



WOMEN'S EDUCATION: PROMOTING DEVELOPMENT AND COUNTERING RADICALISM

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Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Engel, and Members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you today to discuss the role of women's education in development and radicalization. The "Malala Yousafzai Scholarship Act" (H.R. 3583) is an excellent step towards helping empower the women of Pakistan.

"For my brothers it was easy to think about the future. They can be anything they want. But for me it was hard and for that reason I wanted to become educated and empower myself with knowledge." - Malala Yousafzai

Introduction

Education is a basic human right and access should be gender-neutral. It is an unfortunate reality that this is not the case in certain parts of the globe. Whereas the worldwide male literacy rate is 89% compared to a female literacy rate of 80%, the difference is starker in the following regions¹:

- Arab states- 83% male vs 66% female
- South and West Asia- 74% male vs 52% female
- Sub-Saharan Africa- 71% male vs 54% female

¹ All literacy figures taken from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, UNESCO e-Atlas for Gender Equality in Education <http://www.app.collinsindicate.com/atlas-gender-education/en-us>

Despite challenges including socio-economic barriers, cultural norms, stereotypes, lack of access in rural settings, personal safety and violence², the benefits gained through women's education are many³:

Tolerance & Social Cohesion: Higher levels of education are known to coincide with increased tolerance towards others, especially due to secondary & tertiary education. Along with a reduced risk of conflict in areas with the least education inequality, one additional benefit is increased political participation.

Economic: Education has the impact of increasing job opportunities, productivity and earnings. This results in a reduction in poverty and the ability to stay out of poverty. Another shift that comes from changing values attributed to education is a reduced tolerance for corruption which ultimately benefits the country.

Health and Environment: The education level of mothers has consistently shown to improve early childhood care and has reduced maternal mortality in many countries. This also influences reduction in child marriages and early births in girls who stay in school longer. Additionally, education results in greater awareness of environmental issues.

Whereas the role of women's education in development has been well documented and studied, there is limited empirical analysis on their role in Countering Violent Extremism (CVE). To understand this better, we need to understand the context of CVE.

Countering Violent Extremism

As the threat of violent extremism has continued to plague our world, governments and communities alike have been prioritizing efforts to counter it through non-kinetic initiatives that inform, influence, and change hearts and minds. Over time, CVE objectives, strategies and programming have been refined and updated to reflect the evolving threat environment.

In a field with multiple definitions of CVE, and in some cases where no definition has been published by government agencies running CVE programming, the need to be specific is necessary to establish the scope of the problem and solution space. The definition of CVE used for the purposes of this statement is as follows:

Countering violent extremism is the use of non-coercive means to dissuade individuals or groups from radicalizing towards violence, and to mitigate recruitment, support or engagement in ideologically motivated terrorism by non-state actors, in furtherance of political objectives.

² Extracted from "From Access to Equality: Empowering Girls and Women Through Literacy and Secondary Education" by UNESCO, Paris, France 2012

³ Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2013/4: "Teaching and Learning: Achieving Quality for All," UNESCO, Paris, France 2014 <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/efareport/reports/2013/>

CVE Objectives

Currently, the US whole-of-government approach to CVE initiatives using the 3Ds (defense, development and diplomacy) focuses on⁴:

- Countering violent extremist ideology
- Reducing the resonance of violent extremist ideology
- Diminishing specific drivers to violence exploited by violent extremists

These primary strategic objectives are further described to include initiatives by the US government (USG) and its partners to:

- Counter VE ideology by:
 1. Undercutting the legitimacy and discrediting VE messaging
 2. Undercutting efforts to spread VE ideology
- Reduce the resonance of VE ideology by:
 3. Increasing rejection of VE organizations, ideologies, world views
 4. Preventing radicalization (short term)
 5. Preventing radicalization, recruitment and mobilization to VE (long term)
 6. Increasing collective community resilience (by assisting, connecting and engaging)
- Diminish specific drivers to violence exploited by violent extremists by:
 7. Positioning positive vision of engagement with foreign publics
 8. Supporting universal rights
 9. Focused foreign assistance
 10. Focused development assistance

These interdependent and interrelated objectives describe the full scope of CVE programming objectives supported by USG, both domestically and internationally.

The specific goals of our international CVE programming is **“to deny terrorist groups new recruits, by: providing positive alternatives to communities most at risk of recruitment and radicalization to violence; countering terrorist narratives and the violent extremist worldview; and building the capacity of governments and civil society to counter violent extremism.”**⁵ The Department of State focuses on programming⁶ for community engagement, engaging women, prison disengagement and the countering of terrorist propaganda.

