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WOMEN'S ALLIANCE FOR SECURITY LEADERSHIP

Preventing Extremism by Promoting Rights, Peace & Pluralism

Education, Identity and Rising Extremism

*From Preventing Violent Extremism
to Promoting Peace, Resilience,
Equal Rights and Pluralism (PREP)*

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



Education, Identity and Rising Extremism

From Preventing Violent Extremism to Promoting
Peace, Resilience, Equal Rights and Pluralism (PREP)

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“The most dangerous world views are the views of those who have never viewed the world”

— Noufal Abboud, Country Director,
Search for Common Ground–Morocco

Executive Summary

In November 2016, during ICAN’s fifth annual Women, Peace and Security forum, members of the Women’s Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL) and other women-led organizations in over 30 countries analyzed the role of formal and informal education in contributing to enabling conditions and mitigating extremist violence. They also highlighted their own practical experiences and lessons learnt in providing education to prevent violent extremism by fostering peace, resilience, equal rights and pluralism (PREP) in formal and informal spaces, including through the teachings of alternative religious narratives. Their experiences, combined with desk research on the state of current policy and practice, and the first multi-stakeholder Global Solutions Exchange (GSX)¹ meeting on the nexus of education, gender and extremism held at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris in March 2017², inform the findings of this report.

In spearheading the Women’s Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL), 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 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/>.

² The GSX working group meeting on “Preventing Violent Extremism by Educating for Rights, Peace, & Pluralism” meeting was co-convened by ICAN and Open Asia/Armanshahr and co-hosted by the Permanent Delegation of the Kingdom of Norway to United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in coordination with the U.S. Permanent Mission to UNESCO to align with UNESCO Ambassadors’ “Friends of PVE-E” group meeting.

Key Findings

1. Education has always been a battleground for political and ideological movements seeking to instill their views and values on society. Today's violent extremist movements are entering these spaces to "educate", manipulate and recruit based on core human identities, notably: ethnicity, religion, race and gender. They are spreading rigid interpretations of religion and culture that contribute to rising intolerant, and in some cases violent, environments.
2. Most societies globally are experiencing a state of extreme pluralism too due to migration, urbanization and globalization that has resulted in multicultural societies and a growing cohort of young men and women with pluralistic identities (third culture children), who are striving to find their sense of identity and belonging. Many become susceptible to the lure of movements that espouse rigid interpretations of faith, race, and gender to assert superiority over others.
3. Extremist groups invest time, use personalized strategies and engage their targets on an emotional level, preying on their deep faith, religious ignorance, confusion about identity, or anger about injustices, these are key steps in the process towards radicalization that can lead to violence.
4. Extremist groups also use diverse spaces to spread their message. In addition to schools, mosques and madrasas, they are active on university campuses in order to recruit young adults with high technical skills. Supplementing old fashioned media such as radio and television, extremists use cutting edge technologies, mobile applications and social media to reach a wider audience.

5. While increasing resources to education and skills training focused on those communities most susceptible to violent extremist recruitment is necessary in the context of PVE, it is not sufficient. Broader education reform is urgently needed with attention to integrating positive values, skills and knowledge that is necessary to ensure respect for peace, resilience, equal rights and pluralism (PREP) in every society.
6. There are fundamental structural conditions that contribute to an environment conducive to the rise of extremism and violence. These underlying conditions need to be addressed for violent extremism to be prevented and eradicated effectively.
 - a. Education systems that exclude minority groups, be they ethnic or religious, or discriminate based on gender, fomenting the idea of "us" vs. "them", contribute to normalizing intolerance and bigotry. These are creating conditions conducive to the rise of extremism and related violence.
 - b. Budget cuts and the decline in the quality of state education have opened the gates for exploitation by private religious institutions that elevate exclusive religious identity above other shared cultural identities. Cuts in civic education, arts and culture as well as teacher training have reduced the fostering of social cohesion across diverse communities.
 - c. Moreover, poorer families are often unable to pay for schooling and often resort to free religious schools that elevate one set of values and identity

and teach rigid interpretations of religion. Cost of schools has also forced families to choose which child goes to school, often resulting in a gender disparity in education in some countries.

- d. Many national education systems exclude reference to the diverse minority groups in their countries, resulting in an increased sense of isolation and asserting the dominance of one group over the others.
7. In the National PVE action plans that have been published, education is acknowledged as a critical area, but only a few countries prioritize the need to reform curricula to integrate conflict resolution skills and respect for diversity.
8. Care must be taken to avoid securitizing educational setting. Similarly CSOs echo the findings of UNESCO and the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) that education should not be perceived or justified as a tool for PVE or aligned with security interventions.
9. Across countries affected by extremist violence, local civil society organizations including ICAN's partners in the global Women's Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL) have long identified and pioneered educational programs as a key priority for preventing extremist violence and promoting peace, resilience, equal rights and pluralism (PREP). As *Education, Identity and Extremism* highlights, they and other CSOs offer a range of viable and tested solutions that governments can draw upon.

10. Given the depth and breadth of knowledge and expertise that exist, cooperation between UNESCO and the wider UN system, states and civil society organizations in national educational contexts is needed to tailor materials to specific contexts, while anchoring them in universal values and a culture of peace. UNESCO's 2016 Teacher's Guide on the Prevention of Violent Extremism offers a useful framework for such efforts to be adapted to local settings.

Guidance For Policymaking And Programming

These guidance points and recommendations emerge from the analysis and extensive consultations undertaken with practitioners active in PVE and peacebuilding in over 30 countries affected by violent extremism. 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 financial and logistical support. Effective PVE and peacebuilding is complex and requires a "whole of society" approach that enables state, international entities and national level civil society to engage based on their comparative strengths. The recommendations offered serve as guidance for all stakeholders involved and interested in the provision of education as it relates to PVE and PREP in formal and informal settings.

Policy Considerations

Addressing the Structural Conditions that are PVE Relevant

1. Prioritize investment into education and ensure that the values and norms of peace, equality, rights and pluralism in the education sphere are recognized as the ethos and purpose of holistic curriculum, not the tactics for PVE related programming.
2. Recognize that exclusionary education systems and curricula that discriminate and marginalize sectors of the population are a key contributor to conditions in which violent extremism can develop.
3. Recognize the urgency and critical nature of the problem as years of lack of investment and budget cuts have also meant limited resources to sustain higher standards of education and development of the curricula. There has been a reduction in the teaching of arts, culture, philosophy, civics and religious literacy, each vital to nurturing pluralistic understandings of contemporary society, and providing students with diverse outlets to express themselves, flourish and be valued.
4. Call for an inclusive review of state curricula to enable changes in substance and methods of teaching to ensure better reflection of societal diversity.
5. Ensure official curricula deal with historical grievances effectively and addresses complex identities—particularly in terms of religion. Take care to avoid promoting gender stereotypes in curricula.

Initiating PVE Specific Policies in Education

6. Emphasize the importance of gender analysis and sensitivity in PVE efforts including educational programming. While there are some common factors that draw young men and women to extremist ideologies, there are also critical differences. It is thus essential to have a strong gendered analysis of the communities and contexts in which young men and women, boys and girls are at risk, and determine effective strategies for tailored outreach to them.
7. Consult local partners to adapt educational programming labels to be relevant and workable in each context. In some instances, P/CVE is too sensitive. In others, reference to global citizenship or similar values can be deemed as a threat to national or religious values.
8. Inform and engage parliamentarians and teachers associations in the debate regarding education and PVE with attention to the deficits in educational curricula and the limitations on education budgets.
9. Facilitate collaboration between civil society organizations, UNESCO and other relevant national and regional entities to map existing materials and develop new ones on teaching human rights (including articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other conventions) tailored to their region with examples that reflect similarities in the norms and values of each region's different religions and cultures.
10. Use the development of PVE national strategies processes to promote greater policy coherence by encouraging adherence to existing national and international laws and conventions that emphasize inclusion, promote rights and address discrimination (per the SG's action plan).

Programming and Technical Considerations

1. Develop protocols for collaboration between NGOs—particularly women and youth organizations—UN and governments for systematic inclusion in the design and delivery of formal and informal PVE/PREP programming. This is also in line with the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) guidance on General Practices for CVE and Education that calls for collaboration and multi-sectoral approaches to tackle violent extremism.
2. Map and compare existing good practices, pedagogies and curricula that integrate these values and norms into the substance and skills taught. In addition to the UNESCO Guide, Part II of the *Education, Identity and Extremism* report offers a summary of numerous existing initiatives across different regions.
3. Support and encourage cross-sectoral (civil society, state and multilateral) efforts to share existing resources (e.g. curricula, toolkits, media resources) for integrating peace, resilience, equality rights and pluralism (PREP) across different subjects and settings.
 - a. Collate interpretations of religious texts, cultural, historic traditions or other sources that teach nonviolence, respect for diversity and equality (including gender). Supplement with the teaching of life skills and psycho-social empowerment
 - b. Where needed develop capacity building programs to build a cadre of trained advisors to share and spread the materials more effectively.

