UNICRI INITIATIVES: REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION OF VIOLENT EXTREMIST OFFENDERS AND COMMUNITY-BASED PROJECTS

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I. INTRODUCTION

This paper will illustrate, based on the Settings and Community-Based Initiatives, the Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Violent Extremist Offenders platforms put forward by the United Nations in accordance with the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

The notion of counter-terrorism has been materialised in a whole series of organisational mechanisms, processes and entities within the United Nations system that aim to tackle the issues of violent extremism and terrorism from all different angles so as to provide a more comprehensive approach to this multifaceted threat. Taking such a comprehensive approach and making provisions for the coordination of all these efforts is considered part of an effective Counter-Terrorism Strategy.[1]

Within the Counter-Terrorism Strategy, there are the two branches of countering violent extremism (CVE) and the preventing of violent extremism (PVE). Both are essential to reducing the risk posed by those who are currently engaged in violent extremism and those who are vulnerable and on the way to becoming engaged. In the case of the latter, it is challenging to identify which individuals would be vulnerable to becoming involved in violent extremism. As for the former, the violent extremist offender (VEO) is a high priority due to their history of engagement and the possibility that they would re-engage after entering and exiting the criminal justice system.

Many VEOs held in custody will one day be released from prison[2] and dealing with this imminent reality requires its own strategic response. Their successful rehabilitation can make the difference between a continued terrorist threat and a reformed person returning to society – and in some cases, even an individual ready to aid in the rehabilitation of future persons at risk of radicalization, by providing counter narratives. Rehabilitation and reintegration are therefore the combined stages to help an individual with their transition away from violent extremism.

The process of rehabilitation and reintegration is a personal one since every VEO has their own beliefs and experiences and will respond to rehabilitative efforts in different ways and at different times in the process. There is nevertheless space for a common conception of the scope and shape of VEO rehabilitation and reintegration efforts that gathers them into one joint process.

II. CYCLE OF PREVENTING AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

This Cycle of Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) refers to a basis for a comprehensive programmatic approach to PVE intervention. The work of the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) explores all of the stages that comprise the Cycle (see Figure 1) for ways to act on these opportunities and to enhance a comprehensive approach.[3] Inspired by the Global

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[1] United Nations General Assembly Resolution (A/RES/60/288) (2006) *The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.*
[2] *Council of Europe Handbook for Prison and Probation Services regarding Radicalisation and Violent Extremism* (2016).. European Committee on Crime Problems (CDPC) and Council for Penological Co-operation (PC-CP) 2 rev 4
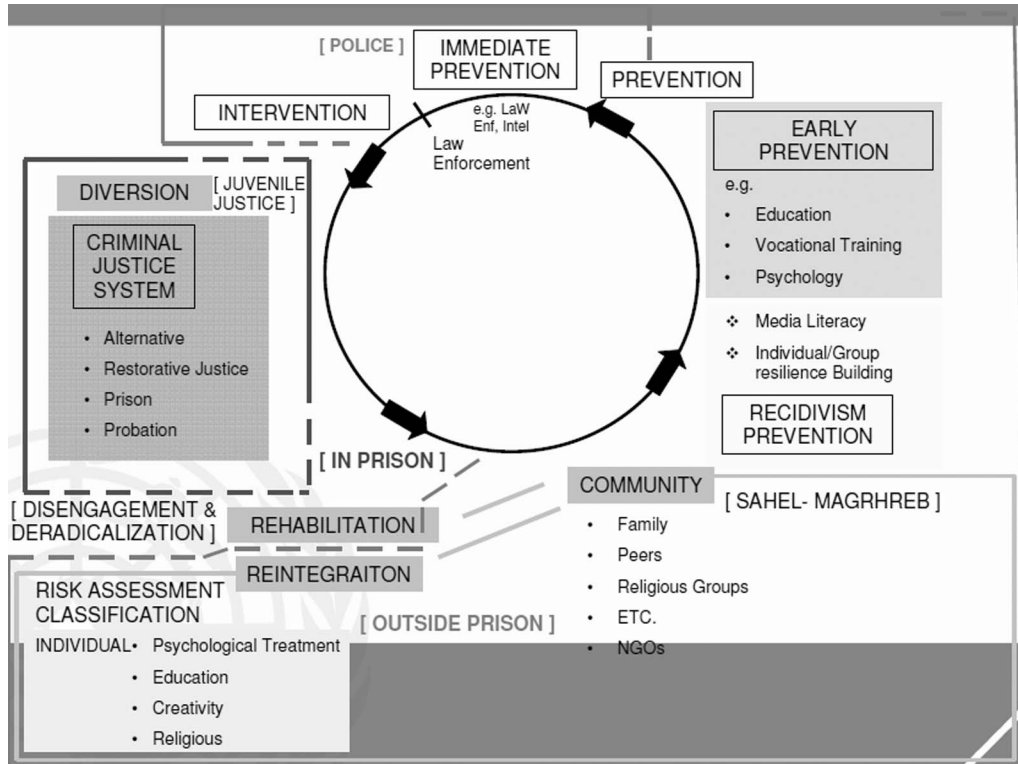
Figure 1. The cycle of preventing violent extremism[5]

Counter Terrorism Forum (GCTF)[4] life cycle and based on UNICRI's work, a cycle model has been developed with the aim to create a comprehensive model towards preventing violent extremism.

