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COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM: A PROVINCIAL PERSPECTIVE

DO 2 Learning Agenda Working Group
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This report represents a joint effort of the learning agenda team members from the USAID/Pakistan Mission. The team members include Kristine Herrmann-DeLuca (Director - Office of Democracy, Rights and Governance, [DRG]), Rabia Akhtar (Development Objective Manager, DRG), Sohaib Ahmed Khan (Development Assistance Specialist, DRG), Kashif Karim (Monitoring & Evaluation Specialist, DRG), and Waseem Ashraf (Project Management Specialist, DRG).

The learning agenda team in USAID/Pakistan planned and managed this learning product, developed the data collection instruments, led the data analysis, and contributed substantially to the writing. All the staff members contributed to developing samples and to data analysis, conducted productive Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) as part of this assignment, and provided expert advice and local context in designing and implementing the assignment and interpreting the data.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report captures USAID/Pakistan’s key lessons learned from the implementation of USAID/Pakistan’s ongoing countering violent extremism (CVE) intervention activities in targeted geographic areas¹ in Pakistan since 2012, first through the Office of Transition Initiatives, and now as part of the Mission’s longer-term development agenda. This study was conducted by the Development Objective 2 (DO 2: More Peaceful Communities In Key Areas) team to better understand how different CVE interventions are more relevant and effective in different geographic areas. This report also identifies unique challenges in different geographic areas to assess if the Mission’s CVE interventions are fully aligned with the regional dynamics. The main questions are:

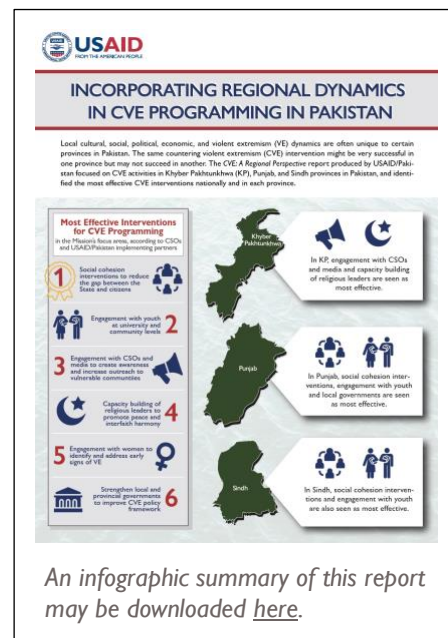
- Are similar CVE interventions (e.g., building capacity of local key actors) relevant and effective in all targeted geographic areas?
- What role can donors and civil society organizations play in improving the Government of Pakistan’s (GoP) commitment towards CVE?
- Do the implementing partners (IPs) and sub-grantees have the knowledge of CVE concepts to implement CVE interventions, and are they using appropriate monitoring and evaluation systems to measure results?

KEY FINDINGS

EFFECTIVE AND RELEVANT KEY ACTORS

- USG respondents (State and USAID staff involved in CVE programs) view **civil society organizations (CSOs)** as key actors in CVE work, whereas CSOs view local community leaders and influencers as key leaders.
- **Youth and community elders** were identified as effective and relevant key leaders across all provinces by USG staff, IPs, and CSOs.
- **Women** in Punjab and Sindh were ranked higher as key leaders by USG staff, IPs, and CSOs, but comparatively lower by CSOs in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) because of the general cultural norms that prevent women from participating in public spheres.
- Engagement with **parliamentarians**, particularly younger members of parliament, is crucial to introduce new CVE laws and strengthen the implementation of the existing policies and laws, especially in Sindh and Punjab. KP respondents ranked parliamentarians lower, primarily because

¹ Using a case study research method, this report draws from CVE activities’ progress reports, implementing partner (IP) studies, and focus group discussions and surveys with IPs, sub-grantees, and relevant USG staff.



the focus of the study was the newly merged district where the concept of parliamentary systems, electoral processes, and civic roles and responsibilities is relatively new.

- **Media** is considered an expensive investment by Sindh and Punjab IPs and CSOs, which reported that the journalists they trained did not remain engaged on CVE issues after the grants ended. However, respondents from KP saw the media as a key player to advance the counter-narrative to violent extremism (VE), and CSOs collaborated with the local government on media programming to raise awareness about the merger of districts, reforms, peacebuilding, tolerance, and countering violent extremist narrative.
- USG staff, IPs, and CSOs identified **religious leaders** as effective, with some variations among the three provinces. The role religious leaders play in CVE depends on the context of the geographic area, their affiliations, and their relationship with the isolated, madrassah-based youth community.

EFFECTIVE CVE INTERVENTIONS

CSO and IP respondents identified the following interventions, which are ranked in order of their efficacy, as the 'most effective' for CVE programing in the Mission's focus areas:

1. Increasing citizens' engagement with community leaders to reduce the gap between the State and citizens, including community-led peace-building and social cohesion projects;
2. Youth engagement at university and community level with sustained actionable programs;
3. Engaging CSOs and media to create awareness and increase outreach to communities vulnerable to VE narrative and influence;
4. Capacity building of religious leaders to lead and promote messages of peace, tolerance, interfaith and social harmony, and to counter VE narrative;
5. Engagement with women to identify and address early signs of VE within their families and communities, and broader Women, Peace, and Security interventions; and
6. Strengthening of local governments, working with provincial governments for policy reforms and legislation, and engaging parliamentarians are all important.

ROLE OF DONORS IN IMPROVING GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN COMMITMENT TOWARDS CVE

IPs and CSOs shared a number of areas where donors can play a key role in increasing the GoP's buy-in for CVE interventions:

- Donors act as a catalyst in CVE programming, bridging existing gaps between local communities and government.
- Donors should engage more directly and often with government officials--especially local governments--to improve the impact of CVE work; nothing can happen without the support of the government.
- Donors should work with the government to create an enabling environment for CSOs.

