Conference Report

Lessons Learned from P/CVE Youth Mentorship

Tina Wilchen Christensen

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Lessons Learned from P/CVE Youth Mentorship

Introduction

PROGRAMMES AIMED AT preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) have emerged especially over the last decade.[1] Some programmes are designed to build community resilience, while others seek to prevent young people from joining violent extremist organisations or support former violent extremists' reintegration into society.[2]

Mentoring has become an increasingly common approach in such programmes.[3] Yet, what is understood by 'mentoring' varies across them, raising questions such as: what constitutes mentoring? Who are part of the target group of such programmes and how are they selected? Based on which criteria should mentor and mentees be matched? And how long should target groups be provided with mentoring support? Additional questions relate to measuring change and evaluating the programmes' success.[4] These questions suggest that the management of mentorship-based approaches is challenging and entails persistent questions.

To investigate the experiences and lessons learned from various mentoring programmes in the field of P/CVE, RUSI in the Horn of Africa (RUSI HoA) organised a conference entitled 'Lessons Learned from P/CVE Youth Mentorship' which took place from 19–20 February 2019 in Nairobi, Kenya.

The aim of the conference was to think through the many puzzles involved in mentoring within the framework of P/CVE and to share lessons learned from the application of the mentorship model in other programmes and settings.

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1. Tina Wilchen Christensen and Tore Bjørgo, 'How to Manage Returned Foreign Fighters and Other Syria Travellers? Measures for Safeguarding and Follow-Up', C-REX Research Report No. 1/2018, 2018.
2. *Ibid.*; Sarah Marsden, *Reintegrating Extremists: Deradicalisation and Desistance* (London: Palgrave Pivot, 2017).
3. Wilchen Christensen and Bjørgo, 'How to Manage Returned Foreign Fighters and Other Syria Travellers?'
4. Daniel Köhler, 'Structural Quality Standards for Work to Intervene with and Counter Violent Extremism', Counter Extremism Network Coordination Unit (KPEBW), 2016.

RUSI HoA has, since 2016, undertaken the project STRIVE ll – Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism in Kenya.[5] The ambition of the programme is to reduce radicalisation, recruitment and support for violent extremism. Mentoring is one of the key components in the programme which aims to offer peer-to-peer support to youth at risk of recruitment to violent extremist groups.

The programme cooperates with stakeholders from local communities in reducing violent extremism by, among other approaches, increasing their knowledge about the various reasons behind engagement in violent and/or extremist groups. The target groups of the programme are youth from less privileged communities in Kenya who are engaged as mentors and mentees, followed by local stakeholders.

Various aspects of mentoring within the field of P/CVE were discussed during the conference. In the first two sessions, two panels moderated by Martine Zeuthen (RUSI HoA) focused on 'Lessons Learned from P/CVE Youth Mentorship in East Africa and Beyond', in which Saida Abdi (Boston Children's Hospital Refugee Trauma and Resilience Center, US), Metin Cakmak (Crime Prevention, Denmark), Tina Wilchen Christensen (RUSI HoA), Hadija Suleiman (RUSI HoA) and Sheikh Yusuf Nasur Abu Hamza (USAID in Kenya) presented insights from P/CVE programmes based on mentoring.

In the third session, 'Communication in Mentorship and the Importance of Self-Expression', moderated by Fiona Napier (Wasafiri Consulting), Matt Freear (RUSI HoA), Stephen Rukwaro (mentor, STRIVE II), Fatuma Hussein (mentor, STRIVE II), John-Allan Namu (co-founder, Africa Uncensored) and Ng'ang'a Mbugua (editor, *Business Daily*, Kenya) investigated the importance of strengthening the voice of youth in the media as a means to prevent recruitment to violent extremist groups. The fourth session, 'Lessons Learned on Measuring Progress', moderated by Matthieu Dillais (Altai Consulting), Kathleen White (Aktis Strategy), Juuso Miettunen (Forcier Consulting), Gayatri Sahgal (RUSI HoA) and Timothy Kimaiyo (RUSI HoA), presented methods for monitoring and evaluating P/CVE programmes.

The conference was chaired by Martine Zeuthen, team leader of RUSI's STRIVE II programme and was opened by Hanina Ben Bernou (EU delegation to Kenya).

