



Vocational Skills Development (VSD) in the context of Violent Extremism – Technical Workshop

Geneva, Switzerland – 16-17 March 2016

Background

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) invites you to a technical workshop on Vocational Skills Development (VSD) in the context of Violent Extremism. At the White House Summit to Counter Violent Extremism, held in February 2015, Switzerland agreed to organise an international technical workshop to discuss the role of vocational skills development in preventing violent extremism. The workshop will be supported by NORRAG, the Network for international policies and cooperation in education and training, hosted by the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva.

The workshop will bring together a selected group of practitioners, scholars and policy-makers in the fields of vocational skills development and violent extremism. Its objective is to share evidence and good practices on VSD programmes addressing the causes and drivers of violent radicalisation, and to develop a common understanding of how VSD and employment promotion can foster resilience to violent extremism. Its results will contribute to the international policy conference on the UN action plan to prevent violent extremism which is to take place at the UN in Geneva in spring 2016.

Workshop Key Objectives and Outcomes

Building on the current state of research outlined below, the workshop has two objectives:

1. Sharing evidence on what the causes and drivers of violent extremism are and on **VSD's potential to address some of them** (*are we doing the right thing?*)
2. Sharing experiences and **good practices** within the skills / employment / fragility nexus, focussing on aspects such as conflict-sensitive targeting, training content and labour market integration – and these aspects' relevance for VSD interventions in the particular context of violent extremism (*are we doing things right?*)

A conference report will summarise the discussion and come up with priorities for VSD projects addressing the causes and drivers of violent extremism. The report will serve as an input paper for the Geneva conference on the UN action plan to prevent violent extremism.

Current state of research and practice

Violent extremism is a phenomenon that is not entirely new and not exclusive to any region or to any political or belief system. However the prevention of violent extremism has become a much-debated topic for development cooperation over the past few years. Injustice, rising inequalities, unemployment, lack of social and economic prospects and relative deprivation are generally perceived as enabling factors of radicalisation and violent extremism:

- The **UN Security Council passed resolution S/RES/2178/2014**¹ wherein it condemned violent extremism, and called on Member States to support efforts to adopt **longer-term solutions rooted in addressing the underlying causes of radicalisation and violent extremism, including by empowering young people**. According to the resolution, addressing the threat will require “promoting political and religious tolerance, economic development and social cohesion and inclusiveness, ending and resolving armed conflicts, and facilitating reintegration and rehabilitation.” The resolution provides a basis for the Secretary-General’s Plan of Action released in December 2015.
- The World Bank’s *World Development Report 2013* in consequence describes **skills and jobs as being instrumental to achieving inclusive social development**.² Similarly the European Council and the European Commission underline in a 2015 joint report that **“education and training have an important role in fostering inclusion and equality”**.³
- **The UNDP developed a four-year regional development project** designed to strengthen the development responses to **mitigate the growth of violent extremism in Africa** for 2016-2019.⁴ UNDP is already actively working in this area to improve job opportunities, youth entrepreneurship programmes, skills-building activities and levels of education in order to lower unemployment rates and improve livelihood opportunities. The problem is that such programmes are not currently targeted/tailored specifically at those at risk and/or already engaged in the activities of violent extremist groups. The programme will leverage existing programmes to ensure they are targeting vulnerable groups, especially in ungoverned spaces where such populations are particularly at risk. In this context, Marc Sommers published a book addressing the vast gap between outcast youth in war-affected Africa and international development efforts.⁵
- The **UNDP’s Youth Strategy (2014-2017)**,⁶ aligned with the UNDP Strategic Plan (2014-2017) and the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Youth, articulates the UNDP’s vision of **youth empowerment** and engaging with young generations as a positive force for change. It is grounded in: (a) the recognition that young people, in all their diversity, have both a right and a duty to participate and contribute to development; and (b) the need for greater youth participation in community development, labour markets, political processes, peace-building and conflict prevention in order to transform the quality of, and overall prospects for, sustainable human development.
- There are interesting experiences and several recent publications on **vocational education, training and employment promotion in fragile and post-conflict contexts**. A typical example of such an approach is the social reintegration of former combatants or other violence-prone young people through VSD and employment promotion (e.g. in a BMZ-financed GIZ project in the Democratic Republic of Congo⁷ and Côte d’Ivoire⁸).
- To prevent *future* conflicts, the main objective of projects has to be not merely training, but **building long-term economic and social prospects for young people**. Just keeping young people busy in training programmes may be counterproductive. Skills training – closely linked to labour market needs – can only be *one* element within a holistic approach which fights hopelessness and opens up prospects for these beneficiaries by **integrating them into decent and meaningful jobs**, thereby addressing several causes and drivers of violent extremism. Considering this, *G-Youth*, a USAID project implemented by the Education Development Centre (EDC) in North East Kenya, combined work readiness training with training in life skills, leadership and civic engagement. SAD’s *Youth Innovation Fund Egypt*