- Key Lesson for Donors: Short-term, small grant interventions are less impactful than long-term and process-oriented interventions, such as establishing youth development centers at universities or in communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are key recommendations for CVE programming:

- Increase engagement with youth in madrassas and non-traditional educational institutions for countering VE because of the vulnerability of these groups.
- Enhance engagement with members of provincial assemblies, provincial, and local governments to help them gain trust in their communities. These interventions must be carefully designed and implemented to ensure CVE activities are not used by members of the provincial assemblies as a tool to advance their political interests in the communities.
- Strengthen media engagement and outreach (especially in KP) to significantly raise awareness among the targeted population. The post-merger environment provides opportunities to use mainstream and social media in countering VE narratives.
- Expand partnerships with educational institutions to increase provision of CVE-accredited courses and make educational institutions more inclusive.
- Review the existing grant mechanism (includes approval, monitoring, and evaluation) to make it more responsive and result oriented.
- Form a community of practice (including GoP, donors, academia, and CSOs) to serve as a common platform for sharing and exchanging ideas and best practices to improve CVE programming.

Additional recommendations for improving monitoring and evaluation are contained in the full report.

CONCLUSION

The findings from this study suggest that the local VE, cultural, social, political, and economic dynamics in the key geographic areas are often unique to certain geographic regions, and the same CVE intervention might be very successful in one region but may not succeed in another.

There is a need for the USG staff to better understand these hyper-local level dynamics for designing and managing CVE projects/activities. All CVE activities should be designed in close collaboration with the local CSOs and governments and have flexibility to adapt to the ever-changing VE dynamics in the key geographic areas. USAID should engage with Pakistani CSOs on a more regular basis as key stakeholders, not just as IPs or sub-grantees, in order to stay abreast of the complex local dynamics. Yet, merely keeping abreast of local dynamics may not lead to strategic change without the GoP's involvement.

Despite the many variations of regional dynamics, there also are a number of similarities, common approaches, and issues of mutual concern. However, there are no provincial or national platforms for CVE practitioners to share their experiences and learning with each other and the GoP. Sharing CVE experiences among practitioners on provincial and national platforms also would help educate the GoP about the importance of working with community leaders and refine its CVE efforts.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Violent extremism (VE) in Pakistan is a microcosm of the broader regional political and security dynamics, with actors of various backgrounds justifying violence based on perceived historic, geopolitical, and cultural grievances. The roots of the drivers of VE in Pakistan are deeply entrenched in history, dating back to partition from India, the anti-Soviet jihad movement of the 1980s, Saudi Arabia and Iran's struggle for regional influence and use of proxies, and the post 9/11 U.S.-led NATO war in Afghanistan. Violent extremist Islamist organizations in Pakistan have effectively drawn on powerful existing narratives in presenting and promoting their particular worldview.² Today, a number of actors—including right-wing religious groups, gangs, jihadi, and sectarian elements—use these historic references as justification for violence against both domestic and international targets, be that the Pakistani government, refugees, internally displaced people, religious minorities, human rights activists, and/or foreigners.³ The recurrent drivers of violent extremism, its resurgence by terrorist organisations, and their linkages to hostile foreign agencies not only disrupt Pakistan's social fabric, but also adversely affect its economy and development.⁴

Political support for extremist elements exacerbates the problem. Pakistan's fear of Indian influence in the region drives support for certain non-state extremist actors from both military and civilian governments. The relationships are interdependent and negatively affect the political, social, and security dynamics in Pakistan, posing a threat to security and stability in the region.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in Pakistan has been funding countering violent extremism (CVE) interventions in Pakistan since 2012, first through the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), and now as part of the Mission's longer-term development agenda. As part of these efforts, USAID has partnered with a number of civil society organizations (CSOs), academia, community groups, religious leaders, and government officials to counter violent extremism (VE) in South Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Karachi, and Northern Sindh. In March 2020, USAID/Pakistan amended its Country Development Cooperation Strategy to fully align Development Objective (DO) 2 of the Mission with the Agency's new guidance for CVE programming. The revised DO 2 (More Peaceful Communities In Key Areas) aims to build on the CVE work done by OTI and shift focus from short-term initiatives to long-term and sustainable interventions to counter VE in Pakistan. Learning and adapting is a key component of the revised DO 2 strategy, and the DO 2 team has established a learning agenda working group to build a strong evidence base to better manage current CVE activities and help inform future CVE interventions.

This study was undertaken to help DO 2 better understand the unique regional dynamics in its three focused provinces. As the DO 2 team started designing a new Citizens Engagement Activity, the team noted that there was a lack of documentation about what kind of CVE interventions are more appropriate for KP versus Punjab and Sindh. This knowledge gap hindered the team's ability to plan and design CVE interventions for different provinces based on the regional dynamics. A second reason that triggered the

² Amil Khan, "Pakistan and Narratives of Extremism", United States Institute of Peace. Special Report. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2013/03/pakistan-and-narratives-extremism> Accessed on March 22, 2021

³ Sahar Khan, "Double Game: Why Pakistan Supports Militants and Resists U.S. Pressure to Stop," CATO Institute, September 20, 2018. Accessed November 12, 2018: <https://www.cato.org/publications/policy-analysis/double-game-why-pakistan-supports-militants-resists-us-pressure-stop>

⁴ Khan, Minhas Majeed. "Countering Violent Extremism in Pakistan: An Appraisal of Pakistan's CVE Initiatives." *Strategic Studies*, vol. 35, no. 4, 2015, pp. 23–44. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/48535998. Accessed 2 Apr. 2021.

need for this study was the policy brief, “A Critique of Countering Violent Extremism Programs in Pakistan,” by the Center for Global Policy (CGP) in 2020⁵. Several findings of this policy brief were relevant for the DO 2 portfolio, but not always consistent with DO 2’s lessons learned. To dig deeper into some of the key findings of the CGP policy brief, the DO 2 team incorporated several questions from the brief into this study to identify which findings are relevant in different geographic areas.

