FREEDOM FROM FEAR
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EXTREMISM
NO VICTORY IN VIOLENCE

No peace without development, justice and inclusion

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United Nations
Interregional Crime and Justice
Research Institute

GHENT UNIVERSITY

FREEDOM FROM FEAR
MAGAZINE

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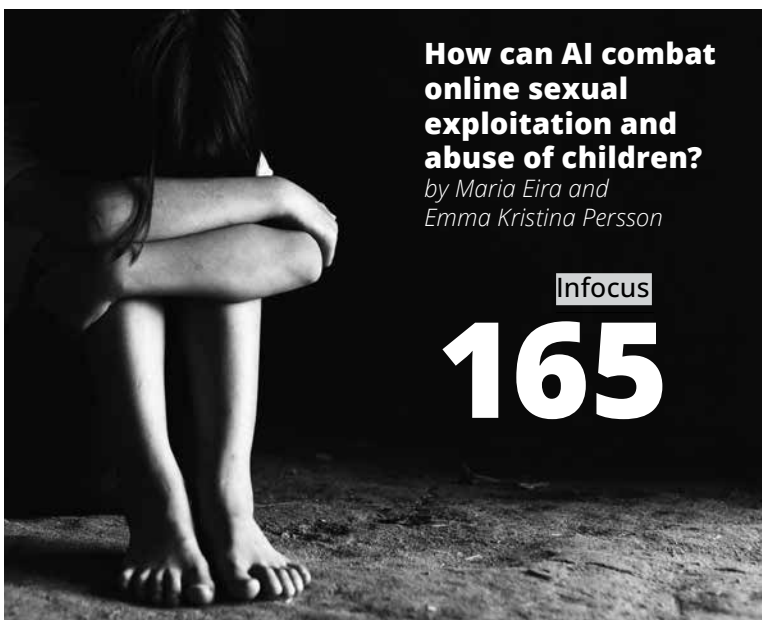
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Staying ahead of the curve in efforts to counter terrorism and violent extremism

by Antonia Marie De Meo
Director of UNICRI

This year began with the harrowing news of a terrorist attack at a mosque in Peshawar, Pakistan. The world watched and listened in horror as the death toll rose from an initial 30 to over 100 within hours as more bodies were uncovered from the debris. More than 200 people, mostly police officers, were injured. This daring suicide bomb attack at a mosque in a police compound was a stark reminder of the imminent danger posed by terrorism and violent extremism, and an example of their effect. This attack was among a number that occurred in the first quarter of the year, with varying degrees of impact on lives and infrastructure.

Terrorism and violent extremism are the bane of our time. From individual lone-wolf mass shootings to suicide bombings, the methods vary but the impacts are devastating. Beyond loss of lives, injuries and the destruction of infrastructure, the twin scourges of terrorism and violent extremism threaten democracy, adversely affect stability of governments, and retard economic development. Such incidents are difficult to foretell and forestall due to their pervasive and unpredictable nature.

As the United Nations research and training institute for criminal justice and crime prevention, UNICRI has a vested interest in enhancing safety and security. The Institute closely monitors trends and developments, with a view to enhancing the capacity of Member States and partners to prevent, curtail or respond to such incidents. UNICRI implements an array of programmes that contribute to counter-terrorism efforts and works with UN entities, governments, and civil society actors in its whole-of-society approach.

As a member of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, UNICRI contributes to coordinated efforts across the United Nations system to prevent and counter terrorism. Its pivotal role includes supporting Member States to translate the good practices identified in the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy into national policies. UNICRI works in three priority areas, namely: a) enhancing efforts for rehabilitation and reintegration of violent extremist offenders and returning foreign terrorist fighters, both inside and outside prisons; b) supporting local communities and civil society organizations in preventing and countering radicalization and extremist activity; and c) working with vulnerable populations, particularly at-risk youth, to strengthen prevention of violent extremism through empowerment and resilience.

This issue of the *Freedom From Fear* magazine highlights trends related to terrorism and violent extremism. It illustrates efforts by UNICRI and partners to stay ahead of the curve through diverse initiatives. From analysing new tools used by terrorist actors to new hot spots for terrorist attacks, this issue shows evolving trends as terrorists and violent extremists adapt to a changing world. A crucial element is the nexus between terrorism and transnational organized crime, a mutually profitable symbiosis that sustains both terrorist and criminal groups and activities. This issue also assesses the emerging link between climate change and violent extremism, and its resultant threat to peace and security, while also highlighting

gender-based norms of violent extremism. It amplifies the voices of terrorism survivors and their role in preventing radicalization, as well as lessons learned from disengaging from violent extremism. It also examines how sports can support strategies to address violent extremism and promote inclusion. Lastly, to promote justice and accountability, this issue looks at the investigation, prosecution and adjudication of radiological and nuclear terrorism.

Information and communication technologies (ICT) is an emerging area that presents both threats and opportunities for terrorists and violent extremists, as well as counter-terrorism actors. In this technological age, with the imminent possibility of new and emerging technologies being used for terrorist purposes, it is crucial to understand the potential misuses of technology and identify the gaps in legal frameworks or governance systems, to better facilitate investigations and prosecutions to hold criminals and terrorists accountable for malicious use of these technologies.

UNICRI has been identifying and analysing the impact of technological changes on trends and patterns in crime, including terrorism, and exploring the potential opportunities technology presents for law enforcement and counter-terrorism actors. Working with the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), UNICRI looked extensively at trends and developments in cybercrime, extrapolating potential malicious uses of AI for terrorist purposes. The Institute's report Algorithms and Terrorism

observes that terrorist organizations have tended to use various forms of 'low-tech terrorism', such as firearms and vehicles. It concludes that the current capability of groups such as Da'esh to effectively deploy AI is unlikely, but as it becomes more widespread and the barriers to entry lower, the risks increase. In this context, the crime-as-a-service model, through which terrorist groups and individuals seek services offered by cyber criminals on the dark web, may enable terrorists to launch more technologically advanced cyber-attacks.