¹ UN Security Council resolution S/RES/2178/2014

² World Bank (2013): World Development Report. Chapter 4: Jobs and social cohesion.

³ European Commission (2015): Draft on new priorities for European cooperation in education and training. SWD(2015) 161 final.

⁴ UNDP RBA Preventing Extremism in Africa

⁵ Sommers (2015)

⁶ UNDP’s Youth Strategy (2014-2017)

⁷ BMZ Democratic Republic of Congo

⁸ GIZ Project Côte d’Ivoire

pursues a similar approach.

- Working with violence-prone youth *before* they become violent is also the goal pursued by some VSD and labour market programmes especially in Latin America and in South Africa, aiming at young people growing up in areas where gangs are active and where there is a high rate of violence (e.g. *Projoven* in Honduras⁹ financed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation or the KfW-financed *Safety and Peace through Urban Upgrading* initiative in Helenvale, South Africa¹⁰). By means of vocational training, young people acquire general life skills in addition to technical know-how: This is part of an effort to **promote social cohesion and prevent organised crime and violence**.
- A recent study by Sarah Brockhoff, Tim Krieger and Daniel Meierrieks found that **the relationship of education and terrorism varies for different countries/regions**.¹¹ In countries with poor country-specific conditions e.g. slow economic growth, strong labour market competition and distortions due to youth bulges and corrupt institutions, the relationship between education levels and terrorism is more pronounced than for countries with sound conditions, i.e. more education seems to fuel terrorism rather than preventing it. In contrast, in countries with sound conditions the effect of education on terrorism is negative, i.e. it reduces terrorism. These findings have provoked a discussion about the most effective strategies to address country-specific differences in VSD programme designs.
- A recent study for the Education Development Center compares and contrasts youth resilience in Honduras and Northern Kenya.¹² Job and skills training are seen as “promising programmes to address youth violence” if they adopt a holistic approach and also address young people’s life skills. In a recent publication Mercy Corps comes to a similar conclusion. Although the authors underline that there is **no solid evidence yet on the impact of VSD and employment promotion programmes on building stability and resilience to violent extremism**,¹³ they also state that market-based vocational training, if it is well embedded in a multi-sectoral programme which offers a range of interventions including psychosocial support and protection measures, “can harness good outcomes for conflict-affected youth”.¹⁴

To what extent and, more specifically, *how* vocational skills development can contribute to the prevention of violent extremism is not yet sufficiently analysed. Further exchange between policy-makers, practitioners and researchers is thus urgently needed to build on experiences from fragile and post-conflict contexts and from programmes addressing youth violence and crime in order to draw lessons for today’s challenge of *preventing* violent extremism. Against this backdrop, the **experts’ workshop will bring together development practitioners and researchers** to share **evidence** on the potential of vocational skills development **to** build resilience and prevent violent extremism, and to exchange **good practices** on VSD and youth employment projects in these contexts.

⁹ Swisscontact, Projoven

¹⁰ Saferspaces

¹¹ Brockhoff et al. (2015)

¹² MercyCorps (2015)

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Day 1: The causes and drivers of violent extremism – and can VSD address them?