In discussing these themes, several recommendations emerged for strengthening mentorship within programmes aimed at P/CVE. While the first parts of this report present a summary of the conference presentations, the second part provides recommendations about mentoring.

Key Themes

The first two panels in the conference centred on lessons learned from P/CVE mentorship and community programmes across Kenya, the US and Europe. The third session focused on what is termed 'preventive communication' – an approach emphasising the

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5.   For further information about this programme, see RUSI, 'Strive – Horn of Africa', <https://rusi. org/projects/strive-horn-africa>, accessed 23 September 2019.

importance of reducing marginalisation and recruitment to violent extremist (VE) groups by giving youth a voice in the public debate. Presentations in the fourth session discussed questions to consider when measuring progress and evaluating programmes situated in conflict-ridden settings.

Lessons Learned from P/CVE Youth Mentorship in East Africa and Beyond

In her presentation Saida Abdi focused on the US-based programme Community Connect.[6] The programme is based on the assumption that terrorism is an outcome of relationships that have, as Abdi stated, gone wrong. Research suggests that social connection is at the heart of resilient communities and any strategy to increase community resilience must both harness and enhance existing social connections and endeavour not to damage or diminish them.[7] From this approach, developing relations between people across communities becomes essential as a means to prevent and counter violent extremism. The Community Connect programme therefore aims at building stronger connections within communities and bridging the gap between youth and law enforcement to develop a healthier relationship. Abdi stressed that Community Connect focuses on community building, which entails a much broader perspective and engages a more diverse range of actors in the community than is often the case with programmes aimed at P/CVE.

Abdi argued that the population in the US perceives P/CVE as focusing too narrowly on a single outcome of low importance to the communities while leaving more prominent concerns such as gang violence unsolved. According to Abdi, most P/CVE programmes have failed to successfully engage Muslim communities because they feel targeted, which undermines the trust between Muslim-Americans and the government. Based on this insight, Abdi emphasised the importance of avoiding focusing on one ethnic or religious group in P/CVE programmes, as it stigmatises communities and only compounds its marginalisation.

Building on those experiences, Abdi emphasised that for programmes to have an impact and bring change, it is crucial to identify the community's real or perceived grievances as a starting point. Abdi added that programming should adapt to such issues. Further, there is a need to design mentorship programmes with the goal of repairing and reconstructing relationships in a manner that does not stigmatise and is sensitive to the grievances of communities and the people involved.

While the Community Connect programme focused on community building, each of the following three presentations – first by Metin Cakmak, second by Hadija Suleiman and Tina Wilchen Christensen and finally by Yusuf Nasur Abu Hamza – focused on individuals. All three presentations

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6.   For further information about this programme, see B Heidi Ellis and Saida Abdi, 'Building Community Resilience to Violent Extremism Through Genuine Partnerships', *American Psychologist* (Vol. 72, No. 3, 2017), pp. 289–300.

7.   *Ibid.*

emphasised the perspective that mentoring aims to support individuals by developing and offering alternative networks and connections and providing counselling and support.

The speakers agreed that the process of mentorship involves legal, ethical, moral, individual and methodological considerations. Mentoring in their approach is first and foremost about building relationships and trust, which can be achieved by establishing regular meetings with mentees, conducting common activities based on their needs and identifying what is important to them, while giving them guidance and support on small and big issues. The underlying theory governing such an approach, the presenters agreed, was that the longer an individual has been in a criminal environment, the less motivated they are to change and the less they believe in the possibility of changing their life. Yet, the stronger the relationship is with a mentor, the better the chance mentees have of making a change.[8]

Common to the mentorship programmes explored during the conference is that they all recruit mentees based on a referral system comprising people with central positions in the communities in which the programme is located. These referral systems include school teachers, health providers, community leaders, religious leaders, peace committee members and sometimes the police. Working with the wider community also provides an important avenue for increasing awareness about the local mechanisms of recruitment into VE groups. As Abu Hamza pointed out in his presentation, some community members perceive the VE threat as solely affecting specific religious and ethnic groups. Such an approach reduces overall support for P/CVE initiatives.

