EU-UNDP Project

“*Preventing Violent Extremism through Promoting Tolerance and Respect for Diversity*”

Final Evaluation, April 2020

Philip Peirce

Independent Consultant



Contents Page

Acronyms & Abbreviations 3

Executive Summary 4

1. Introduction & Methodology 6
2. The Project

2.1 Summary Information 8

2.2 Project Programming 8

2.3 Structure & Implementation Arrangements 10

3. Evaluation Findings

3.1 RELEVANCE

3.1.1 Adequacy 11

3.1.2 Responsiveness 12

3.1.3 Adaptability 14

3.1.4 Flaws in the Design and Limitations 15

3.2 EFFECTIVENESS

3.2.1 Output 1: Regional Networking 16

3.2.2 Output 2: Development of National Action Plans 18

3.2.3 Output 3: Community Resilience 19

3.3 EFFICIENCY

3.3.1 Delivery of Outputs and Issues Arising 21

3.3.2 Project Structure and Organisation 22

3.3.3 Relations with the EU as Partner to the Action 23

3.4 CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNT  24

4. Recommendations 28

**ANNEXES**

Annex I: Evaluation TORs 31

Annex II: Evaluation Desk Review Note, December 2019 36

Annex III: Evaluation Questions for Interviewees/FGDs 38

Annex IV: Evaluation Interviews Conducted 40

**Acronyms & Abbreviations**

ASEAN The Association of Southeast Asian Nations

BARMM Bangsomoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, the Philippines

BNPT National Counter Terrorism Agency (Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme), Indonesia

CSOs Civil Society Organisations

CTED Counter Terrorism Executive Directorate (UN)

EU European Union

FTFs Foreign Terrorist Fighters

GEN 2 Gender Marker 2 - gender is mainstreamed in all project activities

ICT Information and Communications Technology

M&E Monitoring and Evaluation

NAP National Action Plan for PCVE

NGOs Non-Governmental Organisations

NSC National Security Council

OPPAP Office of the Presidential Adviser to the Peace Process (the Philippines)

PCVE Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism

IcSP Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (EU)

PBS Public Broadcasting Service (Thailand)

RAP (ASEAN) Regional Action Plan to Prevent and Counter the Rise of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism

SNAP Sub-National Plan for PCVE

TORs Terms of Reference

UNDP United Nations Development Programme

UNOCT United Nations Office for Counter Terrorism

UNW United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment

VE Violent Extremism

**Executive Summary**

The final evaluation of the EU-funded, UNDP implemented project “*Preventing Violent Extremism through Promoting Tolerance and Respect for Diversity*” (PROTECT) was conducted in the first quarter of 2020. The evaluation looked at the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of project implementation, identified lessons learned for the future, and makes a number of recommendations for the design, approach and implementation modalities for a second phase of assistance.

The overall conclusion of the evaluation is that the project has been a highly successful initiative to date, well-received by all stakeholders, that has built credible and productive partnerships, achieved initial results and demonstrated potential for real impact. The project remains relevant to the context, and a second phase of assistance is needed to consolidate the results achieved to date and to further capacitate Governments and civil society in the region to undertake PCVE programming in accordance with normative standards and global good practice.

The project was well-received by all stakeholders, considered highly **relevant** to the context and timely in its provision, implemented at a moment when ASEAN and Governments of the region were actively working to put policy frameworks in place, and engaging with civil society organisations as partners to the effort. Design and implementation of the project was clearly coherent with UN, EU and ASEAN frameworks, with activities that proactively supported their alignment and promotion.

The design and structure of the project struck a good balance between establishing a regional approach, and decentralizing activity-level project formulation to national teams who were able to ‘frame’ the intervention according to the local context and to identify the specific mix of activities to secure the outputs. Regular contact between project teams, Government counterparts and civil society partners ensured tailored and responsive provision of assistance, sufficiently flexible to adapt to evolving needs.

This proved a very **effective** way of working, that has delivered initial results and holds promise for the future.

The project made good progress in establishing a “community of practice” in three of the countries (Thailand, Philippines and Indonesia), mobilised around the need for a developmental approach to PCVE. There is a clear sense of demand for experience-sharing at regional level, where correspondents appreciated the ability to learn of experience elsewhere. The research component of the project was well received by both Government counterparts and civil society partners, particular research carried out at national level.

