the pilot activities, so that the team will be ready for launch as soon as the go-ahead is granted from USAID.

⁴ For example, it was determined in Q1 that OTI/Libya would be the only USAID presence on the ground in Libya. CoVE-MENA also discovered that Tunisia is not a possibility for programming at this time because special Congressional Notification would be needed, and Algeria also appears to be off the table. This leaves the project with very few places in the Maghreb in which to work (namely, Morocco), and no opportunities for direct cross-border or cross-regional work, although Mali and Niger are both potential sites for pilot activities.

VI. Plans for Next Quarter

Management & Coordination

CoVE-MENA anticipates that coordination between USAID/ME/TS and their many USG interlocutors may continue to cause delays in Q2, although we are confident that once the teleconferences proceed, our work on the Maghreb/Sahel pilot activity will be able to gain steam quickly, based on the preparatory work we have been conducting (including drafting the Grants RFA and other documents in support of the Pilot Activities as discussed in Section IV).

The main management goal internal to CoVE-MENA for the next Quarter will be to complete the hiring process for the Grants and Contracts Specialist position in Rabat.

Research Studies

The following activities are planned for the next quarter:

- Contract agreement with research partners for Study I
- Detailed work plan for Study I completed
- Analysis of quantitative data underway
- Preliminary findings from Research Study I to be shared
- Women and VE Research brief concept note finalized (Study 2)
- Women and VE literature review and development of 4-5 page brief underway

Training and Knowledge Generation

Q2 will be an active one for the Training component of CoVE-MENA; USAID is proposing this workshop to take place in April 2015, and the agenda, attendees, location, and dates must all be finalized in early Q2, along with development of the curriculum.

Pilot Activities

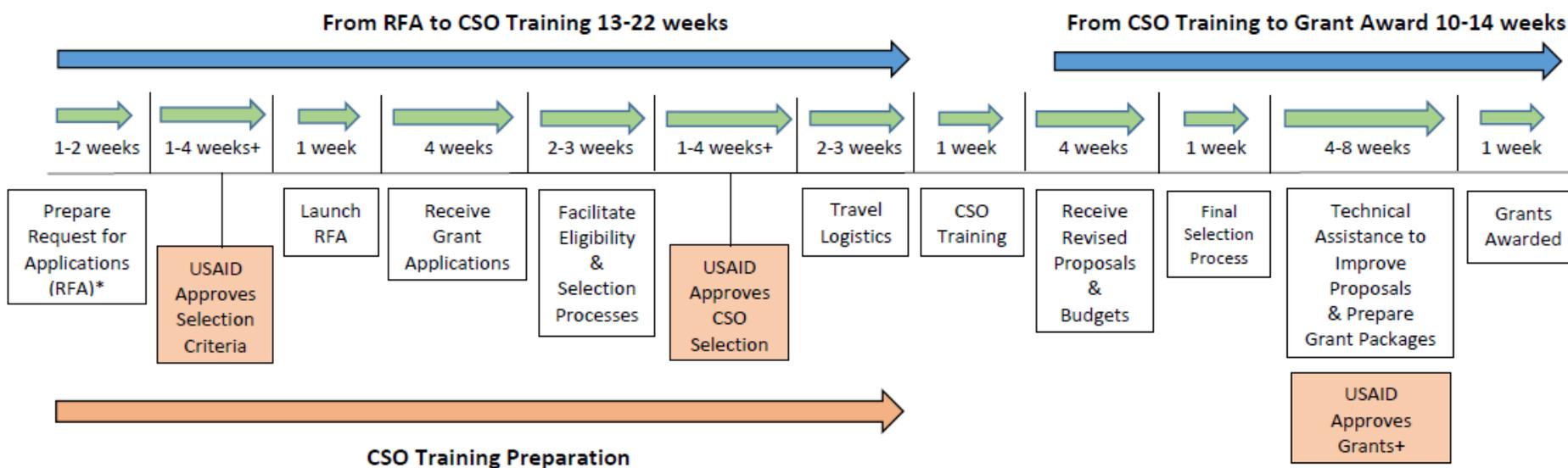
Maghreb/Sahel Pilot: The Grant Timeline developed this reporting period highlights the time it will take to get from the launch of the process (USAID approval of Selection Criteria and the launch of the RFA) to the awarding of grants. The entire process is estimated to take between 23 to 36 weeks, depending on the amount of time necessary for USAID to secure approvals at critical junctures in the process. CoVE-MENA recognizes that USAID's approval turnaround will depend on the number of stakeholders that need to be engaged at each juncture.

In short, when USAID grants the go-ahead for the launch of the Maghreb/Sahel pilot activity, CoVE-MENA is prepared to move forward and launch the grant process.

Annexes

Annex 1

Co-VE MENA Grant Timeline Maghreb Sahel Pilot



* Finalization of the RFA depends on having target countries and content areas signed-off by USAID.

+ The length of time required for USAID approval may depend on how many stakeholders need to sign off.