UNICRI has also been monitoring the impact of technology around Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) terrorism. In 2021, UNICRI and UNOCT published the report "Advances in Science and Technology to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction Terrorism". This report elaborates possible risks associated with the malicious use of science and technology to develop and deploy WMD and identifies solutions to prevent and combat WMD terrorism.

The misuse of ICT to generate and spread conspiracy theories and disinformation is another priority area because acts of terrorism and violent extremism are often linked to hatred and racism, xenophobia, islamophobia, and anti-Semitism. Early during the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICRI conducted a study, "Stop the Virus of Disinformation", on the malicious use of social media. In January 2023, UNICRI released a new Handbook to Combat CBRN Disinformation for practitioners of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear risk mitigation to debunk maliciously generated

false information by non-State actors, including terrorists.

In October 2022, UNICRI published the report Perceptions of climate change and violent extremism: Listening to local communities in Chad. This explores community members' experiences and perceptions on the role of climate change and degradation of natural resources in exacerbating local conflicts, as well as the impact of climate change on violent extremist groups' recruitment narratives. This was followed in December 2022 by the launch of a project to build gender-sensitive resilience to violent extremism in the Sahel.

UNICRI recognises youth vulnerability to recruitment and radicalization to terrorism, as well as their important role to help prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism and promote peace and security. UNICRI is working with the UNOCT-led United Nations Global Sports Programme's #MoreThanAGame campaign that targets youth and highlights stories of professional athletes and young people whose lives have been changed through sport. The campaign, launched on 18 November alongside the 2022 FIFA World Cup, was attended by youth who are training to be practitioners to prevent violent extremism (PVE) and promote peace. Campaign

partners marked the first International Day for the Prevention of Violent Extremism as and when Conducive to Terrorism on 12 February 2023 with sport-based PVE activities.

UNICRI contributes to enhancing knowledge about the nexus between transnational organized crime and terrorism and assists Member States to incorporate effective measures in their crime prevention and counter-terrorism strategies. This includes initiatives aimed at improving policies to prevent the trafficking of persons, drugs, arms, and CBRN materials, both for profit and operational use. Its Policy Toolkit on The Hague Good Practices on the Nexus between Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorism, published in 2019, equips policymakers and experts to address the Nexus in various regions.

While UNICRI prioritises human lives in the global fight against terrorism and violent extremism, it also focuses on threats to vulnerable targets, including critical infrastructure and public places. Terrorist attacks on critical infrastructure can significantly disrupt the functioning of government and the private sector, while attacks in public places can lead to multiple fatalities. Potential attacks against vulnerable targets have become increasingly at-

tractive to terrorist organizations because they can be carried out with minimal resources and little to no complex planning.

The Institute works closely with various actors to enhance safety and security for vulnerable targets. In September 2022 the United Nations Global Programme on Countering Terrorist Threats Against Vulnerable Targets, led by UNOCT and jointly implemented with the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), UNICRI and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), launched five specialized modules dedicated to the protection of vulnerable targets against terrorist attacks. The modules incorporate principles and policies developed by UNICRI over its 20-year history of developing counterterrorism and security policies for major events and tourist destinations.

This issue of the *Freedom From Fear* magazine focuses on diverse but critical topics related to violent extremism and terrorism, their far-reaching and cross-cutting consequences, and preventative efforts that are underway.

I hope you'll enjoy reading the magazine, learn from the authors who have shared their expertise, and be inspired to act against terrorism and violent extremism within your sphere of influence.

"

Non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man.

Mahatma Gandhi

Preventing/countering violent extremism and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: an impact nexus

by Noel Klima

> **The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development represents an opportunity to harmonise the economic, social, and environmental aspects of living.**

Introduction

Today's society experiences immense challenges to sustainable development. However, with challenges come great opportunities. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development represents an opportunity to harmonise the economic, social, and environmental aspects of living. The 2030 Agenda was adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 and came into effect on 1 January 2016. It provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet. The 2030 Agenda includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with 169 associated targets which are integrated and indivisible. The SDGs constitute an urgent call for collective action by all countries in all continents. The Agenda calls for shared responsibilities, universality, engagement, and discussion. The SDGs explore the causes of our most pressing problems and provide answers to the contexts and needs at both local and global levels. The 2030 Agenda strikes a balance between human needs on the one hand, and the environment on the other hand, while trying to understand the complex dynamics of interaction between the two.

The concept of countering violent extremism (CVE) and preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) emerged more than 10 years ago in the post-9/11 context out of concerns to address the root causes of 'terrorism' (Frazer & Nünlist, 2015). Before, the approach to counter-terrorism was largely focused on security responses, despite the proven inadequacy of such approaches. CVE has become a popular term used by many, from governments, the academia, and NGOs. It often refers to non-coercive attempts to reduce involvement in terrorism. CVE initiatives can vary a great deal, from projects that are aimed at changing behaviour to programmes that challenge ideas and beliefs, or initiatives that commit to building resilience and social cohesion. Those approaches can be based on engagement and outreach, capacity building and development aid, education and training, messaging and public relations campaigns, and many more (Kundnani & Hayes, 2018).

