

FALL 2017



WOMEN'S ALLIANCE FOR SECURITY LEADERSHIP

Preventing Extremism by Promoting Rights, Peace & Pluralism

From the Ground Up

A Preliminary Dialogue on the Nexus of Economic Policy, Gender and Violent Extremism

A Brief on Policy and Practice to Inform National Strategies for Preventing Violent Extremism
and Promoting Sustainable Peace

ICAN International
Civil Society
Action
Network
For women's rights, peace and security



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A Preliminary Dialogue on the Nexus of Economic
Policy, Gender and Violent Extremism

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Monica Makar and Devin Cowick for their editorial support and the following for their review of and contributions to the final report and recommendations: Hamsatu Allamin, Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria; Dr. Radhika Balakrishnan, Center for Women's Global Leadership at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey; Frances Guy, Malin Herwig, Nika Saaedi and Endre Stiansen, United Nations Development Programme; Rasha Jarhum, Yemeni Peacebuilder; Cassandra Waters, American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO); and Saira Zuberi.

We would also like to recognize the many committed members of the Women's Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL) for their insights and constructive input that helped shape this brief; as well as the contributions to these findings of participants in the first series of Global Solutions Exchange (GSX) thematic working group meetings.

We also thank the following institutions for their collaboration and generous support of our work: the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Human Security Division of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

We thank our colleagues from Search for Common Ground, The Prevention Project, the Global Center on Cooperative Security, the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, and the Geneva Center for Security Policy for their collaboration in the Global Solutions Exchange (GSX); and the Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL) at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey for the opportunity to hold the preliminary expert meeting on its premises and the fruitful exchanges that fed into the development of this publication.

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“Through experience, we know that [extremism and militarism] are also exacerbated by decades of economic austerity programs that have shredded welfare programs for the majority while benefitting a small minority.”

— Women’s Alliance for Security Leadership

Executive Summary

In 2016, the International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) began exploring the nexus of economic policy, gender and extremism in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Center for Women’s Global Leadership at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. Women peace practitioners and rights activists have long been concerned by decisions made at global and national levels that at the local level impact dynamics of economic exclusion, threaten social cohesion and exacerbate vulnerabilities to radicalization. Violent extremism and state responses to it place significant economic burden on societies. In Pakistan, for example, it is estimated that the Pakistan estimates that the direct and indirect cost of the “War on Terror” between 2002 and 2016 was \$118 billion.¹ The members of the Women’s Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL) have consistently draw attention to this gap between policy intentions and realities on the ground. Their lived experiences of the economic dynamics in contexts affected by violent extremism, combined with desk research on the state of current policy and practice, and the multi-stakeholder Global Solutions Exchange (GSX)² meeting on these issues held at the UNDP headquarters in New York in March 2017³, inform the findings of this report.

In spearheading the Women’s Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL), the International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) is committed to ensuring that the perspectives, experience and pioneering work of locally rooted women-led organizations active in preventing violent extremism by promoting peace and pluralism are heard and heeded in global settings. As a co-founder of the Global Solutions Exchange (GSX) we are also committed to enabling systematic multi-sectoral exchanges between women, youth practitioners, scholars and policy makers across countries to highlight alternative perspectives on aspects of PVE. Sometimes these exchanges are provocative as comfort zones and conventional wisdoms are challenged. Always they are productive as they inform our collective understanding of extremist violence and serve to improve our responses in policy and practice.

¹ “‘War on terror’ has cost Pakistan \$118bn: SBP,” Dawn.com, November 19, 2016, available at: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1297305>.

² The Global Solutions Exchange (GSX) is a mechanism for regular high-level civil society-government dialogue on issues related to preventing extremism first launched by ICAN and WASL with the support of the Prime Minister of Norway in September 2016 at the United Nations, now expanded to a steering committee of 6 organizations. For more information, see: <http://www.icanpeacework.org/our-work/global-solutions-exchange/>.

