

# Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism and WPS: Concepts, Practices and Moving Forward

## Key Issues Report

### INTRODUCTION

On 8 May 2017, the LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security held a workshop to explore the relationship between Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, organised in partnership with Gender Action for Peace and Security, Saferworld and International Alert. The workshop brought together a diverse group of participants, including civil society and international governmental and non-governmental organisation representatives, UK government officials, researchers and academics.

The workshop sought to:

- Develop a position on gender and WPS and P/CVE from a critical perspective;
- Map key policy framework and programming experience;
- Assess the impact of the existing P/CVE policies on women's networks and civil society organisations;
- Discuss strategies to critique, challenge and/or change the P/CVE framework;
- Identify areas of improvement.

This note is a summary of the key issues that emerged during workshop discussions. These issues reveal two layers of the debate: implications of linking P/CVE to the WPS agenda, and issues with incorporating a gender dimension into P/CVE.

### IMPLICATIONS OF LINKING THE P/CVE AND WPS AGENDAS

#### Issue 1: Instrumentalisation of the WPS agenda

The 2015 UN Security Council Resolution 2242 linked the WPS agenda to P/CVE. In practice this has led to the recognition of the potential role of women's organisations in P/CVE efforts. But it has also led to concerns about the instrumentalisation of the WPS agenda to strengthen P/CVE efforts without increasing women's agency and with the outcome of negatively impacting upon women's human rights.

This instrumentalisation of the WPS agenda is due to governments prioritising short-term national security objectives over long-term peacebuilding efforts, as exemplified by the fact that UK's Conflict, Stability and Security Fund sits under the National Security Council Objectives. Short-term security objectives are often at odds with the goals of the WPS agenda. This also raises the question of whose peace and security is to be achieved. There is a risk that the WPS agenda will be increasingly politicised through emphasising the role of women in P/CVE and excluding men. Men may have more

access to the right kind of information to engage on the issue of violent extremism. In developing programmes, it is important to not to simply assume 'peace' is a women's issue, and security and safety are a men's issue but to develop integrated and holistic programmes.

Further P/CVE programmes increasingly cooperate and work in conjunction with the armed forces, while the WPS agenda is the outcome of a movement for demilitarisation. It is important to note that security-related decision making takes place in a highly masculinised culture and in male-dominated and exclusionary spaces (e.g. UN Security Council; UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations; UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee). Similarly and beyond the UN, the 2016 EU Foreign Policy Strategy reveals a patriarchal and exclusionary foreign policy, adopting a 'hard' security approach by placing counter terrorism (CT) and CVE at the heart of its strategy for protecting citizens from terrorist threats. The masculinised culture in these platforms continues despite the efforts to enhance women's voices and the diversification in the composition of stakeholders participating in policy-making in recent years.

Other points were made on the possible intersections between the P/CVE and WPS agendas, in particular that Western governments' simultaneous involvement in the arms trade, peacebuilding and CVE is a contradiction and harmful to the WPS agenda.

## **Issue 2: Financial regulations and implications**

Women's Rights Organisations have experienced negative financial impact on their funding opportunities and structures because of the linking of the P/CVE and WPS agendas. Donors increasingly direct their funding at civil society organisations (CSOs) that are conducting P/CVE programmes. Consequently, CSOs may be tempted to re-label their peacebuilding activities in terms of P/CVE. This leads to issues, capabilities and advocacy work being framed in terms of the objectives of funders, in line with those of policy-makers. The tendency to focus on short-term security objectives rather than long-term peacebuilding efforts decreases the funding opportunities for CSOs working in low-level long-term conflicts. This is also having an impact on funding opportunities for academic research especially if the source of funding is provided by governments or through UN agencies.

Even more, financial institutions impose financial rules on CSOs. Subsequently, P/CVE funding is more likely to be assigned to multilateral organisations or INGOs rather than to grassroots CSOs. Financial rules and regulations designed to reduce the risks to financial institutions negatively impact upon the resources and operating capacity of CSOs, while increasing their operational risks (e.g. cash-carrying). The trickle-down effects from large organisations to smaller local organisations do not necessarily benefit the latter in carrying out their own agendas on enhancing women's rights and contributing to conflict resolution and peace processes. The financial implications are gendered and affect women disproportionately.

