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PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

THROUGH PROMOTING INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT, TOLERANCE AND RESPECT FOR DIVERSITY

**A development response to addressing
radicalization and violent extremism**



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Context and challenges

In recent years, the world has witnessed new waves of violent extremism that have taken the lives of many innocent people. Whether based on religious, ethnic or political grounds, extremist ideologies glorify the supremacy of a particular group, and oppose a more tolerant and inclusive society. This poses two distinct but related challenges for contemporary societies: the rise of violent extremism and its spread across national borders and the governance of increasingly diverse and multi-cultural societies.

While violent extremism requires interventions to protect the security of people and assets, prevention of violent extremism needs to look beyond strict security concerns to development-related causes of and solutions to the phenomenon. Experiences in both development and peacebuilding show that an increase in the levels of inclusion and tolerance in communities can lead to both better governance of diversity, and to societies better inoculated against violent extremism. Tolerance for diversity and intercultural understanding are also at the heart of the new 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, and particularly Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, on building peaceful, just and inclusive societies. UNDP takes a development approach to the prevention of violent extremism (PVE).

This paper does not focus solely on religiously-inspired violent extremism. Many drivers apply to other forms of extreme behavior. Radical behavior in itself is not necessarily a problem. Non-violent radical behavior, especially if undertaken purposely in the political, economic or cultural sphere, can help to promote positive change. Violent extremism kicks in when radical behavior starts making use of indiscriminate violence as the means of expression.

This corporate framing paper to prevent violent extremism is fully in line with the UN Secretary-General's Plan of Action for Preventing Violent Extremism that was released in January 2016.

Drivers of violent extremism

The root causes of violent extremism are complex, multifaceted and intertwined, and relate to the structural environment in which radicalization and possibly violent extremism can start to take hold. Violent extremism is the product of historical, political, economic and social circumstances, including the impact of regional and global power politics. Growing horizontal inequalities are one of the consistently cited drivers of violent extremism. Critically, unemployment or poverty alone is not the only push factor inciting violence and extremism: perceptions of injustice, human-rights violations, social-political exclusion, widespread corruption or sustained mistreatment of certain groups, are also considered important push factors. When all these horizontal inequalities come together for a particular group, radical movements and violence are more likely to erupt.

A State's failure to provide basic rights, services and security not only contributes to growing inequality, it also creates a vacuum that allows non-state actors to take control over State sovereignty and territory. There is a risk that failed political transitions, with weak institutions, law enforcement and checks and balances provide a fertile ground for violent extremism. Weak States thus create opportunities for the physical location of extremist groups.

Other structural drivers include the rejection of a State's socio-economic-political system and rejection of growing diversity in society. The banalization of violence through its daily projection and consumption (via media, books, movies, magazines, video games) should not be ignored as a contributor to the rise in violent behavior.

From radicalization to violent extremism

In addition to these structural drivers, people get pulled into radical and violent movements through well considered manipulation and accompaniment (socialization) processes, often facilitated by personal, emotional or psychological factors, such as alienation, a search for identity and dignity, revenge for previous mistreatment, breakdown of communication between authority figures and youth, as well as through virtual communities on social media. Preventing people from joining violent extremist groups thus requires deeper analysis and reflection on the foundations of the social fabric of countries at risk from violent extremism.

Preventing violent extremism

Development practice has a critical role in providing the foundation for preventing violent extremism. UNDP's conceptual framework proposes eleven interlinked building blocks for a theory of change explaining how development can help prevent violent extremism. These building blocks, which will inform global, regional and national strategies for PVE include:

1. Promoting **a rule of law and human rights-based approach** to PVE;
2. Enhancing the **fight against corruption**;
3. Enhancing **participatory decision-making** and **increasing civic space** at national and local levels;
4. Providing **effective socio-economic alternatives to violence for groups at risk**;
5. **Strengthening the capacity of local governments** for service delivery and security;
6. **Supporting credible internal intermediaries** to promote dialogue with alienated groups and re-integration of former extremists;
7. **Promoting gender equality and women's empowerment**;
8. **Engaging youth in building social cohesion**;
9. **Working with faith-based organizations and religious leaders** to counter the abuse of religion by violent extremists;
10. **Working with the media to promote human rights and tolerance**;
11. Promoting **respect for human rights, diversity and a culture of global citizenship** in schools and universities.

The manner in which regions, sub-regions and countries are affected by violent extremism differs. Regional research and region-specific initiatives will therefore be an important aspect of UNDP's approach.

UNDP's plan of action

UNDP's corporate initiative will look at two main components of work: a) a research, policy and advocacy agenda, and b) an action-oriented agenda aimed at meeting prevention targets at regional and country level. Further policy research and analysis will ensure a better understanding of the contextual drivers that have tipped disaffection and radicalization into violent extremist behavior and inform more effective conflict-sensitive programming on the ground.

The initiative will specifically look at the role of women, youth, religious organizations and leaders, and media when analyzing problems and generating solutions, and at the way these play out in diverse socio-cultural and political settings. The research agenda will also contribute to a better understanding of the challenges to achieving effective governance of diversity in multi-cultural and multi-confessional societies. UNDP will also develop advocacy and communications toolkits for outreach to alienated and radicalized groups and individuals.

Using the building blocks for preventing violent extremism UNDP will support the design/adaptation of regional, sub-regional, national and sub-national strategies. Strategies at the national level will not only consider the design of new initiatives (including fast track projects needed to respond to immediate challenges), but will also include an analysis and adaptation of UNDP's existing portfolio of projects, examining how they may positively or negatively influence the drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism. An early warning tool with reliable risk indicators of violent extremism, as well as a programming guide will be developed to support these country strategies. Specific regional action plans will be further tailored at the national level. Initial target groups of countries would be 25-30 countries essentially in four regions (Africa, the Arab States, Europe and the CIS, and Asia-Pacific).

In implementing this corporate initiative, UNDP will work with interested Member States, development partners, representatives of media, academia, the private sector, youth groups, women's organizations and faith-based organizations; and with members of the judicial, law enforcement and security communities who have engaged systematically with these issues. UNDP will also work with global, regional and national research institutions and think tanks and ensure that research is grounded in the daily realities faced by affected communities.

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