The project achieved notable success in working with Governments toward preparation of National Action Plans in the region, with uniformly positive feedback from key counterparts. Evaluation interviews all credit project staff with building strong relations of trust, based on provision of impartial advice, practical support and a neutral, developmental approach to the issue.

Implementation of the third output of the project, to build community resilience and promote positive narratives, was evaluated as both innovative and promising in terms of the results achieved. Interesting partnerships have been established in all countries as well as regionally. The project has achieved acclaim and visibility in documenting the impact of extremism on people and communities (the *Extreme Lives* series organised in conjunction with Facebook) and in forging partnerships to mobilise young people against intolerance and violence (*Creators for Change,* organised in collaboration with Google).

In terms of **efficiency**, given the good results delivered by the project, and the fact that they were achieved within the original ratio of direct costs to programme costs of the agreed budget, the evaluation concluded that the project was overall a cost-effective as well as successful intervention. The decentralised approach to project implementation was considered to be working successfully, both substantively and operationally.

The Government of Malaysia accepted to participate in the project only toward the end of the implementation period, with project activities essentially limited to the other three target countries – Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines. The budget was flexible enough to allow re-allocation of activity budget for Malaysia to other countries, and approximately 96% of project funds were delivered.

The main issue affecting deliver of inputs was the tension between the short 18-month duration of the project, reflecting the crisis response purpose of the EU funding instrument, and the rather ambitious scope of activities proposed in the project document. While the project was established relatively quickly by UNDP at the regional level, time was needed to agree division of budgets with Country Offices, recruit staff and contract partners, leaving only one year for implementation of the majority of This resulted in a compressed implementation timetable which put real pressure on implementing partners to deliver and report upon activities quickly, and which strained relations with the EU.

While project teams have in general built been good personal relations with EU counterparts, relations could usefully be more systematised, and it is was noted that the formal governance mechanism of the project, a Joint UNDP-EU Steering Committee, had met only once during the project lifetime. In line with proposals for a second phase of assistance, national “Partner Platforms” will in future compliment meetings of the Joint Steering Committee at regional level.

Beyond capturing and assessing results at Output level, the evaluation has not addressed issues of overall **impact and sustainability** in any detail, given the early stage of the PVE effort in Southeast Asia, the 18 month duration of the project, and the longer-term perspective necessary to develop, implement and assess a developmental approach to the prevention of violent extremism. The planned second phase of the project, however, should include a clear focus on the development of monitoring and evaluation frameworks for PVE in Southeast Asia, both to facilitate assessment of their own progress, but also to support Governments to ensure that NAPs are implemented in a transparent and accountable way, and that activities are a targeted and cost-effective investment of national resources. Such work offers an opportunity to further promote gender mainstreaming, with gender disaggregated baselines, targets and indicators.

The evaluation has attempted to identify and record a number of **lessons learned** in the course of project identification and has proposed a series of **recommendations** for the design, approach and implementation modalities for the next phase of assistance. These take into account the evolving context of extremism in the region, the work and results of the project to date, and changes that will affect the future provision of assistance: eg, EU desire to articulate UNOCT to UNDP implementation, a longer project duration of three years, and uncertainties introduced by the advent of COVID-19.

Much remains to be done to support Governments of Southeast Asia to take next steps collectively and individually to tackle the scourge of violent extremism, and to respond to the growing prevalence of fake news and hate speech on social media. Collaboration on PVE is in many senses a natural partnership between the UN and the European Union, which models the soft power of both institutions to mutual benefit, expressing joint commitment to fundamental human rights and common values, the maintenance of peace and democracy, promotion of pluralism and tolerance, and defense of the health of public discourse. The project evaluated has established a good base on which to build.

1. **Introduction & Methodology**

The EU-funded project, “*Preventing Violent Extremism through Promoting Tolerance and Respect for Diversity*” (PROTECT), was implemented by UNDP over a period of 18 months, between August 2018 and February 2020. The project document called for a Final Evaluation to be undertaken in the final quarter.

As the project drew to a close at the end of 2019, the EU signalled its interest in collaborating with UNDP under a new project, with a potential duration of 3 years, subject to positive evaluation of the existing work, to further build on the results and lessons learned by the UNDP country offices in Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, and Thailand as well as the UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub.