> **The Agenda calls for shared responsibilities, universality, engagement, and discussion**

P/CVE is thus part of Member States' broader counter-terrorism agenda. P/CVE approaches address the contributing factors and 'root causes' of violent extremism, such as discrimination and marginalisation, poor governance, and lack of accountability of the State. For this reason, successful P/CVE approaches must be underpinned by human rights and the rule of law in communities affected by violent extremism. Ideally, the P/CVE agenda should also actively work to strengthen human rights and the rule of law. Additionally, P/CVE approaches are multidisciplinary. The efforts, resources, and insights of different actors such as law enforcement and intelligence agencies are relevant, as well as those of a vast network of actors at the local, national, regional, and global levels; these can include municipal services (prevention, welfare, youth, integration, education, etc.); civil society organisations operating in different domains; religious and community leaders; healthcare workers; teachers;

sports club trainers, etc. (Hardyns, Klima & Pauwels, 2022).

> **Successful P/CVE approaches must be underpinned by human rights and the rule of law in communities affected by violent extremism**

A decade after the first pilot projects, CVE approaches have been adopted across several continents, and are still being developed further. This globalisation of the P/CVE policies is one of the most significant developments in the counter-terrorism (CT) policy. The impact of P/CVE is also not to be underestimated. It has had significant effects on the rule of law and on the perceived neutrality and fairness of states. Paying attention to the conditions that lead to the occurrence of violent extremism has generated greater awareness of the direct links between extremist violence and poor governance, accountability gaps in domestic law, and the repressive use of counter-terrorism as a means to extinguish legitimate democratic expression and participation (Kundnani & Hayes, 2018). Additionally, P/CVE policies have significantly widened the range of methods used by governments for countering

terrorism and shifted their target from terrorist organisations to religious ideology and identity issues. The emergence of P/CVE also led to a new vocabulary and a new set of extrajudicial actors who are often to be consulted (Kundnani & Hayes, 2018).

In the framework of the P/CVE policies several points of interconnection (such as poverty, social political exclusion, poor governance, economic dimensions, operational integrity, security, etc.) can be identified. Significant progress has been made in meeting many development challenges and connecting them with P/CVE goals. Nonetheless, the interlinkage between the 2030 Agenda and the P/CVE agenda and the potential contributions that a more robust integration might bring are still understudied.

Nexus of factors

P/CVE, as a discipline, is situated at the intersection of development, peace and security, and human rights (Rothermel, 2020). Underlying factors of poverty, inequality, marginalisation, lack of access to justice, and human rights infractions endanger social cohesion and could boost radicalisation (Werther-Pietsch, 2018; Kuhn, 2020). Vice versa, violent extremism and terrorism jeopardise peace and security and produce devastating effects on hu-

man rights, the economy, and the environment (Rajah et al., 2019).

Member States continue to face tremendous challenges across the world in tackling violent extremist threats. The nature and seriousness of the violence varies but can have both short and long-term implications for societies and the environment. Terrorist acts can destabilise states and governments, undermine civil society, and threaten economic and social development. Furthermore, the freedom of citizens, including their freedom from physical threat, freedom of religion, and freedom of expression could be impeded (Kessels & Nemr, 2016). Acts of terrorism could also threaten international relations and undermine cooperation between states, including cooperation for development. In addition, terrorism can be linked to transnational organised crime, with converging interests in many illicit activities such as arms trafficking and illegal transfers of biological and chemical materials which can have dramatic environmental effects (Rajah et al., 2019). Lastly, violent extremism intersects with and is increasingly part of the context in which development organisations operate. Violent extremist groups endanger and divert the delivery of development assistance and aid services. In certain cases, terror-

ism and violent extremism are the primary factors contributing to the need for continued assistance and the failure to meet the SDGs (Kessels & Nemr, 2016).

> **Violent extremist groups endanger and divert the delivery of development assistance and aid services**

Those common denominators of violent radicalisation and the detrimental effects of violent extremism can thus be linked with the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda, which strives to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. The SDGs can directly and indirectly help our efforts to counter terrorism by addressing the conditions conducive to its spread. The SDG and P/CVE agendas have a lot of factors in common. These include, their emphasis on strengthening civil society resilience, particularly women and youth's resilience, and empowering local agents of change; building social cohesion, and increasing the role that inclusive cities can play in this regard; the need for government to be responsive to citizens' needs; and the importance of respecting human rights and addressing

grievances and inequality (Anderlini & Rosand, 2019).

However, an overemphasis on countering violent extremism without taking into account the interconnection with the SDGs leads to increased funding for security-oriented programmes and a decrease in funding for the local priorities – development and peacebuilding issues – many of which are critical to addressing the structural and other drivers of violent extremism (Anderlini & Rosand, 2019). It is thus crucial to recognise the nexus of factors of sustainable development and violent extremism and integrate the two agendas in a more precise and effective manner.

Examples of interconnection/ integration between P/CVE and SDGs

Several attempts to integrate or align the P/CVE agenda with the sustainable development agenda can be identified.

Firstly, there are close parallels between the recommendations of the UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (2016) and many of the targets of the SDG 16. These include developing effective, accountable, and transparent institutions (16.6); promoting the rule of law and ensuring equal access to justice (16.3);

and strengthening relevant national institutions to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime (16.a). For example, recommendation 50.a, which urges Member States to review all national legislation, policies, strategies, and practices aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism to ascertain whether they are firmly grounded in respect for human rights and the rule of law, and whether they put in place national mechanisms designed to ensure compliance and to take measures to strengthen the rule of law, repealing discriminatory legislation, and implementing policies and laws that combat discrimination and exclusion, is linked with target 16.10.1 which states the importance of public access to information and the protection of fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements as its objective.