In his presentation, Cakmak stressed that mentoring is about enabling the mentees to shift their perspective from perceiving the surrounding society as an enemy. It is also about supporting them in strengthening their relationships with members of their immediate community and developing the required social and professional skill to achieve a position in society to improve their lives.[9]

To avoid getting involved in discussions on ideology, views, values or religion with mentees, Cakmak explained that his point of departure for mentoring was to focus on the mentees' humanity and on them as members of Danish society, notwithstanding their previous or current ideological perceptions and personal history. As a mentor one needs to have a clear stance towards

8.   For more information about the connection between emotional attachment and openness to change, see Tina Wilchen Christensen, 'A Question of Participation – Disengagement from the Extremist Right: A Case Study From Sweden', PhD thesis, Roskilde University, 2015; Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, 'Promoting Exit From Violent Extremism: Themes and Approaches', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (Vol. 36, No. 2, 2013), pp. 99–115; Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, 'Patterns of Disengagement from Violent Extremism: A Stocktaking of Current Knowledge and Implications for Counterterrorism', in Kristian Steiner and Andreas Önnerfors (eds), *Expressions of Radicalization: Global Politics, Processes and Practices* (Cham: Springer Nature, 2018), pp. 273–93.

9.   For further information about the Danish model, see Anne-Sophie Hemmingsen, *The Danish Approach to Countering and Preventing Extremism and Radicalisation,* DIIS Report 2015:15 (Copenhagen: DIIS – Danish Institute for International Studies, 2015).

engaging in or avoiding ideological discussion.[10] Mentees can be trained in the argumentations and can thus occupy a familiar position, setting mentors on the defensive.[11] Cakmak also argued that the perception often initially emphasised in mentoring, of being tough towards mentees to make them understand the consequences of their actions, is misunderstood. According to him, mentorship involves supporting people to develop motivation and an understanding of themselves and their context. This includes supporting their ability to live up to the goals agreed upon with mentors by helping them understand the process involved. As Cakmak pointed out, mentors cannot succeed if they constantly put people in a situation where they are supposed to live up to fixed expectations, if they do not know how to get there.

While the mentoring experiences from Denmark are the outcome of an intervention mainly targeting men aged between 16 and 25 of diverse backgrounds, living on the outskirts of Copenhagen, STRIVE II and the Kibera mentorship programme target youth from less privileged communities in Kenya. Some of the young people from these communities in Kenya are recruited into criminal and violent political activities because of a mixture of structural circumstances including marginalisation of their communities, harsh and difficult living conditions and individual factors such as abuse, school failure, juvenile delinquency and mental health disorders, among others. Like the Danish programme, the goal of STRIVE II and the Kibera mentorship programme is to change the mindset of mentees and provide an alternative way forward to violent extremism. This is done by creating a mentor and mentee network which has the potential to satisfy an individual's desire for belonging, as well as building youth development skills such as personal confidence, critical thinking, improving their social networks, and helping them to plan and achieve agreed goals.

In STRIVE II mentors are matched to mentees according to their: (1) religion, location and language; (2) the profile of the mentee and strengths of the mentor; and (3) preferences of mentor and mentee. All mentors undergo training, including in relationship-building with mentees, the 'dos and don'ts' of mentoring and the drivers of radicalisation, among other topics. The programme is structured around both individual and group meetings between mentors and mentees to ensure a free exchange of ideas of most relevance and concern to the mentees. To help the mentors as they lead meetings, facilitation guides are provided addressing topics such as life skills, critical thinking, VE and positive values.[12] Finally, the mentors are supported by a psychosocial support manager who provides a platform for debriefing and group therapy sessions.

It is also important to add, as emerged during the discussions following the first two sessions, that there is a difference between supporting youth who have been involved in a VE group and

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10.   For further information about approaches to supporting former political extremists, see Tina Wilchen Christensen, 'When Good Intentions are Not Enough: A Successful Mentor–Mentee Relation Requires a Deliberated Practice', *Psyke & Logos* (Vol. 36, No. 1, 2015), pp. 242–65.

11.   Wilchen Christensen, 'A Question of Participation'.

12.   Tina Wilchen Christensen, Hadija Suleiman and Matt Freear, 'Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism STRIVE II – Countering Violent Extremism Mentorship Manual', RUSI HoA, internal document (forthcoming).

those who were previously involved in a criminal gang. Youth who have been involved with VE groups may struggle since they potentially harbour a black and white perception of the world and people around them.[13] This is an issue to be handled by CVE programmes as they should and in general do differentiate between working with former gang members and former violent extremists.