The specificity of the three main CVE objectives thus separates the field from both development and diplomacy. In development, the end goal is to end extreme global poverty and enable resilient, democratic societies to realize their potential⁷ while in public diplomacy, our national interests and

⁴ The focus of for CVE programming is described in the White House National Strategy for Counterterrorism (2011) and highlights that these are the “efforts to strengthen bulwarks against radicalization, recruitment and mobilization to violence” in the name of violent extremism.

⁵ Keynote Address: 2014 Gulf of Aden Regional Counterterrorism Forum. Remarks by Geeta Pasi, U.S. Ambassador to Djibouti, Djibouti, Djibouti, February 3, 2014. <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/rm/2014/221194.htm>

⁶ Extracted from Department of State website, March 31, 2014

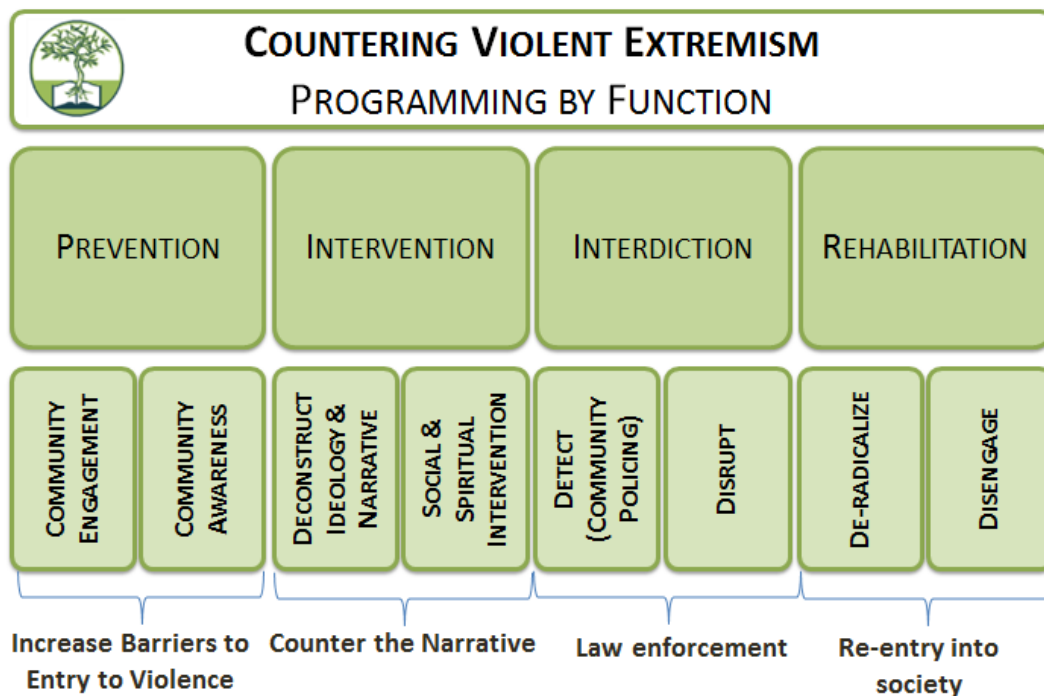
<http://www.state.gov/j/ct/programs/index.htm#CVE>

⁷ Extracted from USAID website on March 31, 2014 <http://www.usaid.gov/who-we-are>

security are furthered by “by informing and influencing foreign publics and by expanding and strengthening the relationship between the people and Government of the United States and citizens of the rest of the world.”⁸

CVE Programming

The most effective way for CVE programming to meet the stated objectives is through whole-of-society approaches. There are nearly 100 types of CVE programs implemented across the globe. These programs can be categorized by type (e.g. education, training, engagement, dialogue, law enforcement etc.) however they can also be categorized by function: prevention, intervention, interdiction, rehabilitation. This functional spectrum will be filled by programs run for, and by the following sectors: civilian, corporate, government, law enforcement, military, academic, development and diplomatic.



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It is important to note that despite the difference in objectives between CVE, development and diplomacy, there is programming done under both development and diplomacy initiatives that has secondary and tertiary benefits for CVE goals.

This **CVE-relevant** programming is important to establishing stronger and more resilient communities that have reduced vulnerability towards radicalization to violent extremism. Many of these programs are thus preventative in nature. Examples include community engagement programming, leadership training, vocational training, language education.

⁸ Extracted from Department of State website, March 31, 2014 <http://www.state.gov/r/>

There is however also a need for **CVE-specific** programs with direct CVE goals as their primary objective. Some of these programs will also be preventative in nature however there will also be a whole spectrum of intervention programs for mitigating recruitment, mobilization and rehabilitation (de-radicalization and dis-engagement). Examples include educational programs that raise awareness of terrorism threats, counseling for radicalized youth, counter-narratives for extremism, vocational training for prison inmates to prevent recidivism. There are also CVE specific programs like training for law enforcement so they are better able to detect radicalization to violence in the communities they serve.