PURPOSE

This learning product has been developed by the DO 2 learning agenda working group to capture key lessons learned from the implementation of the ongoing CVE activities in USAID/Pakistan’s key geographic areas. More specifically, this report aims to explore and capture the unique challenges and opportunities for CVE interventions in these different areas to assess if USAID/Pakistan’s CVE interventions are fully aligned with the regional dynamics. This report draws on lessons learned from CVE activity progress reports, studies conducted by partners, as well as focus group discussions and surveys with partners, sub-grantees, and relevant USG staff. The findings expressed in this document are solely those of USAID/Pakistan and not attributable to any other party outside of USAID.

QUESTIONS

The main research questions, as finalized by the DO 2 learning agenda working group are:

- Are similar CVE interventions (e.g., building the capacity of local key actors) relevant and effective in all geographic areas?
- What role can donors and CSOs play in improving the Government of Pakistan’s (GoP) commitment towards CVE?
- Do the implementing partners (IPs) and sub-grantees have the knowledge of CVE concepts to implement CVE interventions and are they using appropriate monitoring and evaluation systems to measure results?

METHODOLOGY

The DO 2 team used a case study research method combining different approaches to elicit implicit and explicit data from the stakeholders and implementing partners. Primary data collection comprised focus group discussions (FGDs) in South Punjab, Sindh, and KP. Using structured interviews, the team conducted FGDs with six to eight civil society partner organizations per province. The team used the DO 2 monthly partner meeting platform to discuss key questions, in addition to conducting an online survey to all prime IPs. For data triangulation purposes, the team also sent an online survey to relevant internal USG staff in Pakistan to capture their perspectives and knowledge. This was intended as an internal exercise to assess the effectiveness of the CVE programing. The course on “Using Research Evidence at USAID,” helped to finalize the methodology. The research team followed the USAID Landscape Analysis Process of Learning Agenda. The team applied tools from the United States Institute of Peace studies, “Taking Stock: Analytic

⁵ Policy Brief: A Critique of Countering Violent Extremism Programs in Pakistan, Center for Global Policy, July 2020, <https://newlinesinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/CGP-Countering-Violent-Extremism-in-Pakistan.pdf>

Tools for Understanding and Designing P/CVE Programs,” and, “Measuring Up: Evaluating the impact of P/CVE Programs,” for better understanding and achieving the objectives.

The team also drew on secondary sources including program descriptions, annual performance reports, project completions of CVE-specific activity, studies, and cluster evaluations of sub-grants.

DATA ANALYSIS

The team reviewed the available literature corresponding to the objectives of this study. The purpose of the desk research was to enhance the understanding of the nature of work and analyze the trends and results contributing to the Mission’s overarching goal. It was an important element to authenticate information and enrich the body of knowledge of this assessment.

The team transcribed the FGDs and compiled responses to online surveys submitted by IPs and internal USG staff. A few patterns emerged from the literature review and survey responses, and inductive codes emerged from the FGDs. After reviewing all the data sources, the team identified common patterns, as well as supporting and contradictory data. The team held several meetings to discuss these patterns and fleshed out each of the data points under the key questions. Through this analysis period, the team members considered the validity of the findings, taking into consideration the background and expertise of respondents and triangulating the interview data with the literature. Given the lack of mid-term and final evaluations of CVE activities, the analysis relied more heavily on primary data than on secondary data. The reason for less reliance on the secondary data was information inadequacy and inappropriate quality of documentation, which might drive biased conclusions.

LIMITATIONS

Due to COVID-19, the entire learning process was conducted virtually. While it was comparatively easier to set-up online meetings, the use of virtual platforms sometimes resulted in difficulties in probing more sensitive topics and unintended challenges for facilitating the discussion online. The virtual platforms also limited the use of nonverbal communication.

The input of CSOs and IPs was primarily based on their own experience of implementing various USAID-funded CVE interventions. The team noticed that participants were more likely to rank particular CVE interventions as more effective if they had experience implementing those interventions. For example, CSOs that receive funding for implementing CVE grants in partnership with universities ranked university campus CVE interventions as most effective. The team had to ask a series of probing questions to receive more objective responses.

The literature review included reports and assessments mostly developed by IPs. The reports and learning products submitted by IPs for literature review were not directly relevant and contributed little to the questions in this study. Therefore, there was little evidence found from the literature review to ascertain the effectiveness of any specific intervention, and the team had to rely principally on primary data to draw conclusions.

FINDINGS

I. RELEVANCE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF CVE INTERVENTIONS IN DIFFERENT PROVINCES

For the first question, the team used the DO 2 theory of change to develop interview and survey questions. First, the team tried to identify who the relevant and most effective key leaders are in the three provinces. Second, the team prepared a list of CVE interventions being supported by USAID/Pakistan, and it discussed the relevance and effectiveness of these interventions in different geographic areas.

The team identified a difference between how local CSOs/sub-grantees and USG staff regarded the role of key actors. For example, the USG respondents felt strongly that CSOs are one of the most important key actors for CVE, but CSOs emphasized that local community leaders and influencers are more vital as key leaders than CSOs. Similarly, the internal USG survey respondents identified cultural activities and community events as the most effective CVE interventions, whereas, the CSOs across all provinces identified interventions that aim to bridge the gap between the citizens and government as the most effective CVE intervention. This reflects that the knowledge and lessons learned from the hyper-local partners do not always transfer to USG staff, and there is a need for more regular engagement between the USG and hyper-local CSOs.

EFFECTIVE AND RELEVANT KEY LEADERS

Youth, community elders, and religious leaders were identified as effective and relevant key leaders across all provinces by USG staff, IPs, as well as CSOs. Women were ranked higher as key leaders by USG staff, IPs, and CSOs from Punjab and Sindh, but comparatively lower by CSOs in KP. The main reasons behind this inconsistency are the lack of space and acceptance for women’s participation in the public sphere in KP and cultural sensitivities associated with the role of women in society. This highlights the need for more investment in female empowerment initiatives in KP.