When it comes to prevention of violent extremism with a focus on the individual VEO, there are multiple opportunities to have interventions. These start at the earliest stages with PVE and continue as the offender enters and eventually exits the criminal justice system. Once they have re-entered society, whether it is after serving a custodial sentence or not, there is again a need for PVE to reduce the risk of recidivism. In this way, counter-terrorism with regard to the individual is a cycle which can be broken down into a number of stages (see Figure 1), each of which presents its own opportunities for a person to break away from violent extremism. For some, this may occur at the earliest stages but for some individuals the cycle might continue.

One of the stages of the cycle shown above is the community. The community is also one of the influential social layers surrounding each individual offender, even at their time of detention. In order for the individual to go through and sustain behavioural change, support from the community is needed[6]. Therefore, when it comes to offender rehabilitation and reintegration, communities have a crucial role to play as they can serve as the foundation to rehabilitate and reintegrate offenders in numerous ways, namely: before prison if bail is granted, after prison, or instead of custody altogether. For this reason, UNICRI has been working with the countries in the Maghreb and Sahel regions since 2009. In 2015 the Institute embarked on a pilot project launched in cooperation with the European Union.

The main objective of the project is to launch, implement and evaluate innovative projects aimed at preventing and countering radicalization, terrorist recruitment and violent extremism in the Sahel-Maghreb region and disseminate lessons learned and best practices. The Pilot Project has a particular focus on Algeria,

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[3] Klima, N. (forthcoming). '*Pathways towards an integrated and integral life-cycle approach on P/CVE in capacity building*'. UNICRI, Turin.

[4] For more information on the GCTF, see: <https://www.thegctf.org/>.

[5] Figure based on earlier work of Noel Klima, United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute – UNICRI.

[6] See Arispe, I. (2017). '*Programming community-led interventions in CVE*'. Lecture at Specialized Training on International Criminal Law and Global Threats to Peace and Security – Counter-Terrorism UNICRI, Turin.

Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad and Burkina Faso. Smaller, innovative projects were launched under this more large-scale initiative. These projects targeted groups within civil society, particularly youth, women, religious groups, the media, and community leaders.

Engagement of civil society and non-state actors is the main focus, as well as cross-border cooperation. These elements are essential in the community-based initiatives to ensure a comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy.

III. COMMUNITY-BASED INITIATIVES

Recognising the fact that VEOs come from, live in, and return to communities makes community-based initiatives indispensable for many P/CVE efforts. No community can consider itself immune since VEOs have been shown to come from all different backgrounds. The importance of communities is highlighted in the UN Security Council's *Foreign Fighters Resolution* 2178 (2014), which recommends all Member States "to engage relevant local communities and non-governmental actors in developing strategies to counter the violent extremist narrative that can incite terrorist acts, address the conditions conducive to the spread of violent extremism, which can be conducive to terrorism".[7]

Many PVE and counter-radicalisation efforts are geared towards building community resilience to violent extremism. The foundation of such efforts provides for a deeper understanding of the radicalisation phenomenon, the associated risk factors, and indicators[8] for when it happens. In general terms, radicalisation is the process by which individuals believe that non-state violence is a valid means to address their grievances or to foster social and political change. There are a variety of risk factors which have been identified as rendering an individual more susceptible to becoming radicalised. While there is no absolute consensus on what all these factors are, some key areas include individual socio-psychological factors, social factors, economic factors, and beliefs and ideologies.[9] What leads a person to violent extremism is likely to be some combination of push factors (negative perceptions of features of the current societal environment) and pull factors (the perceived positive features of adopting violent extremist identity).

Deconstructing the combinations of risk factors in another way, they can also be grouped according to whether they are structural motivators, individual incentives, or enabling factors, as described in Table 1.

Risk Factor combinations:	Can include the following, depending on the specific context:
Structural Motivators	Repression, corruption, unemployment, inequality, discrimination, a history of hostility between identify groups, external state interventions etc.
Individual Incentives	A sense of purpose, adventure, belonging, acceptance, status, material enticements, etc.
Enabling Factors	The presence of radical mentors, access to online radical communities, social networks with VE associations, access to weapons, an absence of family support, etc.