³ The GSX working group meeting on “The Nexus of Economic Policies, Gender and Extremism” was co-convened by ICAN and UNDP during the sixty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women and funded by the U.K. Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Key Findings

1. Existing policies on the prevention of violent extremism (PVE) acknowledge the need to address economic factors, but limited attention is directed at the underlying structural economic policies that have contributed to creating many of the conditions conducive to rising extremism.
2. While a minority of people become violent, economic conditions pertaining to social exclusion and thwarted aspirations are recognized as contributing factors to their radicalization.
3. Neoliberalism espouses “small government”. Over the past five decades, in many countries governments have been pressured to reduce spending on, deregulate or privatize many social services that were previously considered to be the state’s responsibility due to the dominance of this economic philosophy.
4. The lack of investment in key sectors such as education, health and community security has created vacuums that non-state actors have filled.
5. By providing necessary social services non-state actors also gain the trust of local communities which can be used to spread ideologies that promote intolerance, bigotry, discrimination and violence.
6. Increased insecurity from violent extremism and increased resource allocation for militarized state responses have damaged local economies, shrinking incomes, and forcing displacement while reducing investment in infrastructure and services in communities that are most at risk.

7. The dismantling of regulations has benefitted the financial sector enabling the sector to takeover manufacturing companies and strip them of assets to make quick profits rather than investing in labor, production or infrastructure. This has contributed to inequality, unemployment and the fraying of the social fabric of communities.
8. Economic austerity is combining with mass labor migration to create new patterns of racism and xenophobia. These impacts are gendered, for example extremists are exploiting the isolation and vulnerability of female migrant workers and the sense of exclusion of the young men left behind.
9. A number of economists are advancing a human rights approach to economic policies, making the case that they should be designed and assessed on their contributions to realizing the economic and social rights of every person.
10. Pragmatism not ideology should be the driving force so that state and private sector can cooperate to provide necessary services to the public, and be held accountable for their equal accessibility, quality and cost.
11. Multi-stakeholder dialogues that bring peace and PVE practitioners working at community levels together with economist and international policymakers are necessary to gain a better understanding of whether and how economic policies affect communities adversely to exacerbate conditions conducive to violent extremism.

Guidance for Policymaking, Programming, and Research

This guidance emerges from the analysis and extensive consultations undertaken with practitioners active in PVE and peacebuilding, economists and policy experts. They are divided into three operational areas that are relevant for informing national policies, action plans, and strategies for preventing violent extremism, including by promoting sustainable peace: policy priorities, technical and programmatic actions, and research considerations. The considerations outlined below serve as guidance for all stakeholders involved and interested in addressing the role of economic policies as they relate to enabling and preventing violent extremism, and fostering sustainable peace, equality, pluralism and, dignified livelihoods for all.

Policy Considerations

1. Reaffirm commitments to the social and economic rights articulated in existing international conventions and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
2. Encourage and support more multi-stakeholder interactions on the linkages between economic policies, violent extremism and gender dynamics in international and national contexts.
3. Initiate processes in parliament, media, and policy settings to encourage 'democratizing' national discussions and decision-making on economic policies through for example, participatory and gender budgeting processes.
4. Engage with movements for tax justice, maximum wage, universal basic income and other transformative economic policy initiatives to better assess the options for each country.
5. In PVE national plan and strategy development, conduct in-depth analysis of the structural economic conditions that have contributed to lack of employment or livelihood opportunities, and to help identify gaps and possible solutions through alternative policymaking.

Programming and Technical Considerations:

1. Include national and international economists with expertise in gender and human rights in PVE related strategy and action planning processes.
2. Assess social welfare needs and strengthen state institutions responsible for service delivery including by increasing wages and skills building and investing in infrastructure to make services accessible in the most vulnerable communities.
3. Reduce corruption and absenteeism (and other potential causes for lack of quality services) by ensuring fair pay and working conditions, offering incentives for quality services, showing respect for public service, and instilling strong accountability measures for transgressions.
4. Conduct economic and budgetary audits to highlight where resources are being allocated and gaps that exist, particularly in relation to military spending versus education, health and other human security priorities.
5. Recognize and support (including through national or local convenings) existing civil society organizations (CSOs), particularly women and youth entities that provide services and have expertise in PVE related areas, and ensure they have adequate financial and technical aid to continue their efforts, particularly where the state has limited reach.
6. Initiate public education programs to raise awareness about states' obligations to social and economic rights as articulated in international human rights framework and the SDGs, and enable transparency and accountability.