In Sindh, social cohesion interventions and engagement with youth are also seen as most effective.

IPs and sub-grantees implementing CVE interventions in Sindh and Punjab highlighted that engagement with parliamentarians, particularly young members of parliament from the same constituency, is crucial to introducing new CVE laws and strengthening the implementation of the existing policies and laws. They also highlighted the contribution of parliamentarians in influencing their communities to help counter VE, as well as sectarian and ethnic conflicts. IPs and sub-grantees from KP did not list parliamentarians as relevant and effective key leaders, primarily because the communities in KP (especially the Newly Merged Districts or NMDs) are less exposed to the parliamentary systems, electoral processes, civic roles, and responsibilities than those in Sindh and Punjab. Since the merger in 2018, NMDs have gone through their first provincial elections. The newly elected members of the provincial assembly do not have significant knowledge of CVE laws and regulations. This could be a new area for potential investment in future CVE

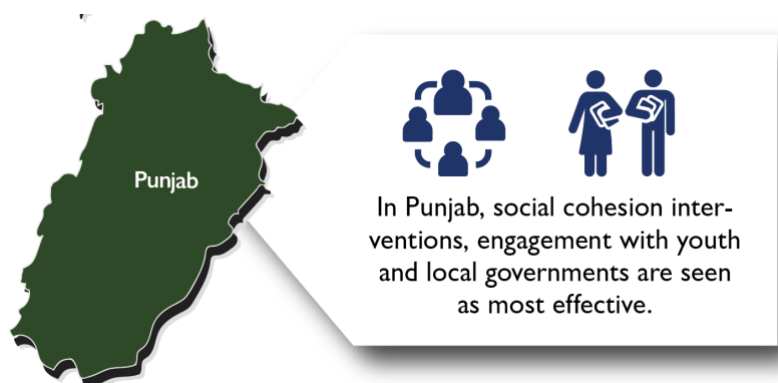
interventions in KP, but it should be complemented with the capacity building of parliamentarians and focused communities.

Another interesting pattern that emerged during the process was the significance of media and journalists in KP versus Sindh and Punjab. IPs and sub-grantees from Sindh and Punjab reported investment in media and journalists as expensive, and in their experience, the journalists they trained or engaged with did not always focus on CVE in their reporting after the training. Respondents from KP, on the other hand, considered the media as a key player in advancing the counter-narrative to VE. This opposing view is due to the unique local dynamics in the NMDs, where electronic and print media, as well as social media, are comparatively more restricted. This presents opportunities to introduce media programming, in collaboration with the government, to raise awareness about the NMD merger in KP, as well as reforms, civic issues, peacebuilding, tolerance, and countering the VE narrative in all targeted areas. For example, the Community Resilience Activity-North is engaged with the KP government to help support more resilience programming in the NMDs through media.

To dig deeper into one of the key findings of the CGP policy brief about “over-targeting of religious leaders in CVE interventions and limited effectiveness of such interventions,” the team held in-depth discussions with the participants of Focus Group Discussion. Contrary to CGP’s findings, religious leaders were identified as effective key leaders by USG staff, IPs, and CSOs, although with some variations among the ranking of CSOs in the three provinces. Overall, respondents noted that religious leaders can play a robust role in CVE depending on the context of the geographic area, their affiliations, and their relationship with the isolated, madrassah-based youth community. CSOs from KP rank religious leaders as the most effective key leaders because of their influence within communities and their strong relationship with the local and provincial government. CSOs from Punjab and Sindh shared a more cautious response. They noted that religious leaders can be less effective when their interests are associated with certain religious and political parties. Religious leaders have been found to be openly, as well as silently, inclined towards supporting political parties and extremist actors for political, influential, or financial gains. It is crucial to identify the right religious leaders and groups for the right set of interventions. Furthermore, the efforts to engage with religious leaders to counter VE in these areas were more effective when they were done in collaboration with the local/provincial governments as prime partners. Provincial institutions such as the “Auqaf Department, Provincial Ministry of Religious and Minority Affairs and Islamic Ideological Council,” were identified as potential partners.

EFFECTIVE CVE INTERVENTIONS

The survey responses by IPs and internal USG staff and the FGD discussion identified the diverse nature of interventions intended to counter VE. Out of 12 options provided by the team (in addition to a 13th option of “other”), the following interventions were identified as ‘most effective’ for CVE programming in the Mission’s focus areas, presented in order of effectiveness:



1. Increasing citizens' engagement with community leaders emphasizing their role in social mobilization, collaboration, and decision making to reduce the gap between the state and citizens; this includes community-led development initiatives with an objective of development for peace;
2. Youth engagement at university campuses and community levels with sustained actionable programs (e.g., establishing youth development centers);
3. Engagement with CSOs and media to raise awareness and increase outreach to communities vulnerable to VE narrative and influence;
4. Capacity building of religious leaders to lead and promote messages of peace, tolerance, and social harmony, and to counter the VE narrative;
5. Engagement with women to identify and address early signs of VE within their families and communities;
6. Strengthening of local governments through different initiatives to respond to the needs of local communities, working with provincial governments for policy reforms and legislation, and engaging parliamentarians are all important.

The data analysis of the FGDs identified practices, trends, and logical leads that should be prioritized for selecting CVE interventions for different regions. The data reflects the need for better knowledge of the local context. In terms of regional dynamics, KP stakeholders considered that interventions related to religious leaders are most effective due to their high social status in USAID's focused areas. They reported engagement with madrassas, training of madrasa teachers, and capacity building of religious leaders to promote sectarian reconciliation initiatives as the most relevant and effective interventions in the NMDs. Contrary to the situation in KP, the participants of Sindh and Punjab ranked engagement with local community leaders, youth, civil society, and local government as the most relevant and effective interventions for CVE. In Sindh and Punjab, cultural and peace promotion activities also were highlighted as most successful because of more cultural acceptance of theater and arts.