- c. Support efforts that make existing knowledge (e.g. religious sources) more accessible through development of multi-media products (e.g. storytelling, animation or podcast formats) and translations.
4. Prioritize and support the teaching of arts, culture, philosophy, civics and religious literacy. Each is vital to nurturing pluralistic understandings of contemporary society, and providing students with diverse outlets to express themselves, flourish and be valued.
5. Map and assess quality of teacher training programs in terms of building their capacity to address extremism and promote positive norms and values.
 - a. In partnership with civil society, UN and governments, develop pilot teacher training programs. Prioritize effective formative training for teachers with attention to positive discipline models, life skills and sensitivity to diversity and inclusivity. There should also be effective monitoring of standards and teacher-mentoring.
 - b. Provide guidance for educators on developing sensitivity to the signs of radicalization among youth, build their capacity and skills to help interrupt the process and work with them to bolster the resilience of individuals, their cohorts and their communities. CSOs with expertise in PVE and peacebuilding can provide mentors and partners for teachers.
6. Tailor interventions that promote global citizenship values and religious literacy, multiculturalism and encourage critical thinking to the target audience in diverse media spheres. Programs and interventions must reach people especially young people where they are. This includes

homes, schools, universities, communities, religious centers, traditional media (such as local language community radio), satellite TV and the most cutting edge Apps and social media platforms.

- a. Use social media, cartoons, comic books, info graphics and short films to reach younger audiences in multiple venues and through different means of conveying ideas and information.
 - b. Incorporate PREP values into education through participation in traditional theatre, poetry, sport, art, creative writing, music and other forms of creative learning.
7. Expand educational programming such as arts and culture beyond schools to children, youth and adults who have suffered trauma and/or are coping with the impact of violence in and around their communities as they are often the most at risk to recruitment.
 8. Initiate literacy programs for youth and adults alike—especially women—so that people can read religious texts themselves and not be manipulated by second-hand interpretations;
 9. Celebrate key international days such as women’s day, youth day, human rights day in schools and communities to foster a sense of global to local connectivity, citizenship and relevance.
 10. Improve conditions for prisoners including child detainees, who can be radicalized while in prison including through commitment to treat them with respect and non-violence, and teaching life skills trainings, psycho-social and religious literacy, cultural programs, film screenings, livelihood to promote discussions and prepare for rehabilitation into the community.

Financial and Logistical Considerations

1. Support long-term programming of locally rooted educational programs and a shift towards ‘scaling across, not up’ to enable trusted local actors to adapt successful programs to their own contexts.
2. Allocate resources for inclusive education policy and curricula review and reform processes that ensure the effective participation of women, youth and minority groups voices in the process.
3. Fund exchanges and convenings among educationalists and civil society regionally and globally for cross-learning, sharing and unified, amplified advocacy efforts rooted in local work.
4. Allocate resources to enable translation of materials and training for use across different settings and sectors;
5. Support multi-media efforts that disseminate and amplify the values espoused by women and youth leaders active in promoting peace and countering extremism.
6. Support targeted audience analysis and participatory research to better understand the trusted conduits and most effective means of conveying alternative narratives.
7. Support the inclusion of local grassroots organizations active in PVE in research and analytical projects tasked with mining data or identifying push and pull factors. Local actors typically have a more nuanced and timely sense of changes and developments in their community, and



have more holistic PVE responses that combine education such as religious literacy, critical thinking with economic livelihood skills and psycho-social support.

8. Support research on factors, including indigenous educational initiatives that foster resilience to identify the common ingredients present at the societal, communal or individual level that not only reject intolerant extremist ideologies and are repulsed by violence, but also embrace and celebrate pluralism, diversity and acceptance of the other.
9. Support community dialogues around the findings to build support for the global citizenship values and counter the regressive messages about human rights and women's rights.

Introduction

In 2014 when Daesh³ entered Mosul, Iraq, one of the movement's primary targets was the takeover and control of local schools. Children were brainwashed into chanting support for the militias and the curriculum was changed into propaganda. Daesh had an education ministry, the so-called Diwan al-Taalim, that decided on the curriculum that Mosul's tens of thousands of teachers had to teach their students. As a local school principal noted, "My school was a seed grain from which a megalomaniacal state was meant to grow." "In our math book there was a truck filled with weapons and a man from IS stood on it," reported one ten-year-old boy. Daesh brought children into the mosques and assembled them on the streets to show them decapitation videos.

In 2017 reports from the UK, Indonesia, Pakistan and the Philippines indicate a shift in Daesh recruitment tactics. Writing in the CTC Sentinel, Huma Yusuf points out that with madrasas and other religious schools and institutions under state scrutiny, Daesh and others have shifted their attention to university settings and recruitment on campuses. It is unclear if there is a genuine uptick in university recruits, or whether there is greater vigilance due to the directives given to counter-terrorism officials under the Pakistani Countering Violent Extremism National Action Plan. But there is little doubt that extremist movements are targeting educated youth who bring technical skills "ranging from video editing to engineering—that are increasingly valued by militant groups with sophisticated media strategies and that are planning high-impact attacks."⁴

³'Daesh' is the Arabic acronym and preferred term for the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria as it has a negative sound and average Arabic speakers do not recognize it as an acronym thereby avoiding conferring legitimacy on the group by referring to it as either Islamic or a state.

⁴Huma Yusuf, "University radicalization Pakistan's next counterterrorism challenge," *CTC Sentinel*, February 19, 2016, available at: <https://ctc.usma.edu/posts/university-radicalization-pakistans-next-counterterrorism-challenge>.

Emmanuel Elebeke echoes this in the *Vanguard*, noting that Daesh recruited some 27 Nigerian medical students from the University of Medical Science and Technology (UMST) in Sudan. Among them 22 were also British citizens, and the children of reputable medics in the UK.⁵

The issue is not unique to Daesh. Education has always been a battleground for political and ideological movements seeking to instill their views and values on society. Populist politicians the world over invoke the concept of ‘national identity’ to play on the public’s fears of terrorism, immigration, and foreign influences, and education is never far behind in the discussions. In the 2017 French Presidential Elections, Marine Le Pen, leader of the extreme right wing National Front party, singled out education, stating that the French need to “relearn...all the history of France, the most positive, the most prestigious—so that each Frenchman should be conscious of the past and proud of it.”⁶ She was echoing the National Front’s policies, which in 2005 led to the passage of Article 4, a measure specifying that French school programs should “recognize the positive role of the French presence overseas, especially in North Africa.” President Chirac repealed the law a year later, following outrage from French historians and the public. But the past has a way of remaining present, particularly when issues of colonialism and the country’s experiences during World War II notably regarding the treatment of France’s Jewish population, are tangled with matters of modern day racism, assimilation and immigration. The future is also at stake because in the context of education, the debates are centered on how future generations learn and understand their own identities and role in the world.

⁵ Emmanuel Elebeke, “ISIS recruiting students with financial inducement, FG alerts Nigerians,” *Vanguard*, April 3, 2017, available at: <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/04/fg-alerts-nigerians-on-isis-new-recruitment-strategy/>.

⁶ Robert Darnton, “A Buffet of French History,” *The New York Review of Books*, May 11, 2017, available at: <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2017/05/11/histoire-mondiale-buffet-french-history/>.

Why Focus on Violent Extremism, Education and Gender? The Policy Context

In recent years, the rise of identity politics in many countries has dovetailed with the deliberate spread of exclusionary ideological teachings through formal and informal educational spaces. It has become a key contributor to social conditions that are more conducive to the rise of violent extremism, including intolerance and militarism. The international Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) agenda, which gained prominence in 2015, has sought to address this dynamic by engaging the educational sector to determine effective means of not only preventing and mitigating the threats, but also providing viable positive alternatives. Within the UN system UNESCO has led the way in developing guidance for member states to integrate into national education policies and curricula. As Gwang-Jo Kim, Director of the UNESCO Bangkok office noted at the September 2016 International Conference on the Prevention of Violent Extremism through Education:

“If we rely exclusively on hard power to find solutions, we will not tackle the many underlying conditions that breed violent extremism and drive youth to join violent extremist groups. We need soft power as well, and this means education. *Not just any education: relevant, inclusive and equitable quality education [emphasis added].*”

The Relevance to Women-led PVE Efforts

Gwang-Jo Kim’s words resonate across the world in communities most affected by violent extremism and related violent conflicts. From Iraq to Syria, Pakistan to Nigeria, educationalists and civil society organizations among ICAN’s partners in the global Women’s Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL) have long identified and been engaged in education as a key priority for the prevention of extremism and violence. They have developed

innovative materials, curricula, programs and pedagogy with a dual purpose: in their efforts to identify the signs of radicalization and counter them, they emphasize the importance of offering positive alternative narratives, knowledge, and opportunities that encourage respect for peace, resilience, equal rights and pluralism (PREP), to “inoculate” against the lure of extremist rhetoric.

There is still much debate about the terminology and definitions. On the one hand, critics note that despite the policy frameworks, there is no international consensus on the definition of violent extremism. On the other hand, analysts make the claim that many of the groups labeled as ‘extremists’ ideologically are not violent per se, so care must be taken to avoid a clamp down on freedom of expression.