The author was contracted to undertake both the Final Evaluation and preparation of a new project document (Description of the Action) for UNDP-EU consideration, in December 2019. Terms of Reference for the assignment are appended to this document as Annex I. The purpose of the evaluation is given as follows:

*The review will attempt to understand strengths in the current project, areas of improvement, and to document the performance, results and impact of the project to date. The review will be both backward and forward-looking. It will consider the design and thematic areas of focus, including partnerships to improve the effectiveness and the efficiency of the activities for a potential new project of the UNDP-EU PVE Programme.*

The Terms of Reference envisaged three main phases to the assignment – a desk review of project materials to be undertaken in December 2019, a mission to Southeast Asia in January 2020 to conduct field visits and interviews of key stakeholders, and home-based writing time in February and March to prepare both the two documents required, Final Evaluation of the existing project and a Description of the Action for the proposed new one.

The desk review phase involved reviewing the project document, annual work plans, project structure and staffing, internal monitoring reports and quarterly project reporting to the EU, facilitated and guided by the Regional Project Manager, and submission of a brief note on methodology and schedule for undertaking the evaluation (Annex II).

The evaluation mission was undertaken 4th January – 1st February, with a break between 21st-26th January, with initial briefings from the UNDP regional hub and the EU Delegation in Bangkok. The mission consisted a series of forty interviews conducted by the author in Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia to solicit answers to the evaluation questionnaire in Annex III. The questionnaire was guided by the evaluation questions under the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, potential impact, coordination and sustainability themes as given in the Terms of Reference.

The questions were designed to capture various levels of information including before and after experiences, stories of change, unquantifiable, tangible and measurable impacts of the project with close care for building attribution to the project’s activities. Interviews were conducted at the UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub, in the national UNDP offices in the beneficiary countries, and with counterparts and implementing partners at their offices or otherwise in the field at project sites. Not all interviewees were asked all of the questions, with certain questions specific to certain stakeholder groups, falling into the following categories: Government counterparts, civil society implementing partners, UNDP staff or other Agency/donor representatives.

The process for data collection and analysis was intended as participatory in nature and gender sensitive. Respondents were encouraged to speak freely, as individual responses would remain anonymous and respondents would be specifically requested to approve citation or quotation of particular remarks. Based on findings, lessons learnt and recommendations for future programming were extracted and collated.

One limitation of the evaluation methodology was that the author was not able to visit all sites where project activities were being implemented, nor able to interview all stakeholders or beneficiaries. This was due to two reasons:

1. Sensitivities in Malaysia in regard to the project and uncertainty over national participation, which militated against the visit of an external international consultant, and which was not considered essential given the lack of concrete activities or progress beyond renewed Government commitment to work with the project in future;
2. Eruption of the Taal volcano in the Philippines on the day of the arrival of the consultant in the country, and which curtailed participation in an arranged project meeting on Mindanao. A number of participants were interviewed by Skype instead on the margins of the event, and others interviewed subsequently at a regional workshop held in Indonesia to share experience between countries on development of National Action Plans.

At the end of the mission, debriefings were conducted with the UNDP Regional Project Manager and Chief of Regional Programme for Asia-Pacific, UNDP Deputy Resident Representatives in the region, UNDP and UNOCT colleagues in New York and with the EU Delegation in Bangkok.

The EU chose to proceed with the process of preparation of the new project based on the verbal debriefing given, and the author was asked to work first on drafting the Description of the Action, to facilitate the contracting process. An initial draft was submitted on February 10th for UNDP review, and subsequently finalised following further inputs and revisions.

To successfully complete the evaluation, the home-based writing leg of the assignment has focused on data triangulation between the desk review undertaken, the interviews conducted and the field observations made, in order to identify plausible associations, and to validate and record them under five headings in line with those given in the original Terms of Reference given for the evaluation: Relevance; Effectiveness; Efficiency; Lessons Learnt for Future Programming; Recommendations.

Finalisation of this Evaluation was interrupted by the COVID-19 crisis, and submission delayed. It is hoped, however, that the Evaluation will *post-facto* substantiate further the scope of work proposed in the Description of the Action, and can usefully inform the Inception Phase of the new project, in which detailed formulation of activities will be undertaken by the UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub and the UNDP Country Offices concerned.