All groups cited the importance of peace and tolerance initiatives carried out with parliamentarians, women, media, and academia. The discussions emphasized that using social and other media platforms to raise awareness and share positive messaging helps increase social tolerance and acceptance of diversity. CSOs from all three provinces reported partnership with local governments for CVE interventions as a key to success. They noted that policy-level issues need to be supported, and that CSOs can advocate for policy development and changes to strengthen the CVE agenda.

Most Effective Interventions for CVE Programming
in the Mission's focus areas, according to CSOs and USAID/Pakistan Implementing Partners

	Social cohesion interventions to reduce the gap between the State and citizens	
	Engagement with youth at university and community levels	2
3	Engagement with CSOs and media to create awareness and increase outreach to vulnerable communities	
	Capacity building of religious leaders to promote peace and interfaith harmony	4
5	Engagement with women to identify and address early signs of VE	
	Strengthen local and provincial governments to improve CVE policy framework	6

The team further compared the CVE interventions listed as most effective by CSOs during FGDs against CVE interventions receiving the highest percentage of funds from USAID. IPs responded to this question based on the percentage of funds allocated for sub-grants on various thematic areas in different geographical areas. The questionnaire identified 12 options of CVE interventions commonly funded by IPs under different CVE programs. The consolidation of IP responses ranks the following CVE interventions, based on the level of funds allocated under their contact/agreement with USAID:

1. Community-led development initiatives to respond to the basic needs of the community and to provide a platform for communal interaction, decision-making, and inclusion that build resilience.
2. University partnerships in promoting social tolerance through designing new courses.
3. Cultural events and community awareness programs to create social harmony and develop cohesion among different communities.
4. Women, peace, and security initiatives.
5. Interventions with madrasah, inter-faith harmony, and capacity building of religious leaders.
6. Policy reform and dialogue and research on CVE.

The team asked the same question from internal USG staff in an online survey, who responded and ranked the interventions based on their experience and perception:

1. University partnerships and youth engagements.
2. Community-led peace initiatives and inter-faith harmony, community awareness, and cultural activities.
3. Improving citizen engagement.
4. Women, peace, and security initiatives.
5. Policy reform and research.
6. Capacity building of religious leaders.

2. ROLE OF DONORS IN IMPROVING GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN COMMITMENT TOWARDS CVE

DO 2 has been actively looking for opportunities to establish more formal collaboration with the GoP to enhance buy-in from the government for CVE initiatives. The lack of GoP involvement and buy-in was also listed as a critique by CGP in their policy brief. To explore opportunities for increased buy-in from the GoP for CVE interventions, the team added a set of questions about this in the surveys and FGDs. The GoP was recognized as a key actor and stakeholder by all respondents. The following three levels of government were examined in this study:

- **National level:** National assembly and national assembly parliamentarians for introducing new CVE laws and strengthening the oversight and implementation of existing CVE laws, and the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) responsible for countering terrorism and VE in Pakistan;
- **Provincial and regional governments:** Provincial governments have most of the administrative controls after the 18th Amendment to the Constitution;

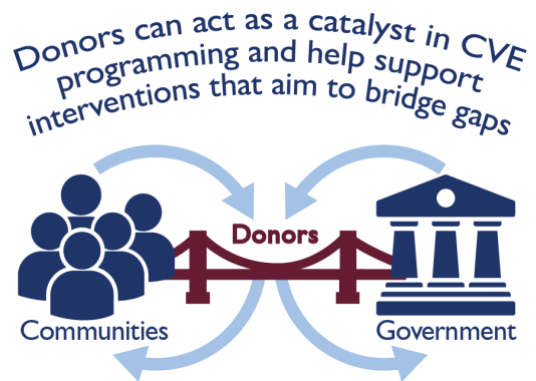
- **Local governments (district/local governments and line departments):** Being a main partner on the ground and having a connection with the communities can enhance direct engagement as well as smooth implementation.

NACTA was not recognized as a viable partner for CVE because of the perception of their lack of openness to engage with CSOs and their focus on countering terrorism instead of CVE. Local governments were ranked high by CSOs in all three provinces, as well as IPs and USG staff. FGD respondents and IPs noted that local government’s buy-in and support are very crucial in engagement with the marginalized communities and enhances the participation of local residents. The government can support CVE activities as local partners in an inclusive, participatory approach to identify, as well as address, the drivers of extremism and instability in the targeted areas. However, government support for effective implementation of CVE activities at the grass-root level, in collaboration with community-based organizations and local CSOs, is even more effective. It is interesting to note that internal staff (members of the Interagency Stabilization Working Group) and IPs emphasized that CSOs can play a key role in improving government buy-in. However, when CSOs were asked about the role they can play to enhance GoP capacity and participation in CVE interventions, they did not have any concrete recommendations because they simply did not believe that they can influence the GoP in CVE.

In terms of regional dynamics, respondents from KP recommended building a strong relationship and partnership with the local government instead of the provincial government and legislators. Respondents from Punjab shared examples of strong buy-in and support from the provincial government and legislators, particularly for enhancing social harmony between different sectarian groups and countering hate speech. They recommended more regular coordination with the provincial government on CVE. Respondents from Sindh shared examples of support from provincial legislators, as well as the provincial government, to support social tolerance, acceptance of religious diversity, and social harmony between different ethnic and sectarian groups. CSOs from Punjab and Sindh also highlighted provincial Higher Education Commission departments and the provincial Ministry of Human Rights as key partners.

IPs and CSOs shared a number of areas where donors can play a key role in increasing the GoP’s buy-in for CVE interventions. It was recommended that donors act as catalysts with CVE programming, bridging existing gaps between local communities and government. Donors, government institutions, and CSOs should work jointly as a trifecta. It is important to identify the various roles and influences of the different levels of government — local, provincial, federal — as well as government institutions such as education departments.