> **MIL empowers citizens, including children and youth, with competencies related to media, information, ICT and other aspects of literacy which are needed for the 21st century**

Moreover, the Media and Information Literacy (MIL) concept, which tries to promote media and information literacy as a tool for reinforcing human rights, countering radicalisation, and extremism is according to UNESCO is "very much intune with Goal 16 of the SDGs' to "promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels." It mentions: "MIl empowers citizens, including childrenand youth, with competenciesrelated to media, information, ICT and other aspects of literacy which are needed for the 21st century" (Sakamoto, 2016, p.65). A concrete example of a project within the MIL concept is the Connection project "Civic Education partnership Germany-Morocco", where good experiences with trainings of youth and adult members of civil society in the development of local SDG development plans are created, keeping in mind the increasing regional tensions caused by radical groups (Röhlinger, 2016).

There is also a common thread between the objectives and priorities of the National Youth Policy (NYP) and the SDGs as the case of India shows (Singh, 2016). The youth leaders have been systematically sensitised and educated about the NYP ob-

jectives and priorities, as well as the SDGs (Singh, 2016). Additionally, the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact (GCCC) represents the cross-cutting quality of P/CVE in its mandate to coordinate counter-terrorism efforts across the three pillars (peace and security, sustainable development, human rights and humanitarian affairs) of work of the United Nations (UN-OCT, 2018; Rothermel, 2020). Furthermore, one of the latest UN frameworks for CT and PVE, 'Preventing Violent Extremism through Inclusive Development and the Promotion of Tolerance and Respect for Diversity', was launched in May 2016 and revised in February 2017. This framework emphasised the incorporation of SDG 16 (Richards, 2020). The work of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) also promotes the SDGs in several ways: while disarmament in itself contributes to global anti-terrorist efforts, the Organisation also facilitates cooperation and capacity building and strengthens existing counter-terrorismstrategies (Rajah et al., 2019).

A number of countries have already underscored the synergy between P/CVE and development. Australia recognises that violent extremism is a development issue directly threatening poverty reduction, stability, and economic growth objectives and has in-

creased the role of its aid programmes in CVE approaches. Denmark released a plan titled 'Principles Governing Danish Development Assistance for the Fight Against the New Terrorism', in 2004, becoming one of the first countries to acknowledge the link between security and development. The Danish principles underline that security is necessary for development and that ensuring stability and security can be investments in poverty reduction and economic growth. Norway released an action plan in 2014 detailing its efforts to improve preventive measures to counter violent extremism. The action plan acknowledges that broader prevention encompasses reducing poverty, improving conditions for youth, and fighting marginalisation. In the United Kingdom, the Department for International Development (DFID) is scanning all current and new development projects for potential CVE relevance. Through this assessment, DFID aims to understand when projects may need dual (development and CVE) objectives that can be mutually supportive. In the United States, a 2011 USAID policy on violent extremism and insurgency was approved, this policy recognises the role development can play in addressing the social, economic, and governance grievances that drive violent extremism. Furthermore, the European Union launched a European

Security Strategy that states that security is a requirement of development. The 'European Consensus on Development' statement in 2006 also recognises the need for conflict prevention, resolution, and peacebuilding and for addressing the root causes of violent conflict (e.g., poverty, weak governance, human rights abuses, gender inequality, etc.). In a 2011 development policy document, the European Commission (2011, p.11) argued that the European Union's "development, foreign and security policy initiatives should be linked so as to create a more coherent approach to peace, state-building, poverty reduction and the underlying causes of conflict." At the level of the United Nations, global citizenship education has been taken up as a central feature of both the new global development compact (SDG 4) and the Preventing Violent Extremism through Education Strategy (Kessels & Nemr, 2016).

Indirect connection

SDG 16 calls for the support of resilient and inclusive societies in their struggle for peace. Strategies include mediation, conflict transformation, dialogue, and support to local facilitators in peace processes, access to justice, meaningful participation, and fair institutions (Werther-Pietsch, 2018). All those strategies

> **SDGs have also an impact on P/CVE by reframing P/CVE approaches and providing vulnerable populations with innovative economic, social, and political participation opportunities.**

aim to change the balances of power within society. They are also crucial to counter violent extremism in society. In addition, political stability and an absence of extremist violence/terrorism have a positive effect on public trust which can be a contributing factor to reaching the SDGs by 2030.

The impact of the SDGs on P/CVE approaches

The sustainable development goals already had a tremendous impact on P/CVE approaches. Recently, more holistic counter-terrorism strategies have focused on prevention and sustainable development, engaging with civil society, and proactively preventing violent extremism (Rajah et al., 2019). This could, however, be expanded. It is

important to concretise the impact that has to be derived from the SDG perspective on peace architecture. Since the interface between security and development progressively forms part of a broader constitutionalisation process in international law, it is possible that there might be a creation of a consistent body of international law leading up to a status where states internally perform along globally agreed constitutional principles, i.e., 'whole-of-actors' Roadmaps to Peace with binding effects on all partners involved, which would shape international relations beyond the UN Charter (Werter-Pietsch, 2018).

SDGs also have an impact on P/CVE by reframing approaches and providing vulnerable populations with innovative economic, social, and political participation opportunities to

create meaningful alternatives to violence and by encouraging partnerships across sectors to develop such programmes sustainably. When analysing the UN Sustainable Development Goals in their entirety, as a holistic agenda to eradicate poverty and hunger, foster human development, human rights, and peace, and ensure environment and ecosystems' health, it becomes clear that the financing of P/CVE is important (Schiano et al., 2017). Additionally, SDGs can serve as an entry-point for tackling factors that contribute to the spread of violent extremism, but through a more neutral and empowering agenda with positive effects (Anderlini & Rosand, 2019). Lastly, the sustainable development goals have also led to efforts to increase the connection between several existing UN gender agendas, such as the Women, Peace, and Securi-

ty (WPS) agenda and the P/CVE context (Rothermel, 2020). Considering and including gender is often presented as contributing to the smooth integration of security and development into the 'holistic' aspirations of the P/CVE agenda.