Discussions at the conference also revealed that mentors are often referred to as role models. It is important to emphasise that they are. Yet, they are much more than that: mentors should be trained in a number of ways, supported by a programme, and informed by mentorship methods or practice.[14] This is not the case with a role model, whose personal story or life experience inspires others. Support provided by mentors is much more formalised than that of a role model.

Communication in Mentorship and the Importance of Self-Expression

The third conference session discussed the significance of enabling the voices of marginalised youth in the media landscape in relation to the factors behind violent extremism. By developing youth self-expression and participation in the media environment and strengthening the way youth are represented in the media, STRIVE II's communications activities sought to address the individual incentives and structural factors behind radicalisation and recruitment in Kenya.

The session explained the communicative aspect of the STRIVE II programme and discussed how it has worked to strengthen the voice of youth in Kenyan traditional print/web media, as well as social media. Matt Freear suggested that P/CVE programmes should consider 'preventive communication', distinct from counternarrative approaches. This approach builds on the mentorship model in the way it seeks to strengthen relationships and increase trust. Through a series of managed activities, preventive communication transfers the discussion of personal dilemmas and social issues that happens in mentorship into the online space and traditional media. The approach is based on a process whereby youth explore, articulate and share their own, often traumatic, stories and seek to engage with others as a way of fostering relationships and understanding. By enabling their voices, while partnering with and training journalists and editors, the intention is to address factors behind recruitment, including structural marginalisation in the media and exclusion in social and political spaces, and to channel their individual incentives such as a search for purpose, meaning and connection into creative media. The media partnerships and training activities were developed using principles of conflict-sensitive journalism, which broadens the voices that media reporting relies on and

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13.   For more information on individuals struggle when disengaging from extremist groups, see Tore Bjørgo, 'Dreams and Disillusionment: Engagement in and Disengagement From Militant Extremist Groups', *Crime, Law and Social Change* (Vol. 55, No. 4, 2011), pp. 277–85; Kate Barrelle, 'Pro-Integration: Disengagement and Life After Extremism', *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* (Vol. 7, No. 2, 2015), pp. 129–42; Wilchen Christensen, 'A Question of Participation'.

14.   Wilchen Christensen, 'When Good Intentions are Not Enough'.

strengthens the discourse of reporting on conflict. The media involved represented important forums for decision-making at the local and national levels, and included locally broadcasting radio stations based on the coast of Kenya and national print media. At the same time, by voicing their stories and participating in media, youth can feel that their point of view is represented and that they are heard by their community and country.

Freear gave examples of how STRIVE II has developed self-expression by the youth, through filmmaking workshops using mobile phones and writing coaching led by newspaper editors. Such workshops used communication tools that youth already had access to – their own mobile phones and a free app – to explore their ideas, concerns and experiences. John-Allan Namu, who had worked with mentors and mentees on the coast of Kenya to make a documentary under STRIVE II, described how the journey was as significant as the destination, and how it was not just about making a film. Rather, it was about a process during which youth can grow in self-confidence and feel that their story and voice count, not only in discussing grievances and political issues, but in engaging in difficult personal and moral issues, the discussion of which may be taboo. Ng'ang'a Mbugua, who had coached one of the mentors to write a short story series in the *Saturday Nation* newspaper, described how youth writing in their own words and from their own experiences could provide an important perspective and offer new insight into the context in which radicalisation and recruitment occur.

As Freear emphasised, supporting the voices of marginalised youth and strengthening their self-expression complements the mentorship programmes in helping mentors and mentees to speak for themselves for many purposes, whether in private, in a town hall meeting or in the community among peers or online.

Lessons Learned on Measuring Progress

Measuring progress in PVE/CVE programmes posed challenges. The fourth and final session of the conference investigated different approaches used and lessons learned through three presentations. This section of the conference report provides a summary of each one.

Kathleen White's presentation addressed what is termed the Jendouba model since it operates in Jendouba Governorate in Tunisia. The overall goal of the intervention is to target young people at risk of recruitment to violent extremism and radicalisation. The programme is Tunisian-led and -owned and according to White, the project is the first model in a Tunisian context which uses a multi-stakeholder approach to address national security issues. The programme brings together police, municipalities, civil society representatives and broader communities, as the lack of trust between government institutions – whether security services or municipal representatives and communities – is a contributing factor to the rise of violent extremism and attraction to VE groups.