Table 1. Source: RUSI

There are a series of stages to developing a community-based initiative for P/CVE or counter-radicalisation. A well-planned approach is needed so that the initiative has a greater chance of success in reducing risk. Figure 2 shows the flow of these stages, as well as some of the main activities involved in each one.

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[7] *The 'Foreign Fighters'* Resolution. Paragraph 16.S/RES/2178 (2014). The United Nations Security Council.
[8] Schmid, A. (2013) '*Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review'*. The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism Research paper.
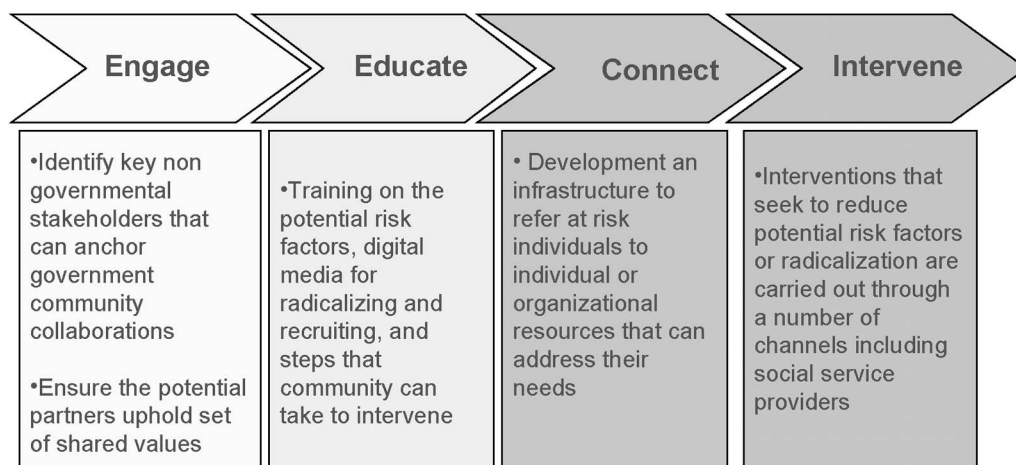[9] See *The Root Causes of Violent Extremism* (2016). RAN Issue Paper.

Engage	Educate	Connect	Intervene
•Identify key non governmental stakeholders that can anchor government community collaborations •Ensure the potential partners uphold set of shared values	•Training on the potential risk factors, digital media for radicalizing and recruiting, and steps that community can take to intervene	• Development an infrastructure to refer at risk individuals to individual or organizational resources that can address their needs	•Interventions that seek to reduce potential risk factors or radicalization are carried out through a number of channels including social service providers

Figure 2. Stages of development of community-based initiatives[10]

Community-led initiatives to prevent and intervene in the radicalisation process can have an impact in ways that are responsive to local realities. This equally applies to rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives for VEOs, which come in different forms. First, the community is itself a source for external experts who can be integrated into the team that is supporting the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders. Such experts include local religious leaders[11] and well-known charismatic figureheads[12], who, in coming from the same community as the VEO, are well placed to build a good degree of legitimacy in the eyes of the offender.

Another form of rehabilitation and reintegration initiative is one that is entirely based in the community. The difficulty with this can be that community actors who are trained and equipped to run counter-radicalisation initiatives are likely to be few in number. Steps to overcome this challenge include engaging community actors, providing them with training, and creating a supportive network around them by making helpful connections. Ultimately, they will be empowered to deliver interventions.[13] The whole community is also then in a stronger position to build resilience to violent extremism. Some of the programmes will be small-scale and specialised, such as youth projects or engaging with community leaders. This allows for a programme to be put in place with fewer initial resources and for more concrete aims to be set, usually, but not exclusively, to reduce offenders' potential risk factors.

One advantage of community-based programmes for all kinds of offenders, and not just VEOs, is they can be alternatives to custody, which may reflect the best interest of the individual. Mechanisms for diversion from formal legal proceedings are a means of channelling someone away from involvement in crime and, in the appropriate conditions, can be used in cases of violent extremism. This is especially important as a consideration for juvenile offenders who stand to gain a lot from the rehabilitative and non-punitive effects.[14] Diversion can be instigated from the time of apprehension (before arrest) to any point up until the final disposition hearing (the sentencing stage of the juvenile proceedings) and during pre-trial detention wherever it occurs.[15] These mechanisms would then operate in the community and can involve different actors from it.

Communities are sometimes reluctant to accept the return of former VEOs.[16]. This is due to an

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[10] Arispe, I. (2017). '*Programming community-led interventions in CVE*'. Lecture at Specialized Training on International Criminal Law and Global Threats to Peace and Security – Counter-Terrorism UNICRI, Turin.