Relevant actors

> A core feature for both the P/CVE and SDG 16 agendas is the call for whole-of-society engagement involving multi-stakeholder partnerships between actors from national and local governments, the private sector, civil society, the media, and academia. Local governments such as cities, municipalities, and their actors, such as mayors, are, similarly, focused on addressing the practical concerns of their citizens that cut across the different global agendas, including those related to P/CVE and SDG 16 (Anderlini & Rosand, 2019). The difficult questions about social integration, polarisation, hate, and violent extremism that mayors encounter in their daily work cannot be viewed separately from the provision of local needs including housing, psychosocial, healthcare, education, jobs, and more. The actions of states are also critical given that research suggests that the role of

the State and the law enforcement and governance institutions is crucial in promoting narratives of injustice and generating grievances that can contribute to violent radicalisation.

Both the SDGs and the different P/CVE approaches put primary responsibility for implementation on Member States. While the importance of civil society and other actors is recognised, the scope of their role is defined by the priorities and internal political agendas of national governments. The political dimension of countering violent extremist interventions is thus considerable. In recent years, the engagement of civil society organisations for peace, human rights, and democracy experienced a continued downward trend, known as the phenomenon of shrinking space. In certain circumstances, e.g., in ungoverned and weak states, legislation all too often tends to cut down and restrain political life (Werther-Pietsch, 2018). However, civil society should be the primary driver of the transition of CVE approaches since they are able to facilitate increased participation of vulnerable and marginalised groups and to broker increased collaboration for social indicators monitoring in the context of the SDGs.

Therefore, vulnerable populations should be provided with innovative economic, social, and political participation opportunities to create meaningful alternatives to violence. Citizen engagement is crucial in reframing P/CVE approaches in light of the SDG agenda. Accordingly, sustainable partnerships across sectors to realise those opportunities are critical (Schiano et al., 2017).

> **Citizen engagement is crucial in reframing P/CVE approaches in light of the SDG agenda.**

Lastly, both the SDG and P/CVE agenda aim to maximise the contributions of young people and women in both countering violent ideologies and working as peacebuilders. More attention, however, should be paid to the effectiveness and sustainability of initiatives that include and engage youth and women, as well as holistic development priorities and the participation in decision-making of both groups. (Anderlini & Rosand, 2019; Pulubuhu et al., 2017).

Links with specific Sustainable Development Goals

SDG 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

CVE approaches cannot only be linked to SDG 16. SDG 1 aims to end poverty in all its forms everywhere. Poverty is more than the lack of income and resources to ensure a sustainable livelihood. It also takes the form of hunger and malnutrition, limited access to education and other basic services, social discrimination and exclusion, as well as the lack of opportunities to participate in decision-making, which are all conditions conducive to violent extremism.

SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

SDG 3 implies that the role of health should be reconsidered, including its relationship with the concept of 'well-being'. Good living conditions are fundamental to well-being. **A change to a mental health and public health approach might be therefore necessary in the P/CVE field.** There is a larger prevalence of the range of mental health problems such as psychosis, personality disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression, in persons who commit or want to commit violent extremist acts in comparison with other groups in society (Logan, 2022). Integrating a public health approach in developing CVE-related programmes might destigmatise the issue of wanting or needing to seek help, as well as having the resources and ability to access advice and services since this is an issue that the medical system has dealt with over the past decade. This is, among other factors, due to policy decisions that created adverse health outcomes and mistrust within minority communities. Furthermore, public health could contribute to policy making and programme development, thereby helping to shift CVE away from its dependence on law enforcement and closer to mental health education, youth development, and other human services sectors. For example, an investment in a child's spectacles can potentially be a violence prevention strategy, it may prevent a child from going down a potentially destructive path by simply offering tools to refocus on school. Many health activities may not be CVE-specific, but are often CVE-relevant. Thus, **mental health and public health services can greatly contribute to targeted violence reduction.** The 10 Essential Functions of Public Health can provide guidance about how the public health approach can contribute to preventing extremist violence (National Academies of Sciences, 2017).

SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Both the Plan of Action to prevent violent extremism and the 2030 agenda mention the importance of quality education. Education plays a key role in promoting shared world values and fostering cultural dialogue, mutual understanding, and social integration (van der Vet, 2020). **As part of the struggle against poverty and social marginalisation, every child must receive a quality education** which should include "teaching respect for human rights and diversity, fostering critical thinking, promoting media and digital literacy, and developing the behavioural and socioemotional skills that can contribute to peaceful coexistence and tolerance" (United Nations, 2016, p.1). Goal 4.7 of the Agenda includes very similar aims. This strengthens students' resilience and can prevent them from seeking answers from less reliable sources of information, which may be manipulated by violent extremist recruiters (UNESCO, 2017). Education is also emphasised in the SDGs as having the potential to promote a culture of peace and non-violence.

SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Gender equality and women's empowerment is not only a specific SDG (SDG 5) but is also considered a cross-cutting theme that affects the achievement of all other SDGs. It is thus important to mainstream a gender perspective in CVE approaches. Misconceptions about women's motivation and recruitment into terrorist organisations or violent extremist groups lead to counter-extremism policies that build on those misconceptions (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2016). A gendered interpretation of extremist violence recognises the often-invisible role of women in their varied roles as preventers, supporters, perpetrators, and survivors of violent extremism. It is crucial to understand agency in terrorism and in the context of the criminal justice system and to make sure that the communication material promoting the P/CVE project/programme does not reinforce gender stereotypes or increase existing inequalities feed the root causes of violent extremism and exacerbate vulnerability to it (Speckhard, 2021; Pearson et al., 2020).