Despite the overlap in programs, especially for CVE-relevant initiatives done through development and diplomacy channels, it is important to remember that the difference in strategic objectives requires that the evaluation of CVE programs not be done against development objectives, but against CVE objectives. An example might be a soccer matches held for youth that would have clear diplomacy ends however would not be considered a CVE -specific program unless it could articulate which strategic goal it was accomplishing and if it was able to target the at-risk audience.

Role of Women's Education in Local Contexts

Education initiatives and vocational trainings in general build capacity and have the potential to increase community resilience. By increasing the empowerment of women and their potential for earning a livelihood, within certain contexts, these development programs can also have CVE-relevant effects and indirectly **mitigate factors that increase the propensity towards violence**.

What must be kept front and center is that the impact of women's education will be **within the context of their larger role in society**. In patriarchal societies the level of empowerment, agency, independence and voice of women is often curtailed. Because women's education and therefore empowerment, changes the status quo in society **men too are stakeholders** in women's education efforts. In heavily patriarchal constructs their buy-in is necessary for successful, long term interventions. In countries like Pakistan, reducing female illiteracy from the current unacceptable level of 60% can only happen when the family men and male community members and leaders support the right of women to receive an education. Without the required communal support, any initiative is likely to be ineffective.

Role of Women's Education in Countering Violent Extremism

Over the long history of terrorism and violent extremism across the globe, we have seen women engage in VE as recruiters, mobilizers, supporters, logisticians and also as participants. Just as they have myriad roles in VE, **women can also be full participants in CVE programs** (both CVE-relevant and CVE-specific). They have roles to play in prevention, intervention, interdiction and rehabilitation initiatives.

As "custodians of cultural, social and religious values"⁹ who are instrumental in shaping the current and future generations, women are acutely aware of their community's needs. They are thus able to not just **serve as advisors** for identifying problems they are also able to **participate in designing & implementing contextually appropriate solutions** for their communities. An example is Mindanao, Philippines where

⁹Fink, N., Barakat, R., and Shetret, Liat., *The Roles of Women in Terrorism, Conflict, and Violent Extremism*, April 2013 http://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/NCF_RB_LS_policybrief_1320.pdf

women school teachers from a village that was targeted by Abu Sayyaf for recruiting new members recognized that the boys most at risk were the ones who had either dropped out of school or were facing economic challenges. These teachers launched an after-school tutoring program aimed at at-risk youth to help keep them in school longer to reduce their vulnerability to extremist recruiting. This locally customized solution was CVE-specific in its context because of its purpose.

What is important to emphasize is that **CVE-specific programs for woman (and men) are needed to directly address the issues of extremism**. Whereas CVE-relevant educational and vocational programs are essential for healthy societies they will not be sufficient in eliminating the scourge of extremism that is rampant in many regions of the world.

Reducing Barriers to Women’s Participation in CVE

Empowering women to be fully engaged in the full spectrum of CVE roles requires a reduction in the current barriers that hinder their involvement. Listed below are recommendations that would facilitate CVE goals.

- **Increase in female educators.** Changing societal attitudes towards women, education and empowerment will take time, in some cases generations. In the meantime, local women and local NGOs that work with women provide access to households and are able to provide gender-safe spaces for women to learn. Encouraging, training and increasing the number of female instructors will make it easier for women to attend educational institutions at primary, secondary and tertiary levels without potential social censure. This will require adjusting the incentive structure to attract more female educators despite social barriers.
- **Training the trainers and curriculum reform.** Updated, locally customized curriculums and well trained female instructors are needed for both CVE-specific and CVE-relevant programs. Reforming curricula to reduce hate and bias taught to young minds, and including programs to recognize radicalization in a local context would have utility. Additionally, vocational training to improve women’s livelihood potential will uplift the general status of women.
- **Access to healthcare, judiciary and law enforcement.** In patriarchal societies like Pakistan, especially in certain regions like Peshawar and Swat, it is not easy for women to access healthcare or report criminal activity without the presence of a male guardian. As extremism has spread through the influence of groups like the Taliban and the Tehrik-e-Taliban-Pakistan (TTP), there have been times when women were even unable to leave their homes by themselves and girls were forbidden from attending school¹⁰. In situations where there is no male guardian left, female victims and survivors of terrorist attacks have been unable to secure access to basic health facilities by themselves and the government has not provided help or compensation. This has resulted in an increase in support for extremist groups who are able to provide direct

¹⁰ Chatellier, S. and Fayyaz, S. “Women Moderating Extremism in Pakistan,” The Institute for Inclusive Security, August 2012

assistance. The lack of enough female police officers also results in a lost opportunity to report criminal activity or terrorism planning.