Despite these concerns, the United Nations regional organizations and individual countries are drawing up action plans for PVE. In every instance, the educational arena—both in formal and informal settings—is identified as a critical battleground to not only counter and prevent extremism and the violence it foments, but also to offer alternative positive solutions. As the summary analysis of currently published NAPs indicates there is urgent need for attention to education (see box on pages 24-25). There is also significant potential for reform in curricula and policies to ensure that states and citizens are informed and equipped with the skills needed to withstand the spread of extremism and related violence, and to proactively pursue positive non-violent alternatives anchored in respect and acceptance of diversity.

This report produced by the International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) and contributions from members of the Women’s Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL) aims to inform the policy debates and developments noted above. It is based on research conducted with a multi-stakeholder, cross-sectoral group of peace practitioners, educators, scholars, policymakers and others with

expertise at the nexus of extremism, gender and education. It provides a summary of the critical common themes pertaining to the educational sector as it relates to P/CVE. It also highlights existing good practices that expert practitioners have developed and actionable recommendations to inform national and international policymakers and NAP development in the realms of PVE and Promoting Sustainable Peace.

In addition to the introduction and brief concluding remarks, *Education, Identity and Rising Extremism: From Preventing Violent Extremism to Promoting Peace, Resilience, Equal Rights and Pluralism* is divided into two parts and a series of guidance and recommendations:

- **Part I** provides an analysis of the relevance of education to extremism, an overview of root causes and structural factors in the education arena that create the conditions in which extremism can rise and flourish and the strategies that extremist movements use to spread their ideology and garner support.
- **Part II** offers insight into the approaches, strategies and programs that civil society, particularly women-led organizations, have developed to counter the intolerance and bigotry that extremist movements teach and offset them with robust positive alternatives that are anchored in local cultures and traditions, global religions and universal human rights norms.

The guidance and actionable recommendations provided for the policy and practitioner communities (at the outset of the report) ensure that reform efforts targeting the educational sector are not only PVE relevant and specific, but embrace the need to promote positive values and inclusivity.

Education in the Context of PVE National Action Plans

NAPs call attention to both the positive role education can play in promoting critical thinking and acceptance of diversity and acting as an early warning system, as well as the potential of education—for instance traditional religious education—to propagate biases and fundamentalism.

Proposed PVE actions related to education focus largely on distributing materials for teachers and students, scaling up vocational and skills training in academic institutions to improve job prospects, and embedding prevention and early warning systems in education strategies. Several NAPs aim to create safe fora for students to express grievances and establish pupil and student welfare services in addition to case management structures.

Some NAPs including Kenya's, Finland's and Somalia's propose changes to education curricula to integrate conflict resolution skills, teach critical thinking and promote pluralism and diversity. The Kenya NAP proposes changes in educational institutions that promote "cooperation, free thought and positive acceptance of ethnic, racial, and religious diversity" (p. 28). In Finland, the government has integrated an increasing emphasis on human rights and adjustment to the democratic society in its core education curricula, and proposes intensifying cultural and global education, for instance by providing opportunities for young people to visit different religious communities (churches, mosques, synagogues, etc.). Finally, the Somalia NAP highlights the peaceful message of Islam in education curricula, and uses education as a platform

to foster relationships between teachers, families, other students, and local community leaders (see ICAN's *National Action Plans on Preventing Violent Extremism: A Gendered Content Analysis*).

The majority of NAPs, however, focus on educational institutions as a platform for skills training, media literacy, or preventing and identifying signs of radicalization, and do not propose curriculum changes related to diversity and human rights.

None of the NAPs, so far, reference the need for teaching history that is reflective of injustices. The NAPs do not acknowledge the need for teacher training overall, nor do they discuss teacher salaries or quality standards for instructors. Finally, no NAP thus far has referenced the need to reform curricula and materials to convey gender equality in the depiction of male and female images and roles, in classroom settings, or in terms of gender-sensitive analysis in subject areas ranging from history to economics, literature or the sciences.

Methodology

Building on desk research on the state of current policy and practice around extremism, education and gender, ICAN convened relevant experts for a series of meetings during which key informant interviews and focus group discussions were conducted to highlight trends and good practices using comparative analysis.

1. In November 2016, during ICAN's fifth annual Women, Peace and Security forum, representatives from WASL and other women-led organizations in 27 countries undertook cross-country analyses of the role of formal and informal education in enabling and mitigating extremism and related violence. They also highlighted their own practical

experiences and lessons learnt in providing education in formal and informal spaces, including through the teachings of alternative religious narratives.

2. Preliminary findings were shared and the issues further explored by WASL members, other civil society actors, educators, UN and governmental policymakers at the first Global Solutions Exchange (GSX) experts meeting on the nexus of education, gender and extremism held at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris in March 2017.

These consultative meetings were designed to facilitate open and horizontal exchange of analysis, perspectives, and experience among diverse stakeholders from different sectors and geographic contexts. The Global Solutions Exchange (GSX) seeks to build trust and generate sustainable solutions by designing and facilitating dialogues between civil society and government actors on preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). ICAN's approach elevates the perspectives and expertise of independent women civil society actors and integrates gendered analysis to address the gender gap in peace and security policies.

The consultations, combined, engaged 80 participants working in 37 countries across Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, the Middle East, and North America. Of these, 69 were women and 11 were men. They included 21 current and former policymakers, representing 8 governments and 3 multilateral organizations (United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE); 10 academics and educators (from 6 universities and 2 associations) and 49 peace and rights practitioners and activists representing more than 49 different organizations, associations, networks and independent initiatives. The vast majority of participants work at the local or

national level in countries affected by violent conflict, insecurity and/or political repression, including those countries most affected by violent extremism and/or terrorism.

To protect participants' personal security and promote honest exchange, consultations were conducted under Chatham House Rules and any personal or organizational attribution in this report is by specific consent. The first round of consultation during ICAN's annual forum was conducted in English, Arabic, Farsi and Russian through simultaneous interpretation and documented in English. The second round of consultation during the GSX expert meeting was conducted solely in English. No compensation was provided to participants.

Part I: Education, Extremism, Identity and Gender

The spread of extremism cannot be separated from the long term structural factors affecting education systems. It is also related in part to historic norms that have deliberately or inadvertently sustained exclusion, intolerance and discrimination, and must be redressed. Examples of such issues are summarized below.

It is also urgent and critical to recognize the strategies and tactics that extremist movements use to enter and occupy formal and informal educational and informational spaces to spread their messages and seek to radicalize individuals. The discussion below provides an overview of key factors.

1.1 Educational Curricula and the Factors Conducive to the Rise of Extremism

Existing national curricula and schooling policies are often anchored in the historic identity of a country or the religious, linguistic or ethno-national identity that new states have sought to forge. Whether deliberately or inadvertently, in many countries, the educational curricula has not evolved to accommodate the changing social conditions and increasingly diverse nature of the populations they aim to serve. As a result exclusion and marginalization of minorities or other sectors of society are prevalent. And too often gender biases remain constant. The range of challenges noted by participants included the following:

Linguistic and ethnic exclusion: Most countries have an ethnically and/or religiously diverse population. Yet many national education systems often exclude reference to or inclusion of this diversity. Thus minority communities and

individuals within them can feel deeply marginalized from an early age, and this can fuel antagonism.

The promotion of ethno-national fundamentalism: In many countries educational curricula are used overtly to assert the dominance of one group over others. This can range from banning education in other languages to excluding references of minority groups (in history, social sciences, literature, and the arts). In effect by seeking to promote one dominant identity group and rendering the plurality of a society as invisible, states implicitly and explicitly enable mistreatment of non-dominant groups. This foundation can set the stage for grievances into which extremist movements tap.

“We are also witnessing the rise of ethnic and religious nationalism in different parts of the world, such as the US, India, Australia, and many European countries.”

— Dr. Zahid Shahab Ahmed, Deakin University, Australia

The dominance of one sect or religion in education and law: From the Maldives to Sudan, the dominance of one religion in educational curricula fosters exclusion of other sects and religious groups and fragmentation within society. Having the laws pertaining to one religion as the overarching national legal framework often leads to discrimination against women and minority groups—those of other religions or varying identities.

Segregation of religious education: Even in countries where diversity of religion is recognized, often the norm is to segregate children for their religious education classes. In other cases, minorities have to learn about the religion of the

majority. Thus instead of enabling children and youth to learn about various religions and compare them to determine similarities or differences in values across belief systems, school systems segregate and divide.

The spread of extreme versions of religious teachings:

In recent decades and particularly in past years, the spread of extremely intolerant versions of religious teachings has expanded across and within countries. Notably among Muslim populations in non-Arabic speaking countries, those who proselytize have sought to undermine more moderate, culturally rooted and syncretic versions of Islam, by advocating that the more restrictive practices are in fact the “real” or “pure” version of the religion. In many Muslim majority contexts, mosques and religious schools have long been funded and often led by self-styled imams trained primarily in Saudi Arabia who teach particularly exclusionary and harsh versions of the religion.⁷ Invariably, the emphasis on particular texts and interpretations is resulting in the spread and normalization of bigotry, intolerance and accepted violence towards minority sects. This is evident in Pakistan in the treatment of Shias and Jafaris, as well as other religions.