SDG 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

The prevalence of water-related terrorism is increasing. This mostly includes attacking water infrastructure such as pipes, dams, weirs, levees, and treatment plants associated with water storage, treatment, and delivery. Terrorists target infrastructure to undermine government authorities and influence populations (Newsecuritybeat, 2018). This hampers the achievement of SDG 6, i.e., ensuring availability and sustainable management of water for everyone. Problems with water availability and distribution can also create instability and lead to conflict, which is a conducive factor of violent extremism. It is thus recommended to better integrate this sustainable development goal in P/CVE approaches (King, 2017).

SDG 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

A lack of energy sources or an uneven distribution increasingly leads to energy terrorism. **Energy is the most important non-human terrorist target.** A terrorist attack on energy infrastructure undercuts the energy security of countries, which in turn may hurt the target country's national security

and economy and again hinder the achievement of SDG 7. Additionally, terrorists are increasingly targeting energy facilities or companies because of the negative phenomena following energy production, such as the unfair distribution of income, environmental degradation, and unemployment (Lee, 2022). Giving people better access to clean and sustainable energy is thus a possible P/CVE strategy as well as a sustainable development strategy.

SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

There is a nexus between terrorism and economic growth. Terrorism is detrimental to economic growth. This relationship is, however, dependent on country-specific factors such as political openness, cultural affiliation, and levels of political instability (Meierrieks & Gries, 2013). There is also some empirical evidence linking extremist violence to economic deprivation. Unemployed youth are typically more inclined to engage in such activities (Adelaja & George, 2020). Policy makers should, in order to prevent or combat terrorism, focus on improving the economy by creating job opportunities through the provision of a conducive environment that supports businesses and

reduces inequality gaps (Isola et al., 2019). Poverty on a societal level can often create 'enabling environments' in which the receptivity to terrorist narratives and the popular support for radical organisations can considerably increase. **Poverty creates conditions in which terrorist organisations can acquire credibility** and legitimacy, establish enduring foundations, and develop a network of 'support structures' that allow them to flourish (Cantin, 2019).

SDG 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Part of SDG 9 is building resilient infrastructure. Infrastructure resilience is the ability to withstand, adapt to changing conditions, and recover positively from shocks and stresses. A terrorist attack can be seen as such a shock. Terrorist threats to critical infrastructure and vulnerable targets are among the most serious security challenges facing the international community today (OSCE, n.d.). The extent of actual damage to infrastructure and, more widely, to an economy depends on the vulnerability and resilience of the country in question and its location. **Developing countries and emerging economies face a significant lack of capacity to capture information on**

the damage estimates that would need to be collected by a combination of disaster risk management agencies and local governments and sector agencies. P/CVE can thus play an important role in making certain critical infrastructure more resilient. **Responses should also include risk management, through investing in adaptation measures, as well as resilience financing strategies,** which must prioritise mobilising the necessary support and stimulating the required innovation and investments from within and outside governments to address it.

SDG 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries

Inequality is multidimensional in nature; it includes a social, an economic, and a social, economic, and ecological dimension. With social inequalities, relative deprivation is a key factor driving violent extremism (Kunst & Obaidi, 2020). Furthermore, growing inequality has a significant impact on societies and the potential to undermine democracy (Kuhn, 2020). **There is a link between socio-economic inequalities and extremist ideologies**, pathways into violent extremism, discrimination, and real and perceived inequalities and their relevance in extremism. Thus, approaches that aim to reduce inequality in order

to decrease the likelihood of extremist violence and terrorism contribute to SDG 10.

SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Cities across Europe are facing complex environmental, social, and economic challenges as well as an increasing frequency and intensity of hazards and disasters. Therefore, the concept of resilience is vital or is important. **To tackle violent extremism and achieve resilience, strategic communication between different cities is necessary**. Additionally, SDG 11 aims to achieve resilient communities. In relation to violent extremism, the challenge or threat can be understood as the potential for violent extremists to recruit individuals to their cause and potentially even engage in violence; successful adaptation to this threat would be a community that comes together in such a way that its members are no longer vulnerable to the threat. In short, the process of becoming a resilient community would need to inherently reduce potential vulnerabilities or risk factors and promote protective experiences or conditions (Grimes et al., 2017; Ellis & Abdi, 2017). Chandra et al. (2013) identified five central components of community resilience in relation to national health security: underlying physi-

cal and psychological health of the population, economic well-being, effective communication, comprehensive engagement of diverse stakeholders in planning, and social connectedness. Research on resilience in the P/CVE field and in adjacent fields can thus contribute to some targets of SDG 11.

SDG 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

SDG 12 aims to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns. Violent extremism and terrorism could however hinder this. **It has been shown that violence reduces investment in capital-intensive sectors, lowering productivity**. Businesses tend to shift investment to conflict-related goods instead of investing in the production of consumption and exportable goods. There is also an adverse effect of violent extremism on agricultural production since it leads to security instability and effects access and availability of resources. Additionally, terrorist conflicts might lead to an increased number of people forcibly displaced. The total economic impact of refugees and internally displaced people should not be underestimated and accounts for lost production, consumption and investment in the country of the conflict. Furthermore, fear of falling victim to violence changes consump-

tion and work-related decisions. It leads to increased transportation costs, reduced productivity and dampened consumption (UNDP, 2019).