Keynote Speech

Keynote speech on “Preventing Violent Extremism: Defining the Issues, Tackling the Problems” by Prof. Mohammad-Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou Deputy Director and Academic Dean of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy and Adjunct Professor at the Graduate Institute.

Panel Discussion

Objective

Better understanding of how vocational skills development can contribute to the prevention of violent extremism and of the role VSD can play in contexts where violent extremism has gained ground.

The UN Plan of Action calls for a comprehensive approach to preventing violent extremism and its spread, and encourages states to implement systematic preventive strategies that go beyond security-based counterterrorism measures to directly address the drivers of violent extremism. Among other interventions, it proposes youth empowerment as well as education, vocational skills development and employment facilitation as important pillars of preventive action.

Panellists

- Prof. Mohammad-Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou, Deputy Director and Academic Dean of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy and Adjunct Professor at the Graduate Institute
- Khalid Koser (Executive Director, GCERF)
- Marc Probst, Executive Director of the Swiss Academy for Development (SAD)
- Rudolf Batliner, Senior scientist (NADEL)
- Shannon M. Green, Senior Fellow and Director, Human Rights Initiative, Centre for Strategic & international studies (CSIS)

Guiding questions

- How can VSD contribute to stability and social inclusion?
- How can VSD contribute to preventing violent extremism?
- What is the role of VSD in conflict-affected contexts where violent extremism has already materialised?
- What can be learned from VSD programmes addressing youth violence and crime or supporting the reintegration of ex-combatants for VSD programmes aiming at preventing violent extremism?
- How can we better organise aid – including VSD – to make it more effective in preventing violent extremism?

Day 2: Designing effective programmes: Focusing on the right people and skills for PVE- Round Table Discussions

Keynote speech

Keynote speech on "Challenges of Violent Extremism for Education Policy Frameworks" by Michel Carton (Executive Director, NORRAG) and Joost Monk (Managing Director, NORRAG)

Round Table 1: Targeting

Objective

Better understanding of who the groups at risk are and how they can be addressed

Which beneficiaries for PVE and poverty reduction? How to identify and reach out to them?

If VSD programmes are expected to contribute to preventing young people from drifting into violent extremism it is decisive to know who the groups at risk are. How can these groups be identified? What are the risk indicators? And if they are identified, how can VSD programmes reach out to them and ensure their participation? How can the typical access barriers – educational level, tuition fees and geographical distance – be overcome?

Round Table 2: Delivery

Objective

Better understanding of the specific skills needed and the design of training targeting young people's resilience and social cohesion

What kind of training and which skills are needed to improve youths' resilience and social cohesion?

The studies mentioned above widely agree that traditional education and training alone is not a promising approach to the prevention of violent extremism. The young people at risk have to be addressed through a more holistic approach that takes their personal and social development into consideration as well. What kind of training offer and course design attract such young people and facilitate their retention? How can technical training be combined with the acquisition of life skills and the strengthening of resilience or a change of mind-set?

Round Table 3: Integration

Objective

Better understanding of the nexus of VSD and integration

How can skills development programmes facilitate the labour market integration and thereby the societal integration of graduates?

Some recent studies and experience suggest that well-trained young people who cannot find a job seem to be even more vulnerable to violent extremism than those who remain without training. If training does not provide prospects for social and labour market integration it seems to be useless with regard to PVE. It is therefore crucial that training courses that address young people at risk of drifting into violent extremism make sure that participants do not end up in unemployment and frustration. How should skills development programmes be designed to open up realistic pathways to

employment and income for their graduates? What are the key aspects to be considered with regard to vulnerable groups? What can training providers do beyond offering high-quality training to facilitate their graduates' access to jobs or to self-employment?

Literature

BMZ, "Children are not soldiers," says Dirk Niebel.

http://www.bmz.de/en/press/aktuelleMeldungen/archive/2013/februar/20130211_pm_20_kindersoldaten/index.html. (Last visited Feb. 10, 2016).

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