[11] *Additional Guidance on the Role of Religious Scholars and other Ideological Experts in Rehabilitation and Reintegration Programmes* (2013). United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute

[12] *Roundtable Expert Meeting & Conference on Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Violent Extremist Offenders: Core Principles & Good practices* (2012). ICCT Background Paper.

[13] Arispe, I. (2017). '*Programming community-led interventions in CVE*'. Lecture at Specialized Training on International Criminal Law and Global Threats to Peace and Security – Counter-Terrorism UNICRI, Turin.

[14] *Neuchâtel Memorandum on Good Practices for Juvenile Justice in a Counterterrorism Context* (2015), Global Counterterrorism Forum.

[15] Mazzarese, D. & Bologna, C. (forthcoming). '*Alternative Measures and Diversion in Youth Juvenile Justice*', in Klima, N. (forthcoming) '*Pathways towards an integrated and integral life-cycle approach on P/CVE in capacity building*'. UNICRI, Turin.

understandable fear and resentment held against this kind of offender. It is a considerable challenge to overcome in terms of reducing negative stigma and preparing the receiving community to accept the VEO both passively and actively[17]. Establishing good relations with communities and reaching out to the disaffected[18] in particular are the basis of soliciting any community backing and involvement in VEO rehabilitation, as indeed with any P/CVE initiative. Strategic communication between stakeholders inside and outside these communities is a useful initiative in this regard.[19] In cases where criminal conviction of strongly suspected VEOs is unlikely, including returning foreign terrorist fighters in communities may be the sole opportunity to rehabilitate, making their engagement all the more important.

Monitoring and evaluation are vital steps in community-based initiatives, as they are in any programme.[20] This makes clear goals and indicators of success all the more important to have at the design stage of programming. Initiatives can then be evaluated against these indicators to see if the extent to which they achieve their stated goals. There are notable challenges in this process, which include:

- Issues of accessing the target population;
- A highly sensitive topic;
- Often indirect and intangible outcomes;
- The lack of baseline data.

Planning the programme evaluation early on helps to prepare for these issues before they arise. What needs to be taken into account at the planning stage are the goals and indicators, the methods and instruments for data collection, the frequency of data collection, and identifying actors who can facilitate this process.

As mentioned in the former section, a UNICRI-led initiative on communities and countering radicalisation and violent extremism was piloted in the Sahel-Maghreb region. Smaller, innovative projects were launched under this more large-scale initiative. These projects targeted groups within civil society, particularly youth, women, religious groups, the media, and community leaders.

In addition to programmes based purely in the community, such as the UNICRI-led initiative piloted in the Sahel-Maghreb, there is also an opportunity for initiatives that bridge some of the stages of the cycle for more continuity in the rehabilitation and reintegration efforts.[21] An example already given is the preparation of communities through strategic communication when it is anticipated that VEOs will re-enter them. Other examples are involvement of community actors with pre-release programmes, halfway houses, and actors from prison-based programmes collaborating with community members to prepare for the offender's reintegration. This acknowledges once again the importance of communities effecting sustained behavioural change for the individual offender by taking an active role in the process.

IV. CONCLUSION

The community represents a stage imbedded in the cycle of opportunities for counter-terrorism intervention focussed on the individual VEO. The reasons for this are that communities are the societal settings for a usually large and diverse group of people, any of whom could be at risk of being radicalised to violence. Thus, community-based initiatives are instrumental to the early prevention stage. They are likewise the settings where convicted VEOs re-enter society. This can be a very delicate issue because of a reluctance to accept these offenders. Efforts to engage communities generally through strategic communication, and community actors specifically as they could be directly involved in VEO reintegration and rehabilitation, are

[16] UNICRI training for religious leaders, Bamako, Mali, 27–28 April 2017.

[17] See Veldhuis, T. (2012) *Designing rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for violent extremist offenders: A realist approach*. ICCT Research Paper;

[18] Lister, C. (2015) *Returning foreign fighters: Criminalization or reintegration?* Brookings Institution.

[19] For examples of this see *Handbook on the Management of Violent Extremist Prisoners and the Prevention of Radicalization to Violence in Prisons* (2016) United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

[20] Arispe, I. (forthcoming). '*Evaluating Counter Violent Extremism(CVE): A Fundamental Challenge to be Addressed*', UNICRI, Turin.

[21] Bologna (2017). '*The United Nations in Countering Terrorism and Introduction to UNICRI Initiatives*', UNICRI, Turin.

the first step in starting a community-based initiative. Community involvement at these preventative and rehabilitative stages are of course the major focus in the discussion about community-based initiatives. In reality though, the community never stops being important, no matter where the offender is in the cycle. Creating bridges between stages of the cycle is another way to enhance the existing opportunities for the successful rehabilitation of offenders on their way to leaving violent extremism behind.

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