It was shared that donors should engage more directly and more often with government officials to improve the impact of CVE work; nothing can happen without the support of the government. Roles of the government can range from granting No Objection Certificates that allow CSOs to operate in a specific geographic location, to implementing government policies. CVE activities should engage local governments from the beginning and work collaboratively with local governments. Local governments help to identify the drivers of CVE, and working together with them helps to reduce the trust deficit.



Activities that build trust between government and civil society are an effective way to build tolerance and more peaceful communities. Dialogue is the best strategy to use to influence the government--when

donors and IPs share best practices and results of activities with government counterparts, this builds trust, which helps secure the government commitment to CVE interventions. Rather than criticizing or blaming the government for the delays, lack of engagement and dialogue, programs should bring them on-board. Such dialogue also helps to align interventions with government priorities and increases trust on the side of the government. Activities that increase citizens' engagement to identify and address citizen grievances and reduce the gap between the state and citizens are also effective. This can include building the capacity and skills of CSOs and activists to pressure the government at the local, sub-national, and federal levels to address problems and deliver on government policy.

CSOs also noted that successful CVE programming depends on flexibility and creativity from donors and their IPs. Donors should be open to the ideas partners bring from the community. Grantees and IPs alike noted a need to create a balance between supply (top-down) and demand (bottom-up) programming. On the supply side, donors can play a vital role to work with the government to create an enabling environment for CSOs. Grantees highlighted that CSOs are in a difficult position now, with shrinking space for activism. Donors must understand the obstacles CSOs are facing and help to create an enabling and supporting environment for them. Short-term interventions with multiple small grant activities are not helpful nor sustainable. Instead, interventions should be long-term and process-oriented in terms of building upon the prior gains through a series of interventions.

3. KNOWLEDGE AND CAPACITY OF CSOS TO IMPLEMENT CVE ACTIVITIES

The team included a series of questions about the capacity of hyper-local CSOs to implement CVE projects/activities in Pakistan. Both USG staff and IPs rated the capacity of local CSOs medium to low. IPs shared that the concept and theory of change of CVE are relatively new, and while grassroots-level CSOs have been actively trying to address VE within their communities, their organizational and technical capacity to implement CVE grants is limited. They require constant support and handholding from IPs, especially in monitoring and tracking results because the concept of measuring attitudes and behaviors is complicated compared to measuring results of more tangible deliverables like infrastructure and training. This is particularly challenging in KP where CSOs have been mainly involved in humanitarian response and service delivery, which are easier to measure.

To dig deeper into this, the team asked CSOs about how they would rate their capacity to implement CVE interventions on a scale of very high, high, medium, low, and very low. CSOs mostly rated themselves high or medium. The team asked follow-up questions about how these CSOs identify drivers of VE within their community to ensure their grant designs are focused and aligned with local drivers of VE. CSOs from KP could not demonstrate their ability to conduct CVE analysis within their community to identify drivers of VE. The respondents proposed strategies for CVE based on their organization's past experience of implementing development projects. For example, CSOs with a focus on education could only provide information about how education can counter VE without providing any evidence to support their theory that the lack of access to education is a driver of VE in their communities. CSOs from Punjab mentioned FGDs with community members as the main tool for identifying drivers of VE and developing grant proposals, and in some cases, a rapid assessment of the targeted area. CSOs from Sindh shared reports of conflict analysis and rapid assessments as the main tools to identify drivers of VE and develop their theory of change. Overall, CSOs in Sindh and Punjab demonstrated more experience in designing and managing CVE grants and projects as compared to KP. This highlights the need to invest more in building the capacity of local CSOs in KP to implement CVE interventions as it is a new domain for them.

The team also asked CSOs about how they monitor results and measure success. Similar patterns emerged, where CSOs from Punjab and Sindh demonstrated relatively more sophisticated monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems than CSOs in KP. However, two CSOs from KP demonstrated excellent knowledge of M&E principles and shared examples of case studies they have conducted to measure the success of their interventions.

CSOs from all three provinces highlighted the difficulty in measuring outcomes and impact-level indicators for short-duration grants. They shared that due to the short duration and small budget of grants, they end up focusing on output-level results and find themselves forced to choose quantity over quality sometimes. Sub-grantees from all three provinces recommended building long-term partnerships with local CSOs instead of short-term grants so they can use pre-and-post surveys to measure behavioral changes.







RECOMMENDATIONS

The team recorded recommendations provided by respondents and reviewed them against the findings and scope of this study. The team held meetings after data analysis to develop a set of recommendations to address some of the key findings listed above. Below are key recommendations provided by respondents and the DO 2 team.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING APPROACHES

- Increase engagement with and among youth in madrassas and non-traditional educational institutions for countering VE because of the vulnerability of these groups.
- Enhance engagement with members of provincial assemblies, officials of concerned departments, and local governments to help them gain trust in their communities. These interventions must be carefully designed and implemented to ensure CVE activities are not used by members of the provincial assemblies as a tool to advance their political interests in the communities.
- Increase engagement with local media in KP to increase outreach to targeted populations to raise their awareness about VE issues. Support the provision of opportunities to use mainstream and social media in the NMDs to counter VE narrative.