The core components of the programme are strategic engagement with policymakers and institutional structures both at the national level and in the local areas of operation. The programme is, at the time of the presentation, in the initial stage of identifying and engaging

with at-risk individuals through a multi-agency approach. The approach is in some respects similar to the British programme Channel, which operates across multiple categories and aims through police and youth mentor teams to do broader safeguarding work by raising communities' awareness of P/CVE. The programmes involve engagement with policymakers and institutional structures both at the national and local level.

To capture change, as White explained, it is important to identify (1) change in attitudes and behaviour between different stakeholders in the project, mainly youth and the police, and (2) change in the relationships between youth, the police, the local authorities and the wider community, and especially (3) changes in the relationship between youth in risk of radicalisation and recruitment to VE groups and the police. To capture change, they counted how many referrals were received by the police liaison community office from members of the public and how many referrals were coming in from police officers as they conducted their routine functions in the community.

Several ethical and methodological considerations emerged from the evaluation of the project. One lesson learned was that it is crucial from the beginning to allow time to build trust between project, stakeholders and community as it is a slow but important process. This process may also involve the anticipation and handling of the impact that both the data-gathering and the end result have on the community and the individuals in the programme.

Models can be inspired from elsewhere but need to be adapted and tailored to fit the local context. Context sensitivity is important in every aspect of these projects and monitoring and evaluation has to be in line with what local actors and institutions are comfortable with. White also pointed to the importance of making the limitations of the chosen evaluation methods clear from the outset for the people involved.

An intervention generates data about challenges in a community, which, when combined with stakeholders' analyses, provides information that can inform and benefit the project and stakeholders for the duration of the project. Quantitative data can provide useful insight into why people feel the way they do in regard to the police and violent extremists.

The programme has, as White pointed out, a separate monitoring and evaluation component as it is an experimental approach that requires ongoing testing and refining to see how the broad components apply in Tunisia. By applying an interactive feedback loop – between monitoring and evaluation, and the design – the implementation of the programme can benefit from experience on the ground to refine the programme's objectives and vice versa. Since, as White explained, a research team dedicates effort to translate and explain the data and insights from an evaluation to community stakeholders and police, the research can provide people on the ground with valuable insights to better understand what is going on at the local and national levels, which can inform, for example, police performance in the community.

Juuso Miettunen's presentation centred more generally on lessons learned when evaluating conflict-stabilising initiatives and countering VE in conflict-ridden contexts, such as Somalia. As

Miettunen pointed out, there are a number of methodological issues to consider when doing research in conflict zones to uphold the researcher's security and to secure representativeness of an investigation. To begin with, the theory of change (ToC) should be developed by a mixture of people on the ground who know the local context and people who have experience with writing ToC.

When doing research in conflict areas, it can be difficult to meet the demands of representation, as these call for talking to a greater number of people. This is practically impossible in a setting such as Somalia, as it can entail field researchers talking to people they are unfamiliar with, which may put the researcher at risk. To handle such issues, doing longitudinal studies may be an option as the researcher may engage with the same people over a period of time and therefore a relationship can be built. Using people from the community to do the research can also be a solution and often provides a double resource as they know the community and cultural codes and may have a better knowledge than the researcher about the people they are dealing with. They may also have a better chance of making contact and establishing rapport.

Miettunen also focused on how to handle sensitive questions related to security and relations between the government and the community in settings of ongoing conflicts. As he explained, one needs to defer such questions until trust has been built and potentially include less sensitive questions alongside them, such as those unrelated to security.

It can prove difficult to estimate people's attitudes in zones of conflicts as everyday perceptions often have changed dramatically. Introducing proxy questions can be one method of establishing a shared reality between interviewer and informant. Miettunen used the example of a researcher asking people if it is safe. They might answer 'Yes, it is safe', but if the researcher then asks, 'Can I go out after 7 pm?', they will say 'No, you cannot be outside after dark'. The latter type of question provides a more realistic perception of safety. Externalisation of questions is yet another way of collecting data about sensitive subjects as it allows people to speak more freely. An interviewer can, for example, tell an informant the beginning of a contextually relevant story and let the person continue. This creates an opportunity for people to talk about their own experiences by externalising them.

Miettunen pointed out that it is crucial to have a clear research strategy in order to mitigate the impact of subjectivity and bias and the potential lethargy of the research communities and data collectors.