The rise of religious schools and madrasas: From Uganda to Syria, the collapse or inaccessibility of public schools has forced parents to entrust their children to informal religious schools simply because it is the only option or because they are promised a free education. External funding from state and non-state entities—including elite philanthropists and diaspora groups—has contributed to the spread of these private religious schools. In many instances religious groups with political motives have promulgated ideology and doctrine, which is by definition exclusionary as it elevates one

religious group and set of values and practices over others. There has been an exponential growth in religious schools including in Western countries that have become a “go-to” for conservative diaspora families and communities. Some teach intolerance and very rigid interpretation of religion. In Pakistan for example, many of the religious schools for girls promulgate regressive norms of female submission and inequality.⁸

Promotion of gender stereotypes: Traditional stereotyping of male and female identities and roles remains pervasive across all educational curricula. Discriminatory gender norms related to women are reinforced in images and texts. In Sri Lanka an analysis is underway to determine means of reforming curricula. In most contexts, reflection of non-binary gender norms or sexual minorities is virtually non-existent in most settings.

Fragmentation of media: The spread of satellite television stations has also become a source of religious instruction—one that is dominated by the most regressive voices. It is now complemented by the use of social media to spread and fuel extremist discourse, often targeting and tailoring messaging to vulnerable individuals and communities, while connecting and mobilizing across geography and the boundaries of nation states.

1.2 Structural Conditions in Education

The issues noted above are further exacerbated by fundamental structural challenges in the education sector that ICAN/WASL forum and GSX participants highlighted. These issues are evident across in various forms across Asia, Africa and the Middle East, and also present in western contexts.

⁷ Sanam Naraghi-Anderlini, “Stealth Sectarianism,” *Lobe Log foreign policy*, September 12, 2016, available at: <http://lobelog.com/stealth-sectarianism/>.

⁸ International Civil Society Action Network, “Reclaiming the Progressive Past: Pakistani Women’s Struggle Against Violence and Extremism,” *What the Women Say*, ICAN & Women’s Alliance for Security Leadership: Washington D.C., Winter 2014, available at: <http://www.icanpeacework.org/2014/01/07/reclaiming-the-progressive-past-pakistani-womens-struggle-against-violence-extremism-winter-2014/>.

“The world will be a far better and more peaceful place if we invest less in military and invest more in peace education.”

— Bushra Qadeem Hyder, Peace Educator, Pakistan

Budget cuts and cost of education: In recent decades, cuts or absence of adequate expenditure on national education budgets has made the public education sector vulnerable to and in need of private sector funding. As a result, public education is more beholden to private interests. In Pakistan, it has led to significant shifts in national curricula, with civic education being diminished and single identity concepts and religion taking precedence.⁹

Budget cuts have also meant limited resources to sustain higher standards of education and development of the curricula. There has been a reduction in the teaching of arts, culture, philosophy, civics and religious literacy, each vital to nurturing pluralistic understandings of contemporary society, and providing students with diverse outlets to express themselves, flourish and be valued.

Teachers and national or official curricula: The lack of effective formative training for teachers and privatized tutoring is an additional consequence. Without the effective training and monitoring of standards, teachers have greater freedom to bring their own personal beliefs and ideologies into the classroom. Meanwhile, the failure of official curricula to deal with historical grievances effectively and address complex identities—particularly in terms of religion—has

led to a demand for alternative information, including from online sources. However, this “democratization of information” is accompanied by a lack of effective means of verifying fact from fiction. At its best, it enables youth to question assumptions and understand historic events from multiple perspectives. But at its worst, it has emboldened unverified sources and movements to gain far greater influence than previously possible.

Gender disparities in education: With costs of schooling shifting from the government to the individual and family, poorer families are often forced to choose which child attends and how long they can access education. In some contexts, such as Iran and the Caribbean, the pressure to earn incomes and care for their families has forced young men to drop out of education—especially at the tertiary level. As a result, some countries universities have majority female students. This gender imbalance can create significant social tensions and mismatched expectations and entitlements, which can result in violence. In other contexts, notably South Asia, and North Africa, families often show preference for boys’ education or pressure their daughters to drop out of high school or forgo university, thus reducing their daughters’ life opportunities.

In Kenya, meanwhile evidence suggests that young female students at university often feel isolated as they are the first girls in their families to attend college. As Sureya Roble of the Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization says, “Most of the girls recruited by ISIS and Al Shabab are girls who are in school or college. It is no longer about only poverty, and luring people in by money. There are trying to get people who are intelligent, who can engage, who you can talk to.

⁹The 1979 National Education Policy and Implementation Program outlined the educational priorities and the role of Islam. See Aziz Talbani, “Pedagogy, Power and Discourse: Transformation of Islamic Education” in *Comparative Education Review*, v. 40, n1.

We asked the students what is the problem? These girls, and boys, do not have anybody to talk to. There is a missing link in the family. There are no role models in the society.”¹⁰

1.3 The Strategies Used to Co-opt Educational Space to Spread Extremism and Conditions Conducive to Violence

As the ICAN forum and the GSX roundtable analysis indicated, extremist movements have devised multiple strategies to coopt and control formal and informal educational spaces to promulgate their own narratives, information and notion of identity, while discrediting existing systems. Their approaches, themes and messages echo across different countries and groups.

In every instance and across all media, there are two common characteristics in their approach. First, the credibility of the messenger is of the essence. Recruiters use personalized strategies to engage their targets. Often it is peer-to-peer relationships or other ties. Second, they find a point of entry to engage on an emotional level. This can be preying on people’s deep faith, religious ignorance, confusion about identity, anger about injustices they witness in the world around them or aspirations to make a difference and be part of a larger cause. Invariably the radicalization process starts with dedicating time, attention and emotional connection to individuals to gain their trust. Other common features include the following:

Attacking “western” values and institutions: Anti-Western sentiment is a common feature in the ideology of such movements. In part it is tied to recent military actions by the US and western states in Muslim-dominated countries. But the suspicions are also historic. Nigeria’s Boko Haram is the most pertinent example of movements targeting “western-style”

schools and girls by suggesting that they are anti-Islamic and pernicious in spreading immoral values or ideas that are antithetical to the local culture and identity. In Pakistan, Afghanistan and elsewhere, schools, particularly girls’ schools and colleges, have also been repeatedly attacked. In part the targeting of educational institutions is tactical: such public institutions are by definition more accessible than other governmental buildings or structures. But the attacks are also ideologically driven. They seek to instill fear in the population to reduce school admissions, and drive girls and boys away from state or secular schools and towards religious schools.

Entering through the heart to get to the minds: As noted there is often a common approach of seeking to engage individuals on a one-to-one basis, infusing the rhetoric with emotion so that there is increased trust and a sense of being “cared” for from the targeted youth. As Shafqat Mehmood of Pakistan’s Paiman Trust says, many of the young men have never experienced parental love or attention, particularly from their fathers. The recruiters tap into this emotional and psychological void. Similarly, evidence regarding the recruitment of young women online and in-person points to a process of first building a personal relationship—sometimes akin to sexual grooming—with attention to deepening emotional ties. Once that trust and emotional link is established, the training and radicalization process takes place.

From medium to message—seeking assistance while peddling aspirations: Participants noted that while extremist movements tap into existing grievances among various populations, they also frame their own messages in positive terms and promises. They counter the corruption and injustice of states and sense of marginalization among youth, women or their communities, by offering the promise

¹⁰ Forthcoming interview with Sureya Roble in the “Peace Heroes” series, Ms. Magazine Blog, available at: www.msmagazine.com.

of fighting for a just cause, to bring about social justice and dignity. The rewards and incentives offered are in this life and the next. It taps into the norms of masculinity as the men are able to provide for their families here, and claim to salvage their souls in death. The use of violence—often with literal references taken from religious texts—is thus framed as a means that justifies a higher cause and ends.

Exploiting the absence of critical thinking and depth of religious illiteracy: Extremist movements have thrived among populations with limited critical thinking skills, religious literacy or exposure to other values and cultural norms. They exploit ignorance of religious education to promulgate their version of a faith. By honing in on the singular identity of their targets—be it their religion or their ethnicity—they undermine other identities and fuel exclusivity and rejection of the “other” as immoral or threatening. In this way they simultaneously spread bigotry and fear—the foundations on which violence can then be rationalized.

“It is ironic that extremist movements often aspire to recreate an ancient world and often rail against the immorality of modern, western societies, but have no qualms in using the latest technologies to spread their regressive messaging.”