Research Considerations

1. Support qualitative and quantitative multi-country research on the role and relationship between economic conditions and extremism, with attention to the gender dimensions.
2. Support research and analysis of the cost of military and security oriented interventions to counter violent extremism, the impact on GDP, social capital and economic opportunities and alternative solutions to mitigate the harm done by such interventions.
3. Support simulations or other means to determine potential scenarios if a human rights based economic policy framework is established in different contexts.
4. Ensure that the dialogues between grassroots practitioners, international policy makers and scholars, notably economists and other social scientists, continue to inform future research and documentation.

Introduction

"We are living in a dangerous world." So said UN Secretary General Guterres at the Munich Security Council in February 2017, as he called for a surge in "diplomacy for peace" at a time when conflicts are increasingly more complex, authoritarianism is spreading and violent identity-based extremism³ and terrorism are on the rise.⁴ In recent years, the use of these forms of violence has steadily become more prevalent, increasing exponentially since 2011.⁵ In 2015, some 120 countries were directly affected by violent extremism.⁶ While much of the international media focus has been on groups claiming the mantle of Islam, such as Al Shabab in Somalia, Boko Haram in Nigeria and Daesh in Syria and Iraq, other identity-based movements with an exclusionary and extremist ideology have emerged in many contexts. In Canada and the United States, studies suggest that the white-supremacist militias pose the greatest security threats. In the US alone, the number of known white supremacist militias has grown from 42 in 2008 to 822 in 2015 and 917 by 2016 according to the Southern Poverty Law Center.⁷ Meanwhile, in Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand militant Buddhist movements are gaining ground, and in India extreme right-wing Hindu movements are more evident in the political and public arena.⁸

These movements may seem different, but their ideologies often mirror each other. They are based on exclusionary notions of identity, pressing people to choose one identity over others: for example, religion over ethnicity or race.⁹ They have prescribed notions of masculinity and femininity. This translates into how men and women are perceived, treated and expected to behave to fulfill their social roles. They often project blame and hold grievances against "the other"—be it on a communal or personal level. For example, white supremacists may amplify the notion that their economic and social exclusion is due to the influx of immigrants, while Islamist extremists may link their own exclusion and sense of discrimination in Europe to the plight of Syria or other countries they see as under attack from "western", non-Muslim majority states. In many instances victimhood, loss of status, or humiliation is reacted to with a sense of righteousness that condones and can validate violent actions against the other. All extremist movements simultaneously exclude those who do not espouse the same values and beliefs, while lifting themselves above others. In doing so they also dehumanize those they seek to marginalize, setting the stage for a tolerance and normalization of violence.

As a growing body of research and analysis indicates, there are no single causes of violent extremism. Rather in each context and often changing through time, different variables pertaining to governance, security, social and economic conditions combine to become driving factors.

In terms of responses or prevention of violent extremism (PVE), there has been significant attention given to governance and

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⁹ ICAN's approach to these issues is grounded in the lived experience of activists and practitioners, particularly women, in contexts affected by violent conflict and extremism. They consistently assert the importance of addressing identity-based extremism in society, as an enabling environment for radicalization to violence. Thus, it is vital to problematize our definitions of violence, and consider interpersonal (particularly sexual and gender-based) and structural violence as relevant to our understandings of and interventions to prevent violent extremism. For a comprehensive discussion of the concepts and their relationships to each other see: Australian Government, *Preventing violent extremism and radicalization in Australia*, 2015, available at: <https://www.livingsafetogether.gov.au/informationadvice/Documents/preventing-violent-extremism-and-radicalisation-in-australia.pdf>.