SDG 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts;

SDG 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development; and

SDG 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

SDG 13, 14, and 15 are all climate change related. There is an overlap between P/CVE and climate change prevention. On the one hand, people and countries that are impacted by climate change are often more vulnerable to terrorist recruitment (Security Council, 2021). On the other hand, terrorism and violent extremism also adversely affect the environment. Successfully fighting climate change and countering terrorism both depend on promoting good governance and strengthening partnerships with national, regional and international actors. Where vulnerabilities overlap, solutions often overlap as well. **Climate change can be described**

as a threat multiplier, indirectly escalating the risk of conflict through mechanisms such as food and water insecurity, economic shocks, and human mobility (Security Council, 2021).

Ensuring the climate and conflict-sensitivity of interventions will be key to making sure that interventions are less prone to failure and are able to realise synergies and co-benefits. At present, interventions and strategies to counter violent extremism do not often take climate change into account (Nett & Rüttinger, 2016). It is thus best to use existing knowledge on the nexus to inform context-specific adaptation and/or mitigation intervention(s) at multiple scales across the globe (Asaka, 2021).

However, it might be possible that investment in climate solutions could increasingly be connected to efforts to reduce the 'threat of terrorism', rather than as a standalone imperative in itself when connecting it with P/CVE. To avoid this, it is crucial that there is a more rigorous analysis to understand where an investment in climate solutions can help reduce the impact and likelihood of support for violent terror groups and wider conflict issues. Building engagement strategies from this analysis and learning from people living and working in environments where climate change,

conflict, and violent groups using terror tactics overlap, can help the climate justice and environmental peacebuilding movements (Asaka, 2021; Street, 2021).

SDG 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Several national and international governments and practitioners have underscored the synergy between P/CVE and development. Both concepts diverge and converge in numerous ways, e.g., poverty, poor governance, and socio-political exclusion. Currently, there still remains a gap between security and development (Kessels & Nemr, 2016).

SDG 16 provides an opportunity to bridge this development and security divide. **The 2030 Agenda emphasises the interdependency of development and security** by expressing that "sustainable development cannot be realised without peace and security; and peace and security will be at risk without sustainable development." (United Nations, 2015, p.9). The linkage between the SDGs and P/CVE objectives offers an entry point for development and se-

curity actors to come together to promote inclusive and multidimensional approaches to achieve a peaceful society (Fink & Bhulai, 2016). As stated before, there are close parallels between the UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (2016) recommendations and many of SDG 16's targets (Zhou et al., 2017). Both agendas emphasise the importance of strengthening civil society, building social cohesion and resilience, the need for government to be responsive to citizens' needs, and the importance of respecting human rights and addressing grievances and inequality (Anderlini & Rosand, 2019). Achieving SDG 16 will thus require development actors (e.g., bilateral and multilateral donor agencies, responsible national ministries and departments, international non-governmental organisations, and civil society organisations) to engage with security actors (e.g., ministries of interior, justice, foreign affairs, and defence; law enforcement actors; and regional and multilateral organisations), especially in fragile and post-conflict contexts, which are often vulnerable to violent extremism (Ensor, 2017).

However, integrating P/CVE objectives in development programmes or implementing P/CVE initiatives in fragile and conflict-affected areas

comes with its own challenges due to the lack of access, resources, and capacities and the involvement of governmental departments with different coordination mechanisms (Fink & Bhulai, 2016; Anderlini & Rosand, 2019). For instance, trust deficits, unintended stigmatisation, and a discrepancy in tolerance for long-term CVE initiatives versus long-term development goals could hinder the successful integration of the two agendas (Kessels & Nemr, 2016). Additionally, the apolitical mandates of development institutions and the political dimension of P/CVE interventions bring along some risks. This, however, also highlights an opportunity and need for external actors to be engaged (Zhou et al., 2017). On the development side, strengthening local institutions and political empowerment will be key to the successful implementation of SDG 16, which will implicitly promote means of addressing local grievances through a non-violent, bottom-up process (Fink & Bhulai, 2016). As such, addressing governance-related P/CVE issues through the broader SDG 16 lens that is less securitised and has wider ownership from Member States offers great potential (Anderlini & Rosand, 2019).

Recommendations

In light of the SDG agenda, approaches to P/CVE can be reframed by addressing predominant underlying factors of poverty, inequality, and violent extremism that regularly meet with fragility. It is, however, a two-way street. The relationship is best framed as one of mutual benefit between programming that supports complementary goals. P/CVE can prove a valuable vehicle for bringing together state officials, law enforcement agencies, civil society, and communities to formulate collaborative strategies. P/CVE actors have already laid some valuable groundwork through efforts to enhance community resilience, strengthen community policing, and foster greater understanding of the drivers (Fink & Bhulai, 2016). It is important to emphasise the integration of SDGs in P/CVE so as to keep in mind that state responses to countering violent extremism can mask larger democratisation demands in society. Without that integration, widespread economic violence sustained by the State in the name of countering extremism might be justified (Huff et al., 2016). It is thus essential that policy responses do not externalise the debate on conflict management, which is key to state and national cohesion.

Some other recommendations for policy makers to improve P/CVE approaches by integrating the SDG agenda include the consideration of the roots of extremism when addressing peacebuilding efforts. It is also important to balance short-term, medium-term, and long-term objectives and the related investments to address extremism comprehensively. Moreover, public spending should be aligned with the SDGs. Member States should therefore allow for an inclusive, transparent, and accountable open budget and legislative mechanisms that ensure social participation and ownership at the local level (Schiano et al., 2017).