— Sanam Naraghi-Anderini, Co-founder and Executive Director, ICAN

Patriarchy and submission: The co-option of women and girls is a consistent feature among extremist movements. It is done by coercion and violence as in the kidnapping of the Nigerian girls and the rape of Yazidi women. It is also done through targeted recruitment and educational settings. The religious schools and much of the messaging towards young women conveys the notion of “submission as power”. As one

participant noted, the adages of “Be a slave to your husband and he will be a slave to you,” is implicitly and explicitly messaged. Simultaneously, stereotypical norms of patriarchal or hyper-masculinity or “boys don’t cry” are also pervasive.

The movements also alter strategies and spaces in which they disseminate their ideology and recruit new members. While religious institutions remain a key locale, they have spread to other spaces.

Graduating from madrasas to universities: National and transnational movements that espouse extremist ideology and the use of violence are active in universities across multiple countries. This may be a new trend and a shift away from mosques and madrasas that are under increased surveillance. It could also be that state security organizations are paying more attention to university settings because of the increased number of students involved in attacks. One reason why they have targeted more educated youth and those studying engineering and other technical subjects at university, is that they bring much needed skills to the movements, particularly with regard to the use of social media, internet security and development of sophisticated explosive devices.

Co-opting modern media to spread an archaic message: The messaging is consistently adapted and altered to fit the various media. The media used, range from the most traditional physical face-to-face interactions to the use of traditional technologies such as local radio and satellite TV to the most cutting edge Apps and encrypted social media platforms. From the KPK region of Pakistan to the banlieues of Paris, it is evident that extremist movements seek to enter and occupy all of these spaces. To defy this force and offer a robust positive alternative requires presence and attention in all these spheres.



Exploiting hardship and tensions in vulnerable

communities: Their ability to spread within communities affected by war and chaos is notable. In 2012, Syrian peace activists predicted the spread of extremism in displaced and refugee populations because of the funding, humanitarian aid, and school curricula that appeared in those communities through extremist militias associated with factions in the Arab Gulf States. The scapegoating of the other, combined with the politicization of religion and promise of righteousness, sense of purpose and victory are a powerful combination to lure supporters. Among populations with an already limited worldview or lack of respect for diversity, spreading fear and bigotry about “the other” is an effective tactic through which abusive and violent actions are tolerated and even condoned. Moreover, in many contexts they tap into existing anti-American or anti-Western sentiments that have arisen in response to the militarized reactions of Western governments. They also recognize that young people are frustrated and mistrustful of their own national institutions, governance and security apparatus, and exploit these sentiments as well.

“We should not present peace and human rights at the extreme opposite end of the spectrum from violent extremism. They are at the zero point. Peace and human rights should be the norm.”

— Mariann Rikka, Ministry of Education, Estonia

Part II: Effective Strategies and Solutions in Educational Policies and Programs

With rising pluralism within states and communities (and individuals) there is a growing momentum of peace and global citizenship education that includes attention to substance and skills. Many pedagogies and curricula now include attention to world history from multiple perspectives, reflections on varying religions and world literature. In the skills arena, the focus is on critical thinking, conflict resolution as well as psycho-social and emotional skills, fostering attitudes and mindsets that are inclusive. Inherent to this is recognition of ethnic, cultural or religious diversity, respect for gender equality, sexual identities and inclusivity of those who are differently abled. The exposure to and socialization of such skills and principles from early childhood to adolescence and young adulthood is akin to “inoculating” children against bigotry and violence in their own lives and in relation to others. These developments in education are directly relevant to and necessary in the context of PVE efforts and NAPs.

To date, however, most of the research and analysis regarding violent extremism has focused on the ‘push and pull’ factors that lead to radicalization. Less attention has been paid to understanding the factors and initiatives that prevent and foster resilience against the lure of extremist rhetoric. Even less has been done to understand the common ingredients present at the societal, communal or individual level that not only reject intolerant extremist ideologies and are repulsed by violence, but also embrace and celebrate pluralism, diversity and acceptance of “the other”.

The absence of documentation and analysis is in part due to relative “newness” of the PVE agenda. But it is also because the agenda is framed around what we hope to counter and

prevent, not what we hope to foster and strengthen. Moreover, in most instances civil society and not state actors are leading the innovative work that takes a holistic approach, which is effective in PVE and deradicalization because it offers sustainable alternatives to its beneficiaries. These initiatives can be harder to identify and access, in part because most are not labeled as PVE. Additionally, as Jamal Al-Jawaheri of Iraq's Al-Amal Association notes, until the rise of Daesh, many governments showed little interest in programs that taught social cohesion, human rights and peacebuilding.

A key antidote to exclusionary extremism is teaching and instilling precisely those values and initiatives that foster a “healthy society” in which pluralism, inclusion and equality are celebrated. Thus education policy and curricula should be reformed to elevate and offer those positive values and teachings. Education must not be perceived or justified as simply a tool for PVE or aligned with security interventions.

“Assertive advocacy for inclusion of peace education has never been undertaken. Lack of funding and disinterest of donors in this regard has been another hurdle.”

— Bushra Qadeem Hyder, Peace Educator, Pakistan

2.1 Reactive Strategies to Pre-Empt Radicalization and Violence

Educational interventions as direct tools to address radicalization and violent extremism. It encompasses policies and programs in three related areas:

1. Providing guidance for teachers, community leaders and other educators on developing sensitivity to the signs of radicalization among youth; building their capacity and skills to help interrupt the process and working with them to bolster the resilience of individuals, their cohorts and their communities.

2. Providing support to children, youth and adults who have suffered trauma and/or are coping with the impact of violence in and around their communities. Such approaches have both healing and prevention effect given that unaddressed trauma can contribute to vulnerability to radicalization whether for seeking vengeance, asserting lost personal power, and/or enabling protection of self and family. Additionally, exposure to sustained or extreme violence also results in desensitization to violence and thus normalizes it as a means for solving problems.
3. Providing the counter narratives and alternative interpretations of religious texts or other sources that extremist movements use to erode empathy, heighten anger and mistrust and ultimately justify the use of violence.

2.2 Proactive Initiatives to Prevent the Spread of Extremism by Promoting Positive Values

Education as a means of conveying positive values, skills and knowledge to build resilience against to the bigotry that is inherent in extremist ideologies and foster an appreciation for pluralism and shared common humanity across cultural, religious or political differences. As a specialist from the UK's Department for International Development noted, engaging the education sector through a PVE lens can be challenging, so two factors inform their approach. First, care must be taken to avoid doing harm, and this includes creating a perception that education initiatives or support are a tool for P/CVE. To reinforce this, there is a need to ensure education programs consistently promote positive values. This captures a wider array of approaches including pedagogies, curricula and activities that promote non-violent resolution of conflict, resilience, equal rights and pluralism.

Despite the range and diversity of the initiatives, there are core common characteristics evident in each, as summarized below.

Values and inclusivity: Practitioners noted the importance of teaching students about our shared humanity and core values such as honesty, humility, kindness, generosity, forgiveness and compassion as well as acceptance of difference and diversity. A key component is enabling people—from young children to adults—to recognize their own multiple identities, and embrace the characteristics that they may share with others, as well as celebrating the differences.

The programs and interventions that have impact, are designed to engage people’s core identities through both emotional and cognitive means. It is a hearts and minds approach to move from animosity to tolerance and ultimately to acceptance and respect. For example, in Pakistan, young men in a madrasa may be exposed to different traditional or religious practices from their private school counterparts, but they find commonality in their love of cricket or football. By the same token traditional gender differences may separate young men and women, but through dialogue sessions or expressing their experiences as young people in art, they learn communication, acknowledge the existence of multiple perspectives, and develop respect for equality by virtue of working together on shared projects. The programs that exist reaffirm and respect faith, ethnicity, cultural or other defining identities, but they also expose and connect along shared values, interests such as sports, art or music. In each instance they provide their beneficiaries with the variety of options in which they can make the connections and relate to “the other” Other fundamental values include citizenship rooted in a balanced sense of having rights and responsibility,

volunteerism, respect for human rights, equality and anti-discrimination. Inclusivity is key because often dominant national historic or religious narratives do not cover the experiences and histories of minority communities or those of women or other traditionally marginalized sectors are integral to the formation of a nation’s history. By including multiple perspectives and diversity into history, literature and arts curricula the state can foster a sense of belonging and respect for all, while exclusion or erasure can foster alienation.

Positive framings: Engaging youth with positive reinforcement and treating them with respect and dignity is a common feature across the programs. This is particularly relevant given that in so many cultural contexts youth are taught to adhere to strict behavioral norms of respecting their adults, and not voicing their opinion. Meanwhile they are often subject to criticism and humiliation as a means of asserting control or dominance over them. Role modeling positive engagement is a key means of demonstrating respect and belonging. By seeking their opinion, it also implies that their ideas matter and that they can contribute constructively. A simple way of framing this is ensuring that adults and youth alike are encouraged to communicate based on what to do, not just what not to do.

Participatory design with multiple stakeholders: Related to the above, every successful initiative engages not only the youth, but also the teachers, principals, parents and other adult figures with whom young people interact and from whom they learn. It is notable that the adults also need the skills training themselves as the negative attitudes, mindsets and behaviors are often learnt from them. As the sources of discipline and control in the lives of young people, they may also be the ones who disrespect, exclude or humiliate the children, even inadvertently.