Gayatri Sahgal and Timothy Kimaiyo's presentation disseminated the midline findings from STRIVE II. The evaluation of the programme is based on three main outcome levels: (1) reduce mentors' level of engagement in violence; (2) raise awareness of the risk and consequences of joining VE groups; and (3) improve understanding of VE issues among mentors, mentees and stakeholders. These are the basis of the project's ToC, which, to facilitate monitoring and evaluation, has been broken down into indicators.

STRIVE II focuses on three aspects: awareness; critical education; and changing the mentees' peer networks. Sahgal and Kimaiyo categorised their finding into three sections: (1) What are the mentees' attitudes to violence? (2) What is the mentees' awareness of risk when joining VE groups? (3) What is the effect of the programme on mentees' understanding of VE issues? They formulated four indicators focused on the risk of young people joining VE groups or becoming violent extremists: (1) moral behavior; (2) self-confidence; (3) networks; and (4) attitudes towards violence. As a result of the mentorship intervention, significant improvements were noted in factors such as the attitudes towards risk and morally appropriate behaviour. Despite such improvements, however, limited changes were observed in the life skills of mentees. Between the baseline and midline of the programme, improvements in those reporting higher levels of self-confidence or a more diverse network of friends were not noted (in fact there was a decrease between the baseline and midline).

In interpreting such findings, it needs to be borne in mind that lower reported levels of self-confidence at the midline were primarily driven by the lower levels of satisfaction with life and circumstances, as Sahgal emphasised. While on the face of it these findings may appear discouraging, more in-depth conversations with mentors and stakeholders revealed that in the course of their participation in the programme, the mentees had developed higher aspirations for their lives and circumstances.

Recommendations for Doing CVE Youth Mentorship

During the presentations and the following discussion about mentorship programmes, several recommendations emerged. The key ones are as follows.

1. Issues to consider when mentors are an integrated part of a P/CVE programme

Mentors should be recruited based on a professional recruitment process. It is crucial for a programme to support mentors to ensure that they develop skills necessary to support mentees.[15] It is also important for programmes to provide mentors and mentees with psychosocial support in order for them to handle information about potential traumatic events and increase their reflection level, self-esteem and life skills capabilities.

2. Stakeholders

For mentorship programmes to be successful, stakeholders with a thorough understanding of the target group's social setting and context are crucial to assess who 'at-risk youth' are in the community when recruiting mentees. It is also critical for project managers to bear in mind that stakeholders might have their own agendas and that a community's negative perceptions could influence their assessments of a given target group. This could lead to the inaccurate identification of the target group of mentees.

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15.   For more information about practice/method-informed mentoring, see Christensen, 'A Question of Participation'.

3. Selection of mentors

Mentors need knowledge about the target group and the environments the mentees are or have been involved in. Mentors with religious or ideological knowledge are valuable for a programme when targeting mentees at risk of recruitment to extreme religiously or politically defined groups. Mentors must operate within the boundaries of the law and be respectful and tolerant of people of different ethnicities, genders, physical appearances, dress codes, political inclinations or personal beliefs.

4. Selection of mentees

Mentees in P/CVE programmes are, in general, selected based on one or more criteria such as: knowing close peers/relatives engaged in VE activities; being violent criminals or gang members; holding or articulating extremist views and tendencies; or being in vulnerable situations.

5. A mentor's qualities and competencies

Questions such as what attributes a mentor should have and how to avoid getting mentors and mentees who get involved for the sole purpose of gaining money or other goods seem to be common challenges, which need ongoing considerations. A good mentor is mature, reflective, motivated, open and able to set boundaries and a positive example to follow. It is likewise important that a mentor knows about available material and human resources in the community or where to get such knowledge.

6. Pairing mentors and mentees

While a mentor's areas of experiences and personality should reflect the problem of the mentee(s), the relationship between the two needs to be based on genuine sympathy and trust in order to enable the mentee to be receptive towards the mentor's input and support.

When pairing mentors and mentees, it is ideal to initially use mentors who share some similarities with the mentee, but who are on a positive, stable and secure path in life. When pairing mentors with mentees, gender always needs to be considered in relation to the specific target group as it may pose a problem dependent on the kinds of groups the mentees have been involved in. It can be an issue when working with male former members of right-wing extremist groups and other groups informed by a male chauvinistic ideology.[16] Yet, in preventive programmes like STRIVE II, interviewing of female mentees indicates that matching mentors and mentees across genders provides males and females an opportunity to learn about each other's challenges, thoughts and lives.