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In light of the SDG agenda, approaches to P/CVE can be reframed by addressing predominant underlying factors of poverty, inequality, and violent extremism

Vice versa, in order to optimise the efficiency and impact of development programmes with integrated P/CVE objectives, it is recommended to establish a baseline of knowledge on the interaction between security and development in relation to P/CVE and to refine and support monitoring and evaluation tools in insecure environments. Additionally, a robust learning capacity should be developed to apply the principle of do no harm. Looking at P/CVE approaches, it is key to clearly define the objectives and target audiences and identify realistic targets and timelines for the sustainable development programmes. Furthermore, the importance of the local level and developing context-specific initiatives in countering extremist violence can and should be applied to development initiatives (Kessels & Nemr, 2016).

Recommendations can also be given to enhance both the P/CVE and SDG agendas and integrate them coherently and effectively. Existing initiatives should be leveraged and a global platform to allow for regular multi-stakeholder discussions around the P/CVE and SDG agendas should be developed. It is also suggested to better advocate for an independent, vibrant civil society sector,

which is critical to the realisation of the whole-of-society approach that underpins the P/CVE and SDG 16 agendas. Thirdly, the development of country-based platforms in fragile and conflict-affected states that cut across the P/CVE and SDG 16 agendas is needed. There should also be more national-level interconnectivity among multiple, interrelated strategies. The funding strategy of programmes should be driven by local analysis and priorities and data collection and analysis on the interlinkages between the SDG and P/CVE agendas and how they can be further strengthened should be leveraged. Governance is often less emphasised in the P/CVE discourse, but it is front and centre when it comes to the implementation of the SDGs. As such, more attention should be given to addressing governance-related P/CVE issues through the broader SDGs lens that is less securitised and less repressive and has wider ownership from Member States (Anderlini & Rosand, 2019).

After the above analysis of the interconnection of P/CVE and SDGs, it is clear that P/CVE should be recognised while trying to achieve other SDGs. This does not mean that all development assistance needs have to include specific objectives aimed at

P/CVE, but instead emphasis should be placed on the importance of recognising P/CVE relevance as part of an ongoing development work and the potential benefits of integrating some targeted P/CVE interventions into development programming where appropriate (Kessels & Nemr, 2016).

Evaluation

In 2017, the UN adopted a global SDG indicator framework which includes 244 indicators across its 17 goals and 169 targets. However, many of the SDG indicators assess outcomes rather than the comprehensive and integrated 'upstream' policies and interventions required to deliver the outcomes. Creating indicators is time consuming and may be burdensome, particularly in developing countries where access to appropriate high-quality data may be lacking. Evaluating the implementation of SDG 16 so far has taken four main forms: data gathering and analysis by the secretariats of the UN system using indicators agreed upon with Member States; monitoring by NGOs

and programmes such as the Small Arms Survey; voluntary national evaluations and reports; and high-level political reviews within the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the General Assembly (GA) of the United Nations (Savoia, 2021).

In comparison with the 2030 Agenda, the P/CVE field is even more characterised by unclear scope and underdeveloped monitoring and evaluation frameworks. Rigorous evaluations of P/CVE programmes are required to inform decisions about whether to sustain, discontinue, or scale up these efforts. Despite the extensiveness of P/CVE programmes around the world, data on the impact of these programmes are lacking. Reasons for this include several practical, political, conceptual, and logistical challenges that policymakers and practitioners face when evaluating P/CVE initiatives. It is important to understand whether the evaluation is useful, context-specific, ethical, accurate, feasible, independent, culturally sensitive, systemic oriented, and transferable, and to include a counterfactu-

al situation (what-if scenario). Those requirements are often difficult to achieve (Savoia, 2021).

It might be possible to adapt a P/CVE programme evaluation framework from the field of public health (Savoia, 2021). Also, a developmental evaluation where stakeholders of diverse backgrounds are contributing to the development of initiatives could be well-suited to the work of evaluating emerging P/CVE programmes designed to tackle a complex social phenomenon with no clear single causal factors (Savoa et al., 2020). Moreover, this approach enables the evaluator and the project developer to work together in an iterative process to develop and assess a programme. It could facilitate collaboration and cooperation between those with different types of expertise. It is also recommended to establish a baseline of knowledge on the interaction between security and development in relation to P/CVE and to refine and support monitoring and evaluation tools in insecure environments.

> **In comparison with the 2030 Agenda, the P/CVE field is even more characterised by unclear scope and underdeveloped monitoring and evaluation frameworks**

Risks and obstacles of connecting SDGs with P/CVE

Notwithstanding the benefits of recognising the interlinkage between the SDGs and the P/CVE agendas, there are some legitimate concerns that a conceptual blurring between security and development has not necessarily led to better policies but in fact to confusion and exposure to abuse (Kessels & Nemr, 2016). Although development and security aims can be overlapping and mutually reinforcing, there are challenges in integrating P/CVE objectives in stabilisation and development programmes. A lack of trust between governments and civil society organisations and other non-governmental actors delivering development assistance contributes to reluctance on both sides to engage in collaborative partnerships without further clarity on concepts, parameters, and implications. Furthermore, the long-term nature of development initiatives runs contrary to the focus on immediate gains seen as necessary to address dynamic and rapidly changing security environments.

If traditional development programmes are effective and correctly done, particularly in areas vulnerable to violent extremism, the added value of P/CVE measures might be contested. The evolving security challenges and the blurring of traditional lines between criminal, political, and terrorist violence does, however, call for a change in those traditional development programmes.

> **A lack of trust between governments and civil society organisations and other non-governmental actors delivering development assistance contributes to reluctance on both sides to engage in collaborative partnerships**
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> **"**

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