Life skills to manage difference and tension: Skills such as conflict resolution, dialogue, deep listening and respect for “the other” are essential. Such approaches also implicitly address the contemporary phenomenon of rising extremism by imparting a clear alternative vision for society that is rooted in addressing disputes and differences through engagement, communication and inclusion, rather than justifying revenge or violence.

Critical thinking skills and psycho-social empowerment: Related to the above, are programs that teach critical thinking and build confidence so that the youth involved are encouraged to question and analyze materials taught, and consider their own opinions and choices. It is in effect countering the rote learning style of traditional and especially religious teachings.

Exposure to multiple perspectives and alternative narratives in the teaching of religious, cultural and historic texts: The substance of curricula is critical. Much attention is paid to countering narratives in terms of religious texts, but other subjects are equally important. Programs that teach different perspectives on history, for example on the impact of colonialism, or introducing a “gender lens” that highlights women’s experiences and leadership, encourage critical thinking, empathy and the importance of viewing the world through multiple lenses.

Integration of experiential, creative and fun cultural activities as means of learning: The initiatives all enable learning through doing, and engaging students and adults through emotional and cognitive channels. The use of arts, sports and other shared cultural practices are also essential as they anchor difficult discussions or the need for trust building in activities that are not only appreciated but inherent to

the identities of the stakeholders. Moreover, integrating local cultural activities into the programs also demonstrates that the values, perspectives and skills being conveyed are indigenous and authentic to their own settings.

Active across sectors and community: The majority of programs are not limited to a school or institutional setting. They may be anchored in them but they engage and are present in the community, for example through their cultural activities. Most also use multiple media and platform through which they engage and share information and ideas.

2.3 Examples of Good Practice: Educational Programming for PVE and PREP

As noted below most of the programs that CSOs and other local actors have developed encompass all of the elements above in a holistic manner. In every instance the problem of extremism or intolerance and conflict is an implicit component and driver of the intervention. But the approaches taken are designed to enable positive engagement, safe spaces and skills through which the problems are addressed and resolved.

A. Rapid Response Youth Deradicalization and Reintegration Programs

- **Seeing the signs and intervening to deradicalize, educate and rehabilitate:** When Daesh entered Iraq, the leader of the Shia community, Ayatollah Sistani, called on all Iraqis to arm and defend their nation, thousands of teenage boys and young men heeded the call. Fatima Al-Bahadly, founder of Al-Firdaws, a local NGO dedicated to promoting peace and development, found her teenage son and other school age youth joining in the militias. Al-Bahadly responded

rapidly to the developments. Because of her credibility in the community and her past social work, she was trusted. She established contact with militia groups and provided them with food and clothes to gain access and communicate with their members. She also contacted youth via social media, and with her deep knowledge of Islam was able to offer the young men alternative and peaceful avenues by which they could fulfill their religious duty of “jihad”. For example, she would suggest that they do God’s work not by destroying or killing, but by rebuilding school buildings and giving blood at the local hospital. Her teachings were anchored in Islamic texts that encourage respect for diversity and pluralism, community service and peaceful actions. Her work has expanded into a curriculum of peace education for students and teachers on concepts of peace, co-existence and non-violence. She also collaborates with religious elders in Basra to stand in opposition to violence against women. The Al-Firdaws Society has deradicalized hundreds of teenage boys and young men, redirecting their energies toward positive activities such as community development.

- ***From warning signs to rehabilitation as promoters of social harmony:*** Alarmed by the normalization of extremism in Pakistan and the commensurate levels of violence, the Paiman Alumni Trust led by former university professor Mossarat Qadeem and retired Brigadier Shafqat Mehmood initiated programs to counter and prevent violent extremism in 2008. The goal of their efforts is to counter the acceptance of extremist ideology by providing alternative religious narratives and rekindle the social harmony between and among the region’s populations. The program engages madrasa teachers and those from private university on inclusivity, interfaith dialogues and peace in Islam. It also has a community outreach program, initially reaching out

to women who have been radicalized and are supporting the violence by sewing and selling suicide jackets, giving their jewelry or providing other material support. Paiman’s outreach strategy includes providing safe space for these women to learn about religious literacy, Islamic teachings on peace and coexistence and civic education, as well as providing psycho-social support and income generation skills building. Once trust is built with the women, Paiman is able to reach their sons and other male relatives who are the rank and file of the Taliban or other extremist movements in the area. They provide similarly tailored programs for the youth and men, encouraging them to become active volunteers in their communities using traditional theater and arts to convey the messages of respect for diversity and social cohesion while raising awareness of the existence of extremism within the community - not as an unknown outside force. Paiman’s curriculum draws on local history, culture and religion to convey stories of peaceful coexistence, respect and morality. Much of the learning is done through role-playing to bring the issues to life through experience and foster empathy.

- ***Inter-religious understanding to counter extremism:*** In Myanmar, the Women’s Peace Network (WPN) has been a leading voice in countering extremist narratives by building peace and understanding among different groups, particularly regarding the persecution of minorities, including Muslims by the country’s Buddhist majority political and religious establishments. Led by Wai Wai Nu, a former political prisoner who has dedicated her life to promoting human rights and democracy in Myanmar, the network brings together diverse youth with trainers from various backgrounds to learn about civic education and concepts of human rights and pluralism. In particular, the network uses Buddha to bridge the divide between Buddhists

and Muslims, thus celebrating their differences while also demonstrating the commonalities between them. WPN also uses social media as a tool to counter racism and celebrate diversity. The impact thus far has been the formation of a network of young people with a commitment to respecting diversity, human rights and citizenship, and practicing the values in their own communities.

B. PVE Through Peace and Civic Education Programs in Schools

Many women-led NGOs have paved the way in developing curricula for school and university settings. As the cases below suggest, while work has often commenced in one institution, its success has led to expansion to other settings or by the national authorities.

- ***Building trust and emphasizing shared humanity through exposure and activities:*** At the Educational Institute in Peshawar, Pakistan with school children between the ages of 3 and 16, principal Bushra Qadeem Hyder recognized the trauma that her students were experiencing due to the heightened violence and spread of extremism. In 2008 she established a school-wide peace curriculum that has now expanded to other schools. The program is designed with the intent of bringing students from private and public schools together with their counterparts in religious schools (madrasas). The purpose is to challenge the exclusive and intolerant teachings of extremist groups that claim to represent Islam by highlighting the Quran's acceptance and respect for diversity and human life. The program includes outreach to the community to impart the core values through a mix of trainings, theatre, creative writing and sports. The curriculum teaches values such as honesty, forgiveness and compassion and acceptance of diversity by anchoring the

values in Islamic and civic education, lessons from history and local cultural traditions. In this way they cannot be accused of promoting foreign values, and instead can demonstrate how local traditions are reflected in universal values. The curriculum is now being introduced into madrasas.

- ***Bridging intolerance and fostering social cohesion:*** Similarly in Iraq, the Al Amal Association recognized that tensions and violence were rising in communities due to displacement, mass trauma, urbanization and the dissemination of extremist rhetoric and ideologies that emphasize differences and promote exclusion. Beginning in 2004, Al-Amal reached out to youth and academics in university settings to introduce a curriculum on peacebuilding, human rights and gender as well as negotiations skills and strategic planning. Building on this work and leveraging its credibility in key communities, in 2015 Al-Amal piloted a civic education program in three school settings. They introduced the skills and raised awareness by engaging students and teachers in three areas of activity: a) improving student-teacher communications; b) teaching civics and citizenship including notions of rights and responsibilities of citizens, non-discrimination, gender awareness, volunteerism and respect for diversity and participatory decision-making; and c) encouraging students to participate in the educational system and feel ownership. The program also engaged families and integrated arts and cultural activities. The intervention transformed relations between communities. It is being expanded nationally by the government into camps and with youth outside of formal institutions. Al Amal is also adapting the program for university settings, notably Karbala University, which is a seat of Islamic scholarship.

