

MOVING THE NEEDLE ON VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Learning from the CREATE Programme in Kenya

NOVEMBER 2023

For practitioners and policymakers supporting Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) efforts, decisions on whether to channel investment towards those most at-risk within societies or towards broader community resilience efforts remain central to programming design. For Mercy Corps, the Collective Resilience Against Extremism (CREATE) programme presented an opportunity to explore these programming approaches while furthering our understanding of what drives risk and resilience to recruitment and radicalisation by violent extremist organisations at both individual and societal levels.

As a learning and demonstration programme, CREATE aimed to understand what drives radicalisation and recruitment into VEOs within at-risk communities, as well as what works to address those drivers at individual, community, and systemic levels. Through five years of programming and adaptation, the UK-funded programme produced lessons, reflections, evidence, and experience-backed guidance. These resources fill gaps in the P/CVE evidence base, provide practical tools for implementers, and pose additional questions for reflection and learning.

Building Durable Resilience to Violent Extremism

Building Durable Resilience to Violent Extremism: Evidence from CREATE in Kenya fills key evidence gaps around the effectiveness of P/CVE programming and the extent to which improvements in resilience are durable over time. This report builds on CREATE's earlier report, **From High-Risk to Resilient**, which evaluated the first cohort of participants alone. This follow-up report's results and reflections include:

- CREATE reduced participants' likelihood of justifying the use of violence by 38% on average.
- Results improved for each of the three successive cohorts, both in reduced support for violence and strengthening the five risk-to-resilience dimensions that are central to the programme's theory of change: diversity of social networks, skills and livelihoods opportunities, sense of agency, position in community, and inclusive participation in governance processes.
- Key adaptations over time to how the programme selected and engaged with participants contributed to progressively stronger results for each cohort.
- Each of the five risk-to-resilience dimensions is correlated with a reduced probability of supporting violence, with a sense of agency and position in the community as the factors most strongly linked to reduced justification of violence.
- Nine months after participants' engagement with the programme ended, all five resilience dimensions were still significantly higher than at baseline, and justification of the use of violence remained lower as well.



Findings from this report have significant implications for future programmes seeking to build resilience among young people at risk of recruitment into violent extremism, as well as for governance and system actors seeking to enable the peaceful engagement of young people.

Beyond Participants: The Effects of P/CVE Programming on Mentors

Beyond Participants: The Effects of P/CVE Programming on Mentors is a qualitative study premised on the observation that mentors—a cornerstone of many youth-focused P/CVE programmes—are not only powerful agents of change for individuals at risk of recruitment or radicalisation into violent extremism, but that they themselves might be deeply transformed through their engagement. This study found:

- Characteristics of ‘successful mentors are both fixed and can be developed over time. Effective mentors for such programmes should come with key characteristics, such as motivation, socioemotional skills, adaptability, trustworthiness, and strong networks, but many of these factors were strengthened throughout the programme.
- Mentors participating in CREATE reported significant improvements in their skills and capabilities, including in their own ability to manage trauma from their lived experiences in high-risk communities, and in the networks and opportunities they could mobilise to support themselves and their mentees. These improvements were corroborated by mentees’ families as well as influencers in the communities. Mentors also experienced negative effects, such as financial and time pressures and emotional exhaustion.
- Mentors are now a sustained community resource for building a positive environment for youth at risk of VE. Many used their new skills and connections to continue working on P/CVE and strengthening the system around vulnerable youth.

Stronger Individuals, Supportive Systems: A Practitioner’s Guide to Working with At-Risk Youth to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism

The evidence above, as well as constant learning and adaptation throughout the programme, contributed to the development of **Stronger Individuals, Supportive Systems: A Practitioner’s Guide to Working with At-risk Youth to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism**. This guide presents an overview and details of the processes and approaches used to deliver mentorship-centred packages of support to 1,363 at-risk individuals across four coastal counties in Kenya. The guide outlines eight steps, each with its own specific considerations, divided across three stages of programming. It provides a step-by-step account of the design considerations, preparatory stages, and interventions delivered, including information on adaptations and decisions, and on the network of local actors mobilised to support delivery.

Disclaimer

The CREATE programme and the findings in this report were funded by UK aid from the UK government; however the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK government’s official policies.