Recommendations for CVE Programming

 <p>Engage Youth</p> <p>Increase engagement with youth in madrassas and non-traditional educational institutions for CVE. Partner with educational institutions to increase provision of CVE accredited courses.</p>	 <p>Engage Government</p> <p>Enhance engagement with members of provincial assemblies, provincial, and local governments to help them gain trust in their communities and improve community engagement to identify and address drivers of VE.</p>
 <p>Strengthen Media</p> <p>Increase engagement with journalists to use media and social media platforms to raise awareness among the targeted population on CVE.</p>	 <p>Partner with Educational Institutes</p> <p>Expand partnerships with educational institutions to increase provision of CVE accredited courses and make educational institutions more inclusive.</p>
 <p>Shift From Small Grants to Longer Partnerships</p> <p>Move away from the use of a small grants mechanism to more long-term partnerships with CSOs and govt institutions to achieve long-term results.</p>	 <p>Establish a CVE Learning Platform</p> <p>Form a community of practice with including GoP, donors, academia, and CSOs to serve as a common platform for sharing and exchanging ideas and best practices to improve CVE programming.</p>

- Expand partnerships with educational institutions to increase provision of CVE-accredited courses and make educational institutions more inclusive.
- Review the existing grant mechanism (including the processes for approval internally, monitoring, and evaluation) to make it more responsive and result oriented.
- Building the capacity of local CSOs on CVE.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR M&E APPROACHES

Since peacebuilding and CVE interventions are soft in nature, measuring behavior change could be challenging. There could be several ways to measure the impact of such interventions, therefore, the following recommendations are for IPs, donors, and USAID.

IP/SUB-GRANTEES

- Include pre- and post-intervention surveys in each of the activities' M&E plans to assess the effectiveness of the interventions at the activity level.
- To assess the behavioral change among beneficiaries over time, make sustained efforts to follow up with the beneficiaries, using key informant interviews and focus group discussions. This will provide evidence-based data at the outcome level and also will confirm whether the participants are willing to carry out similar interventions in the future. This also can help tell the story of local ownership, sustainability, and effectiveness of hyper-local approaches designed under the activities.
- Continuously re-assess and revisit the grants' project objectives and theory of change based on lessons learned from the interventions. This will help refine a logical approach to the overall goal of the activity.
- Ensure grantees develop a robust M&E mechanism. All indicators should be carefully drafted and tracked, based on the results framework of the activity.
- Conduct more rigorous capacity building on M&E for sub-grantees to enhance their capabilities to measure the effectiveness of the interventions.

DO 2 LEARNING TEAM

- Conduct case studies on a periodical basis to validate the effectiveness of interventions. These studies will indicate if there are any strategic shifts/improvements needed in future similar interventions.
- Conduct periodic desk reviews, using the qualitative data available from various surveys, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions to assess the trends related to behavior change over a certain period.
- Form a community of practice (including GoP, donors, academia, and CSOs), a common platform for sharing and exchanging ideas and best practices bringing improvements in CVE programming.

CONCLUSION

The overall findings of this report indicate that the Mission's CVE programming is responsive to the fluid VE dynamics and drivers in Pakistan. The diverse nature of CVE interventions and a collaborative approach built within the DO 2 strategy and its activities is helping the Mission adopt a holistic approach to ensure successful CVE interventions.

The findings from this study suggest that the local VE, cultural, social, political, and economic dynamics in DO 2-focused geographic areas are unique to sub-regions, and CVE interventions that may be successful in one region may not work in another. Despite the many variations of regional dynamics, there also are a number of similarities, common approaches, and issues of mutual concern, but there is no national platform for CVE practitioners to share their experiences and learning with each other and the GoP. Sharing CVE experiences between practitioners on a national platform also would help educate the GoP about working with community leaders and nuance its CVE efforts.

There is a need for the USG staff to better understand these hyper-local dynamics for designing and managing CVE projects/activities. For example, different key leaders have different levels of influence and success in CVE in different regions, and CVE interventions should engage with the key leaders accordingly. All CVE activities should be designed in close collaboration with the provincial offices, local CSOs and governments with the flexibility to adapt to the ever-changing VE dynamics in the DO 2-focused geographic areas. Furthermore, USAID should try to engage with Pakistani CSOs on a more regular basis as key stakeholders, not just IPs or sub-grantees, to stay abreast of the complex local dynamics.

The soft components of CVE interventions make it difficult to measure long-term results. The DO 2 team and partners need to work together to identify and adopt best M&E approaches to measure success. That would require capacity building of local CSOs on using more scientific M&E tools to measure behavioral change over time, which should be incorporated in the activity budget. There is also a need to improve coordination with the GoP at the provincial and national levels to better align USAID's CVE activities with the GoP's priorities and policies.

ANNEX I: DO 2 PARTNERS SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Select your organization's name (dropdown option)
2. Based on your experience of implementing CVE project/s in Pakistan, rate the following key leaders and groups on a scale of 1-5 (1 being least effective 5 being most effective) based on their effectiveness in identifying and addressing drivers of VE in their communities (linear scale option)
 - 2.1 religious leaders
 - 2.2 women
 - 2.3 youth
 - 2.4 local government officials
 - 2.5 local civil society organizations
 - 2.6 media
 - 2.7 community elders
 - 2.8 parliamentarians
 - 2.9 are there other effective key leaders that you would like to include in the list? If yes, please list other key leaders in your answer.
3. Rate the following interventions on a scale of 1-5 (1 being lowest and 5 being highest) based on the percent of project funding allocated for them? (linear scale option)
 - 3.1 Cultural events to promote acceptance of diversity social harmony
 - 3.2 Partnership with universities to support youth efforts to counter VE
 - 3.3. Peace and social harmony interventions with madrasa students
 - 3.4 Community awareness raising campaigns
 - 3.5 Women, peace, and security interventions
 - 3.6 Capacity building of religious leaders to promote peace messaging and counter VE narrative
 - 3.7 Increasing citizens engagement to reduce the gap between the State and citizens
 - 3.9 Community led peace building and social cohesion projects
 - 3.10 Research on CVE issues
 - 3.11 Policy dialogue or provincial/national conferences
 - 3.12 are there other interventions you would like to add to this list? If yes, please include those interventions in your response
4. How do you identify the drivers of VE in the areas where you are implementing your project? (text box)
5. What role do the sub-grantees play in identification of VE drivers during grant design and negotiation? (text box)