- **Teaching life skills to promote non-violent conflict resolution and respect for all:** In Armenia, extremism is not prevalent, but the country has had a history of oppression, genocide, marginalization of its language and culture and conflict. In the aftermath of the cold war, civil society organizations emerged to address issues of human rights, freedom of expression and peace and conflict management. For nearly sixteen years the Women for Development (WFD) NGO has developed and institutionalized peace education among youth, schoolchildren and teachers in Armenia. Since 2002, they have implemented the Peace and Conflict Resolution Education (P&CRE) in Armenia project. The purpose is to provide students with the tools to manage and resolve issues non-violently. The strategy has been to integrate peace and conflict resolution into school curriculum, including by developing a handbook to guide school heads and teachers on lesson planning. Thus far 850 schools or about 60 percent of Armenian schools have participated in trainings for 60 people at each school. The use of arts and culture to convey the values through artwork has been a key component of the program. The project was completed in 2017 but the government will continue the training programs through the national institute of education. Students who benefitted from the program have expressed gratitude for the conflict management skills that have become life long skills, enabling them to cope when faced with difficult circumstances. In 2017 Gohar Markosyan, founder of WFD, is establishing a network for post Soviet NGOs, particularly Southern Caucasus and Central Asia countries, working in the field of peacebuilding.
- **Teaching multi-perspective history, religion and culture:** In Estonia, another former Soviet state, the Unitas Foundation (now Estonian Institute of Historical Memory) has led the way in addressing past grievances and broadening education on human rights, with attention to history curricula. Storytelling has been a key technique developed in this work. Mariann Rikka, chief expert in the General Education Department of the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, notes that through stories, the ideas enter into the heart before they get to the mind. Through the program Kogu Me Lugu (Our Whole Story or Collect Our Story) the foundation has developed a portal with short and full-length video-stories from the WW II period, and is now developing an interactive portal and new materials on teaching multi-perspective history lessons, and to enable students to explore the human dimensions of their ancestors or past events rather than simply teaching facts. They have also established a simulation project for trying cases of violent extremism in the International Criminal Court (ICC). Says Mariann Rikka: "History should not be taught simply on the basis of national heroes whose actions often create an "us" and "them" divide. There should be more teaching about people who did positive societal work and made contributions in other fields, and the values and qualities they personified."
- **Countering extremist religious rhetoric with alternative texts and understanding across religions in university settings:** In the immediate aftermath of the 2011 Tunisian revolution, the country's universities became a hot spot for the spread of extremist rhetoric and violence. Amel Grami, a professor in the Department of Literature, Arts and Humanities at Mannouba University specializing in Islamic Studies, Gender in Islam, Women's Studies and Comparative Religion, became a target for her outspoken

opposition to the rising intolerance and the pressures on women in particular to conform to conservative norms. In her university courses, writings in national press and media presence, she has provided analysis and counter narratives to challenge the religious sources and credentials of ISIS and other extremist movements active in the country. In 2012 the work was expanded into student clubs including theater work and other arts, providing spaces for students to have dialogues about differences, while also unifying across shared interests. In the aftermath of terror attacks she has become a prominent and trusted voice in the media, enabling people to better understand the context while tackling head-on issues of gender and discrimination. A key approach she has developed is to teach the sociology or anthropology of religions to demonstrate the commonalities and shared values within them. This approach undermines the essence of extremist strategies by focusing on what unifies rather than what divides us.

- **Creating safe space for mediation and dialogue through summer schools:** Where the formal educational system may push back against new content or skills programs, alternative strategies are needed. In Egypt, the Regional Center for Mediation and Dialogue (RCMD), established the Tanaghom Summer School for Coexistence and Dialogue as a summer program outside of the academic year. Led by Nagwan El Ashwal, the Chairperson of RCMD, the program's purpose is to strengthen the culture of peace and find common ground among conflicting parties. Similar to other programs, the strategy includes a preliminary assessment of the community and context of conflict or disputes. The program identifies existing capacities of the parties involved, and offers development to strengthen their dialogue and negotiations skills. The school also

promotes youth and women's empowerment, ensuring diversity based on gender, religion and socio-economic background among its students. The empowerment consists of teaching young people how to understand, analyze and approach conflict, and eventually start initiatives of their own. The program has created a safe space for dialogue and negotiation and has helped introduce a culture of non-violent conflict transformation in Egypt. Perhaps most importantly, the participants discover their shared identity, especially as young Egyptians, despite their religious or sectarian differences (notably Muslim and Christian, Sunni and Shia) and various socio-economic backgrounds.

- **Teaching positive engagement to education leaders and students:** The Positive Discipline Association operates internationally to train teachers, principals, parents and others who work with children and youth in non-school settings, in the concepts of positive discipline. The concept of positive discipline is both ancient and modern. It is common sense confirmed by neuroscience. The goal is to create a community of people who prioritize respectful relationships and connection to foster a child's sense of belonging and significance, and help children develop long-term life skills. Jane Nelson, the founder of Positive Discipline, prioritizes five core principles: 1) belonging and significance; 2) kind but firm engagement; 3) long-term planning and implementation; 4) teaching of social and life skills and 5) constructive use of personal power and autonomy. The ancient world also recognized the value of positive instruction as evident in Zoroastrian teachings that commanded people to "think kind and good thoughts, say kind words and behave with kindness and goodness." This is in direct contrast to the Abrahamic religions that teach "see no evil, do no evil, say no evil" but do not provide similarly simple guidance on what their followers should do.

- ***Instilling peace and equality from early childhood:*** The UK-based Think Equal initiative, founded and led by human rights campaigner Leslee Udwin, is a relatively new global program determined to bring about a system change in education. It calls for the “missing subject” of social and emotional learning (SEL) and holistic, value-based education in the earliest years, to be mandated on the national curricula of world schools. Think Equal asks: “If mathematics is deemed to be compulsory, how can we consider it to be optional for children learn to have healthy relationships and to respect and value others?”. The initiative provides children from the earliest years with the tools to promote human rights and moral values in their communities, “transforming mind-sets and creating a new generation of peace and equality advocates.” Think Equal provides tangible and detailed lesson plans in the form of a new subject, which have been designed by visionaries and thought leaders in the field of SEL. The initiative has developed programs for use in pre-schools and schools during early childhood (3-7) and intends to continue developing materials through high school. The rationale for their focus on early childhood (starting age 3) is rooted in Neuroscience research that “defines the optimal window of cognitive modifiability (when change of attitudes and behavior are highly effective due to development and flexibility of thinking) as being between the ages of 3 and 5”. Working with researchers and eminent educationalists, the organization has drafted the Early Years Curriculum comprising 140 lesson plans and related materials (each ½ an hour for 2 full hours of learning per week). In 2017 and 2018 the curriculum is being piloted and rolled-out in a number of countries, including Kenya, Argentina, Botswana, and Canada. Think Equal will also establish teacher training programs, and has plans to develop additional programs for children and youth in refugee communities, and older

age groups in the coming year. Sri Lanka is committed to being the first Think Equal country in the world, rolling out to all of its 19,000 pre-schools and 12,000 primary schools from January 2018.

C. Integrating Peace Education in Religious Schools

- ***From Boko Haram to Boko Halal—Challenging the anti-education narrative and integrating peace education into Islamic schools:*** In Northeast Nigeria, Boko Haram has decimated communities and warned parents and children away from schools. Hamsatu Allamin, a local resident with over three decades’ experience in teaching, mediation and administration, has developed a multi-pronged program to challenge and reverse the Boko Haram legacy. Working with the Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Program and FOMWAN, a women-led civil society network, Allamin devised a strategy to first listen to the grievances of militants, whose mantra has been anti-western schooling in the name of Islam. As a renowned scholar of Islam herself, Allamin developed a network of CSOs for Peace in Borno and Yobe states where Boko Haram was most prevalent and alongside them she established peace clubs in Islamiyya schools in Borno. Next, she brought Islamic scholars on to local radio to discuss Islamic teachings and texts, and enable community members to call in with questions once a week over 15 weeks. A key purpose was to debunk the notion that Islam is anti-education, and instill awareness that being educated is the duty of every Muslim. In parallel she developed a manual that anchors peace and civic education values in Islamic texts and teachings. In 2017, this manual is being used and disseminated widely in schools in the region. Allamin is trusted by the Boko Haram leaders as well as the local Islamiyya school heads and teachers.

Her radio program prompted a 40 percent increase in enrollment in 2016, and the demand in 2017 was higher than the region's schools could accommodate. Her efforts have drawn national and international attention. Her program is being adapted and replicated by others in other countries.

- **Anchoring peace and pluralism in local religion and culture:** In the Philippines, Amina Rasul, expert and author on the Mindanao conflict, Islam and democracy, and President of the Philippine Center for Islam and Democracy, recognized that while peace education existed in the country, it was dominated by Christian groups that were not trusted by non-Christians. Rasul set out to develop peace education curricula anchored in Islam to reach more people in the country, thereby laying the groundwork for inclusive peace. The Philippine Center for Islam and Democracy collaborates with religious leaders such as imams and muftis, developing various peace education publications for use by those who teach in madrasas, particularly women teachers. The curriculum uses stories from religious texts, folklore, and history to show human rights are local, not just western. The publications include Islamic Model for Peace Education (used by Muslims teaching good governance and civil society); The Aemat Module (used by Commission for Human Rights and women teaching in madrasas) and Proceedings of the 3rd National Conference of Muslim Women Peace Advocates: Empowered Women of Faith, Rebuilding Peace (Human Rights, Economic and Political Empowerment as Dividends of Peace). Rasul has gained the trust of religious leaders in her country and convinced them of the value of peace education. The Center continues to build new relationships and expand its reach of with the materials developed.