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16. Wilchen Christensen, 'When Good Intentions are Not Enough'.

7. Setting goals for mentees

Goal-setting needs to be guided by the programme and developed in dialogue between the mentor and the mentee. When planning the mentees' goals, it is important to make the steps involved apparent and achievable to uphold the mentees' motivation and to ensure they can appreciate small achievements. The goals need to be realistic and broken down for the mentee to see their achievements along the way. An achievable goal can initially be to get up in the morning, meet the mentor at a given hour or become a member of the local sports team. Short-term goals should be informed and placed with a framework of long-term goals. This can prove valuable if the programme has access to other actors, such as vocational training and community support programmes, which can also help the mentees achieve their goals by providing possibilities and support.

8. Managing social and economic problems and upholding the mentees' motivation

Many mentoring programmes depend on external funding, which raises questions of how to uphold the positive outcome of mentoring when the programme depends on donors who might suddenly disappear, taking away possibilities for the mentees. One way to further secure the relationship between mentors and mentees is if the mentorship programmes provide access to complementary programmes. Experiences from STRIVE II indicate that connections to a broader range of programmes and NGOs seem to ensure mentees remain motivated, as the mentees' often-difficult economic situation poses a problem for their engagement. The possibility of former mentees becoming mentors also seems to reinforce their motivation and engagement in the mentorship programme.

9. When is mentoring no longer needed?

Estimating a programme's impact on mentees depends on the programme design and target audience. Determining when mentoring is no longer needed can be identified through conversations and observations with the mentees along the way or when both the long-term and short-term goals have been achieved. The end of mentoring is considered reached when the mentees improve their life skills and have increased confidence in themselves for actions such as speaking in public, taking a role in the community, or becoming a mentor, and when there is a change in their connections, such as reconnecting with family and/or members of the community. Mentees can also provide an avenue to document improvement by providing mentees with a workbook to write down their experiences and skills have they learned. This simultaneously supports mentees' reflections and self-awareness.

10. Risk and safety when doing mentoring in a PVE/CVE setting

It is important to consider risk and safety when doing mentoring in a P/CVE setting. Programme managers and/or mentorship managers ought to discuss security issues with the mentors and set ground rules, principles and boundaries for the mentor to follow. To reduce the mentor's risk when meeting with a mentee, the mentor must determine the venues and time for meeting.

The individual mentors should also be aware and reflective about their capabilities to handle different and potentially difficult situations and to be supported by the programme in stopping mentoring of mentees that they feel unsafe dealing with.

11. Thoughts for consideration when mentoring with limited resources

Several challenges have been identified across representatives of different programmes present at the conference. Some questions seem to be ongoing such as: if the right stakeholders, mentors and mentees are selected, is the matching of mentor–mentees beneficial to the mentee? How do programmes maintain mentors' and mentees' motivation? After mentorship, then what? How to handle stigmatisation of mentors/mentees? What does the programme do if a mentee is potentially involved in a terror attack? How will the programme handle government bureaucracy and security actors? These are just some of the challenging tasks involved in mentoring that need to be addressed and discussed in the programme design. Some of these require putting in place contingency plans, persistently asking 'what if?' Others require trialling new ideas and adapting to circumstances. A general critical eye on safety, outcomes and context is necessary.

Conclusion

Mentoring has become a widely used approach in preventing mainly youth from entering, or supporting them in exiting, VE groups,a theme reinforced by this conference. Yet, for mentoring to provide support of any person in danger of recruitment to VE groups, the mentoring schemes need to be informed by a deliberated ToC and build on an explicit practice and method. If not, mentoring runs the risk of being reduced to being a positive 'role model', while it should and can be so much more. Mentoring has proven to be a strong tool in preventing mainly young people from entering VE groups and in supporting them in leaving.[17]

Tina Wilchen Christensen has a PhD in social anthropology. She is a mentorship adviser at RUSI, Kenya and assistant professor at Aarhus University, Denmark. Her research centres on ways into, across and especially out of violent extremist groups, the associated exit processes and the individual's development of a new self-perception and identity.

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17.   Wilchen Christensen, 'A Question of Participation'.