- **CVE-specific programming for rehabilitation.** Dealing with radicalization towards violent extremism requires CVE- specific programming, not just general education or CVE-relevant programs. Educating women on recognizing signs of radicalization and providing on-ground alternatives and resources to help them protect their family members allows for early warnings before criminal activity takes place. An example of a program launched by a Pakistani woman is Paiman Alumni Trust¹¹. This program convinces mothers of youth who are starting to engage in extremism to turn their sons over to a rehabilitation program where they undergo counseling and programs for disengagement and de-radicalization. The youth are also taught vocational skills and placed in jobs by the time they graduate. This initiative is able to use women’s networks to find at-risk youth and provide interventions that help protect them. Additionally by providing job placement it is able to reduce poverty for the family itself.
- **Supporting mothers and wives of arrested or dead violent extremists.** In many cases, the person who is arrested or killed is the primary breadwinner of the family. This results in families left with limited resources and options for earning an income. In such cases, it is not unusual for mothers and wives to encourage other men from their families to join extremist causes (e.g. in Yemen¹²). There is a need to include mothers and wives of arrested or dead violent extremists into CVE programs to prevent them from sending (or supporting) more of their family members going towards extremism. This would require education about the threat and the awareness of the unacceptability of the terrorism, as well as an alternative income stream (either through support or vocational training). A legal framework that allows NGOS to engage with women for CVE purposes without fear of being labeled as providing material support is essential¹³.
- **Supporting wives of arrested violent extremists to accelerate rehabilitation.** Government support for wives and families of violent extremists has been seen to impact the openness of the individual towards rehabilitation. In the case of Malaysia, where the families were fully financially supported while the husband was serving a prison sentence for terrorist activities, it was observed that the prisoner was significantly less hostile towards the government after a visit by their spouse. This change in attitude was caused by a combination of shame at their inability to earn to support their own families and also a realization that stereotypes about the government are not necessarily accurate.

¹¹ Chatellier, S. and Fayyaz, S. “Women Roles in Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Rehabilitation in Pakistan,” The Institute for Inclusive Security, August 2012

¹² In Yemen A Woman’s Life Entangles with Al-Qaeda, Feb 2012 <http://www.dawn.com/news/1088540/in-yemen-a-womans-life-entangled-with-al-qaeda>

¹³ “Women and Terrorist Radicalization- Final Report,” OSCE, Vienna, February 2013

- **Social media as an equalizer.** In many patriarchal societies where women have limited voice and agency, social media is a channel for women to express their views and participate in national discussions with fewer societal constraints. Just as we see women who embrace VE growing their online footprint, so too can women increase their CVE activities.
- **Broadcast media as an ally.** In countries like Pakistan where 60% of the female population is illiterate, print media is not a viable medium to convey content. In this case audio or video based programming through broadcast media (e.g. radio, television) would be most effective in reaching the target audience.
- **Long term impact cycles.** Changing values and ideas is not an overnight effort and the achievement of CVE objectives (directly and indirectly) requires long-term commitment to these initiatives. Similar to infrastructure development projects that span multiple years, so should CVE programming. This would require a shift away from annual measures of effectiveness (MOE), measures of performance (MOP) and funding cycles that can constrain the design and implementation of effective programming.

Conclusion

Supporting increased enrollment in tertiary education by women in Pakistan through the “Malala Yousafzai Scholarship Act” (H.R. 3583) is an important step towards improving their role and empowering them to become change-makers in their society.

It will be important for the longer term success of the initiative that beneficiaries not use these scholarships as an opportunity to exit from their society –but rather use this personal development as an investment back into their communities. Serving their communities post-graduation can be built into the conditions of the scholarship.

Investment and reform of the educational system itself, through increased access to primary and secondary education and curricula changes will be instrumental in increasing tolerance and reducing the lure of extremism. These changes would have both direct and indirect benefit to women and to societies grappling with extremism writ large.

Development of CVE- specific, customized local curriculums must be utilized to push back against violent extremism, in addition to CVE-relevant preventative programs. The combination of both CVE-specific and CVE-relevant programs has the ability to build community resilience, empower women and counter extremism in the long term.

In a world where women are especially victimized and oppressed by extremist elements in their societies, it is heartening to see their strength as they transform themselves through education, empowerment and support into becoming an effective line of defense against violent extremism.

Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Engel and Members of the Committee, thank you for your attention, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.