D. Innovations in Teaching Peace in Community and Other Non-Formal Settings

Given that most young people spend some 20 percent of their time in formal education settings and the remaining 80 percent with family, peers, online or in their communities, it is not surprising that much of their "education" comes from these sources too. Similarly, people's life experiences vary dramatically between school and non-school settings. So even if racism or bigotry is banned in the classroom or school grounds, it continues in the streets and outside of school boundaries. Community outreach and engagement is even more critical in crisis settings, where children living in refugee settings or displacement have even less access to formal education. Often the adults need more consciousness raising and training to prevent them from reinforcing discrimination and bigotry that they have subconsciously absorbed, so programs must involve community members. As the examples below suggest, CSOs consciously design programs to reach key influence shapers and stakeholders.

- **Teaching coexistence and peace in the midst of war:** Since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011, Mobaderoon has been running "active citizenship and peace" programs in communities and through social media sites. The purpose is to promote citizen-led social and economic initiatives as well as a culture of respectful engagement and non-violent dispute resolution within and between different communities and across divergent political views. With a focus on youth and women, the program has reached over 4000 individuals across Syria. Many of those within the network are running projects in their own communities, sharing the core values of respect, rights and responsibility. They are often involved in providing relief to war survivors and connectivity between host and displaced populations to sustain social cohesion and community

based peace among Syrians, even while the war is raging. These social activists are the catalysts of change in mindsets and social interactions locally, and their network is poised to have impact nationally if and when peace is negotiated.

- **Enabling men to discuss violence and extremism and act to prevent it:** In Afghanistan, decades of war have normalized interpersonal, inter-communal and related forms of political, ideological and criminal violence. Violent extremism has been prevalent since the earliest days of the Taliban. While there has been significant attention to women's experiences of violence over the years, less attention has been paid to men. Hassina Neekzad, a member of the Afghan Women's Network, has been leading anti-violence peace programming in communities in the Herat area for years. Recognizing the signs of rising extremism in 2015, with support from ICAN Neekzad designed the "From Violence of Extremism toward the Peace of Deradicalization" initiative specifically directed at men to reduce violence and extremism, and build peace. The strategy entails providing influential community men with the safe space to share their own experiences of violence over a lifetime, and empower them to value their own potential role in the nation building process and bringing peace to their communities. The pilot period of eight sessions resulted in the men initiating their own anti-violence efforts, including through Friday prayers sermons. The group also formed a network to collectively counter community violence, particularly violence against women.
- **Reclaiming public discourse for peace and coexistence through cultural materials and activities:** OPEN ASIA/ Armanshahr, led by Guissou Jahangiri, is a human rights organization with activities in Afghanistan, Tajikistan and France. Its mission is to uphold and expand pluralism and democratic thought and practice by nurturing a

community of informed and committed citizens. The strategy entails widening public spaces to amplify the voices, actions and thinking of progressive individuals involved in human rights and women's empowerment, and satisfy demands for democracy, justice and rule of law. In Afghanistan, Armanshahr has initiated the Simorgh Peace Prize to celebrate peacebuilding work by Afghans across the country. It is an effective means of demonstrating that the culture of peace and coexistence is indigenous to the country, while acknowledging the courage of the winners, who despite threats from the Taliban or others, have stood their ground and non-violently fought for justice. The organization also publishes an online magazine as a space for discussion of pluralism, rights and democracy, and translates materials to enable Afghans to have access to the discourse and debates internationally. In Tajikistan, Armanshahr initiated the first national survey on violence against women (VAW), which led to policy change and new laws in the country. The World Health Organization adopted its research methodology for its work in Europe.

- **Filling the gaps on gender and interfaith education:** The Wi'am Palestinian Transformation Center draws attention to the rights of women and marginalized groups in Palestine. Working with the center for two decades, Lucy Talgieh has developed manuals on gender and peacebuilding to fill the gaps of traditional curriculum, and interfaith education to bridge the gap between peoples of different faiths in Palestine.
- **Ancient tales, modern media; using cartoons to educate and heal refugee children:** Big Bad Boo Studios is a Canadian company dedicated to producing high quality animations and storytelling to convey compassion, empathy, collaboration and care. In 2016, Big Bad Boo partnered with UNICEF to provide 50,000 Syrian and Iraqi

refugees in Jordan with educational materials based on the studio's animated children's series inspired by the ancient tales of 1001 Nights. The partnership was extended in 2017 to reach 170,000 children in six countries with Big Bad Boo providing curriculum materials, animated videos and over 1.7 million books based on 1001 Nights and their other children's animation series. The curriculum materials focus on civic education, with the aim of helping children re-establish normative values. Robert Jenkins, UNICEF Jordan's Country Representative says "Big Bad Boo's materials have become an integral part of our education and psychosocial programs with refugee children. Children who have endured extreme trauma are very difficult to reach—Big Bad Boo's cartoons engage them with humor and their supporting materials are having measurable impact countering trauma, instilling positive social values and providing a sense of hope."

2.4 Key Lessons in Effective "Counter" or "Alternative" Narratives

The consultations highlighted a number of lessons and observations regarding the use of "counter" or "alternative" narratives that were common across various countries.

The Who: Trusted messengers are key but the *trusted* are not always the traditional. If the messenger is not trusted or credible, the message will not be heard, and can be discredited regardless of how good or true it is. As discussants in the ICAN and GSX fora noted, it is not simply about mothers or teachers noticing the signs and intervening to prevent their children from becoming radicalized. At each juncture the "credible messenger" can vary but the following are key:

- Women community activists and local organizations with a track record in providing care and services often have established their credibility and thus can access and engage young people about extremism.
- Across many settings, research¹¹ indicates that peers— young men and women—are more influential than the parents or people in other positions of authority, so the work with youth and formation of youth networks and community groups is critical.
- Religious leaders or elders are also essential. From Nigeria to Pakistan they are increasingly open to engaging women leaders who demonstrate a deep knowledge of religious texts and providing them with the resources to teach peace and respect for diversity, which are anchored in their own religion and culture.
- Teachers and families: Adults that influence and have authority can be powerful influencers. They can be actively involved in radicalizing youth, or transmitting intolerance and discrimination that contribute to the conditions in which extremism can flourish. By contrast they can also be sources of positive and countervailing influence, if they are informed and equipped.

The What: Reference to religious and cultural texts is essential. In each setting the values being taught should be referenced and reflected in the religious texts that are known and respected. The goal is not to challenge a person's faith or their desire to serve God, rather it is to convince them that violence and destruction does not serve that purpose and is antithetical to the teachings of their faith. Key strategies include:

¹¹ Forthcoming (2017) UNDP report on masculinities and violence in crisis settings.

- Providing positive alternatives from religious texts to challenge the negative interpretations used to radicalize and militarize people and questioning the credibility of the extremist interpretations and false narratives by simply asking: “Where in the Quran/Bible does it say this?”
- Redefining expressions and terminology. For example, jihad which means “struggle” can be interpreted and acted upon in different ways, such as doing God’s work on earth by caring for your community or giving blood in a hospital instead of spilling it in the streets.
- Renewing and updating religious discourse in relation to women by pointing to the prominent role of women in the religious texts and history. In Muslim majority contexts, there are countless historic examples of individual and collective actions by women in pursuit of justice and peace. These cases need to be recognized and taught to demonstrate the status and respect that women garnered, compared to the subservience that is taught and practiced by extremist movements now in the name of Islam.
- Updating curriculum so it does not include old adages that reflect gender bias, bigotry and discrimination (e.g. “Be a slave to your husband and he will be a slave to you,” or “Boys don’t cry”).
- Using stories from religious texts, folklore and history to show that human rights are local not western.

- Creating bridges between religions by using common figures. For instance, the Maryam Movement in Southeast Asia highlights the similarities between the Virgin Mary in Christianity and the prophet Maryam in Islam. This can help build peace and mutual understanding between groups.
- Reflecting on local religious and cultural teaching to humanize the issues and start with the premise of “everyone has the right to life.”
- Incorporating conflict resolution, listening and dialogue skills into classroom and other settings so that people learn experientially and by doing.
- Incorporating theatre, sport, art, creative writing, music and other forms of creative learning to convey ideas and experiences.

The Where: Programs and interventions must provide a safe and trusted space for young people to engage in. They must reach them where they are. This includes homes, schools, universities, communities, religious centers and online or social media.

Conclusion

The consultations and research conducted for this report reveal the importance of the education sector, curriculum and spaces to the spread of extremism and related violence. This study also offers examples of effective and innovative practices that both state and civil society actors are already implementing with positive impact.

It is evident that while providing education and skills training is a basic necessity. In the context of PVE that is not enough. Rather, governments and multilateral institutions need to focus on significant reforms in the substance of curricula, the pedagogies and materials and the skill sets that need to be integrated into education alongside the basic literacy and numeracy.

PVE NAPs must take account of education, but care must be taken to avoid securitizing educational settings. Instead the focus on education in NAPs must be to ensure attention to the positive values, skills and knowledge that is necessary to ensure respect for peace, resilience, equal rights and pluralism (PREP). Given the depth and breadth of knowledge and expertise that exists, UNESCO and the wider UN system should encourage cooperation between states and civil society organization in national educational contexts, to tailor materials to specific contexts, while anchoring them in universal values and a culture of peace. The recommendations provided at the outset of this report can guide the design and implementation of related policies and programs.



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