6. USAID's CVE policy promotes a bottom up approach in countering VE. In your experience so far, what are the challenges in aligning your grants with USAID's strategic priorities? And please explain, if relevant, how this can be contrary to how local I CSOs address drivers of VE in their communities? Please provide an example of how USAID's strategic approach (as outlined in your contract/agreement) is aligned or not aligned with the local approaches. (text box)
7. In your opinion, what role can your project play in improving the Government of Pakistan commitment towards CVE? (text box)
8. In your opinion, what role can/should USAID play in improving the Government of Pakistan's commitment towards CVE? (text box)
9. How do you know if your sub-grants are actually countering VE and how do you measure that result? (text box)
10. How would you rate your project staff (especially field staff, if applicable) based on their understanding and knowledge of CVE concepts and theory of change? (multiple choice)
 - High
 - Medium
 - Limited knowledge
 - Low
11. How would you rate the understanding and capacity of your sub-grantees to implement CVE grants? (multiple choice)
 - High
 - Medium
 - Limited knowledge
 - Low
12. How effective would you rate the guidance you receive from USAID regarding expected results and impact of your project? (multiple choice)
 - Very effective
 - Effective
 - Somewhat effective
 - Lacks clarity sometimes
 - Not effective
13. How effective do you find the monthly DO 2 partner meetings? Please share any suggestions or recommendations for making these meetings more productive and effective. (text box)
14. Please provide any suggestions may you have for USAID to improve communication, coordination, and effectiveness of your project (text box)

ANNEX 2: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION (FGD) QUESTIONS:

Introduction: please introduce yourself and your organization? Proposed structure for introduction can include:

- Would you describe your organization as rights/advocacy based, service delivery, or both?
- How large is your organization? How many full-time employees do you have?

Since these questions are for an FGD, not a survey, I am rephrasing them from rating on a scale to eliciting discussion and opinions.

1. Based on your knowledge of CVE issues in Pakistan, in your experience which key leaders and groups are most effective in identifying and addressing drivers of VE in their communities? Examples of key leaders and groups are:

- religious leaders
- women
- youth
- local government officials
- local civil society organizations
- media
- community elders
- parliamentarians

Are there other effective key leaders that you would like to include?

2. There are many types of interventions with the goal of countering violent extremism (CVE). In your experience, what are the most common or most often held types of CVE interventions? *If participants need prompts, you can list some of the interventions listed in the IP survey which include:*
 1. Cultural events to promote acceptance of diversity social harmony
 2. Partnership with universities to support youth efforts to counter VE
 3. Peace and social harmony interventions with madrasa students
 4. Community awareness raising campaigns
 5. Women, peace, and security interventions
 6. Capacity building of religious leaders to promote peace messaging and counter VE narrative
 7. Increasing citizens engagement to reduce the gap between the State and citizens
 9. Community led peace building and social cohesion projects
 10. Research on CVE issues
 11. Policy dialogue or provincial/national conferences

12. Are there other interventions you would like to add to this list? If yes, please include those interventions in your response
1. How do you identify and prioritize the drivers of VE in your focused areas? How does this inform the CVE projects carried out in your area?
2. What role do local civil society and/or government actors play in identification of VE drivers during grant design and negotiation?
3. In your opinion, what role can your organization play in improving the Government of Pakistan's commitment towards CVE?
4. In your opinion, what role can your donors and their implementing partners play in improving the Government of Pakistan's commitment towards CVE?
5. How do you know if your CVE programs are actually countering VE? How do you measure that result?
6. How would you rate the project staff with whom you interact on their understanding and knowledge of CVE concepts and theory of change? (multiple choice)
 - High
 - Medium
 - Limited knowledge
 - Low

ANNEX 3: INTERNAL USG SURVEY QUESTIONS:

1. Based on your knowledge of CVE issues in Pakistan, rate the following key leaders and groups on a scale of 1-5 (1 being least effective 5 being most effective) based on their effectiveness in identifying and addressing drivers of VE in their communities (linear scale option)
 - 1.1 religious leaders
 - 1.2 women
 - 1.3 youth
 - 1.4 local government officials
 - 1.5 local civil society organizations
 - 1.6 media
 - 1.7 community elders
 - 1.8 parliamentarians
 - 1.9 are there other effective key leaders that you would like to include in the list? If yes, please list other key leaders in your answer.
2. Rate the following CVE interventions on a scale of 1-5 (1 being lowest and 5 being highest) based on the percent of funding allocated for them in your office/agency CVE projects? (linear scale option)
 - 2.1 cultural events to promote acceptance of diversity social harmony
 - 2.2 partnership with universities to support youth efforts to counter VE
 - 2.3. peace and social harmony interventions with madrasa students
 - 2.4 community awareness raising campaigns
 - 2.5 women, peace, and security interventions
 - 2.6 capacity building of religious leaders to promote peace messaging and counter VE narrative
 - 2.7 increasing citizens engagement to reduce the gap between the State and citizens
 - 2.9 community led peace building and social cohesion projects
 - 2.10 research on CVE issues
 - 2.11 policy dialogue or provincial/national conferences
 - 2.12 are there other interventions you would like to add to this list? If yes, please include those interventions in your response
3. In order to determine what CVE projects/grants to fund, how do you identify and prioritize the drivers of VE in your focused areas? (text box)
4. What role do your civil society and/or government partners play in identification of VE drivers during grant design and negotiation? (text box)
5. In your opinion, what role can your office/agency play in improving the Government of Pakistan commitment towards CVE? (text box)

6. In your opinion, what role can your implementing partners play in improving the Government of Pakistan's commitment towards CVE? (text box)
7. How do you know if your CVE programs are actually countering VE and how do you measure that result? (text box)
8. How would you rate your project staff based on their understanding and knowledge of CVE concepts and theory of change? (multiple choice)
 - High
 - Medium
 - Limited knowledge
 - Low
9. How do you rate the effectiveness of IP's working to achieve the objectives to address CVE per Mission's goal and objectives, on a scale of 1-5 (1 being least effective 5 being most effective) based on their effectiveness in identifying and addressing drivers of VE in their communities (linear scale option)
10. Based on the experience you have, what are the five major areas for the interventions / programming to address CVE?