Lastly, the role of the private sector is often neglected in debates on financial implications and regulations. With respect to funding, the private sector is competing with the CSOs. Private companies are successful in raising funds as they use the securitisation jargon and package their work to attract funding. Also, private companies do not seek to establish long-term projects. Overall, private sectors' activities in this field should be understood better.

## **ISSUES WITH INCORPORATING THE GENDER DIMENSION INTO P/CVE**

### **Issue 3: Conceptual blurring of P/CVE**

The conceptual blurring between CT, PVE and CVE is a challenge and renders the integration of the WPS agenda risky. PVE is considered to be more holistic, long term and less securitised than CVE, but in practice the difference between the two is small. PVE emphasises peacebuilding efforts or enhancing resilience in communities, but, again, the issue of instrumentalising these goals through securitisation remains. Although the intersection of conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities may explain the blurred distinction between PVE and CVE, the lack of a shared understanding of P/CVE amongst policy-making institutions and CSOs is problematic.

Furthermore, P/CVE focuses predominantly on violent extremism conducted by non-state actors, neglecting the occurrences of state violence. Short-term security objectives dominate P/CVE programming and harms CSOs conducting peacebuilding and disarmament programmes. In any case, non-state actors would resist demobilisation and disarmament where state protection is absent, or not trusted. The exclusion of violent acts committed by states from P/CVE policy and programming needs further attention.

### **Issue 4: Stereotypes in P/CVE**

P/CVE programmes reinforce gender stereotypes. This causes concern as it contradicts the WPS agenda that seeks to empower women and have transformative effect. Heteronormative thinking presumes that women and men have natural roles in life. Consequently, women are often portrayed as innately peaceful, as peacebuilders or community organisers in P/CVE programmes. Other programmes focus on women as victims of sexual violence and usually neglect existing structural restrictions on women's freedom of education, movement and association. They also fail to take account of women's other experiences of violence, such as intimate partner violence and early enforced child marriages. Moreover, the lumping together of 'women and children' is problematic because it infantilises women, and does not allow for understanding the different, gender-based, experiences of boys and girls.

Women who are involved in P/CVE activities are praised for their personal involvement rather than their political agency, for being mothers rather than leaders, thereby confirming rather than challenging prevailing gender norms. Many such programmes assign a disproportionate responsibility to women in preventing or countering violent extremism. This may over-estimate their influencing power and put them at risk; or, conversely, may negate the work they do outside a P/CVE framework, only recognising their P/CVE contribution. Typically, gender stereotypes mean that both women's role as supporters or perpetrators of violent extremism, as well as men's role in preventing or countering violent extremism are absent from P/CVE programmes.

### **Issue 5: Lack of evidence-based understanding and research**

There is a dearth of knowledge on the relationship between gender, agency and P/CVE, which may explain the absence of an analytical gender perspective and reliance on gender stereotypes in P/CVE

programmes. Existing evidence-based research predominantly focuses on the policy level or on country-specific examples, resulting in gender blind reports.

Local, regional and country level analyses are all necessary to provide multilateral organisations and states with civil society perspectives. The opportunities for local CSOs to participate in policy-making processes are limited, which reduces the ability of international actors to learn from local actors' observations. Yet, the latter are the ones most likely to be working on countering violence on the ground. Lack of dialogue between different actors results in ambiguities about who is setting the agenda on issues and hinders developing insights into how INGOs and CSOs work with local communities. Local context and ownership in decision-making is essential. On the other hand, attempts to increase dialogue mostly take place with the underlying assumption that all actors involved have similar agendas; policy makers often presume that civil society will adopt a supporting and stabilising role.

Moreover, gender norms within local societies need to be understood before they can be applied to P/CVE. Gender analysis can serve as the basis of a more holistic approach. Remarkably, gender mainstreaming is lacking across the P/CVE instruments – for instance P/CVE in EU policy is gender blind necessitating gender analysis and mainstreaming – while P/CVE mainstreaming of gender instruments is occurring rapidly. Developing gendered conflict analyses is essential for contextualising and understanding the issues. In this process feminist as well as gendered political economy analysis should not be neglected.