The author would like to thank the Regional Programme Manager and all staff at the Bangkok Regional Hub for their substantive inputs, administrative and logistical administrative support, the UNDP Country Office and project personnel in each country for their critical thinking and mission facilitation also, and all interview respondents who were so generous with their time and responses.

Philip Peirce

20th April 2020

**2. The Project**

**2.1 Summary Information**

The project, formally entitled “*Preventing Violent Extremism through Promoting Tolerance and Respect for Diversity*” and informally known as “PROTECT”, was contracted by the EU to UNDP for implementation on 19th August, with an 18-month duration (for closure 18th February 2020) and a budget of 3,000,000 Euro. The project was established as a multi-donor action, with co-financing arrangement in which core UNDP resources complemented EU funding provided.

The overall objective of the project was to reduce the vulnerability of the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand to violent extremism, reduce the danger of radicalization and increase the resilience of local communities and societies as a whole towards terrorist threats.

While the project has three outputs for implementation at both the regional and country level in the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand, outlined below, the specific activities to secure them are listed in the document as “indicative”, giving UNDP significant leeway at regional and country level to determine the precise nature and cost of each intervention, and to make continual adjustments to evolving project context and needs.

**2.2 Project Programming**

**Output 1: Regional network of practitioners that conducts research, holds forums and develops policy recommendations for preventing violent extremism in Asia established**

UNDP will work with Hedayah (and coordinate with other local research institutions and think tanks) to identify and carry out critical VE research relevant at national and regional levels:

1. The journey’s returnees are taking to return home and how governments and communities are reintegrating them;
2. The reasons why certain groups – separatists in Southern Thailand and Rohingya in Myanmar – have not proved susceptible to international jihadi recruitment;
3. Connections between criminality, smuggling and extremism;
4. The role of women in extremist groups and counter-extremism policies and the impact of extremism on women;
5. The emergence of extremist groups in Myanmar;
6. The impact of devolution on conflict and extremism;
7. Effective models of policing in Southeast Asia; and
8. Gendered dimensions of extremist narratives – hyper masculinity and the restrictive role for women.

To connect research to practical policy outcomes, UNDP will work with partners to hold roundtables and conferences to disseminate a more evidence-based analytical framework to prevent VE in South-East Asia. Most prominently are four national research workshops and several regional research workshops on cross-border issues.

To bring together a number of experts approaching violent extremism from different perspectives to discuss new and innovative strategies, including but not limited to; security and counterterrorism experts; development professionals; ICT companies; academics; think-tanks; and reformed ex-combatants. The regional dimension to these discussions will ensure the transnational elements of violent extremism are addressed, and that UNDP can utilize its comparative advantage in advancing a development perspective to the structural conditions that drive violent extremism.

**Output 2: National policies and programmes on violent extremism developed and implemented within a human rights and gender equality framework**

This output facilitates preventative diplomacy to support policy making for national policies and programmes on violent extremism to ensure they are inclusive and framed with a human rights and gender equality framework. This will be done through:

***(1)*** *Bringing together a range of countries from Asia together to build their understanding on these more inclusive and holistic processes, exchange experiences and share lessons learned;*

***(2)*** *Supporting a small number of interested stakeholders in countries in facilitating their understanding, development, localization, implementation and monitoring and evaluation strategy as they embark on national action plan development processes.*

Efforts will be made to ensure National Action Plans are developed through a participatory process which includes women and women’s organizations and ensure they address the gendered dimensions of extremism including the impact of extremism on women. Efforts will also be made to ensure youth voice and participation are incorporated to understand the specific role youth play in the fight against extremism.

**Output 3: Strengthened capacities of communities to promote peace, tolerance and respect for diversity**

The third output has three components:

1. The first component builds on *#ExtremeLives*, a UNDP initiative that partners with Facebook in South-East Asia. This initiative explores themes related to radicalization, violent extremism and reintegration through conversation-style interviews with people in some way affected by violent extremism (former extremists, survivors, prevention activists) and is broadcast on Facebook Live. The series provides a platform for these narratives.
2. The second component will introduce a partnership with YouTube to find, stimulate and showcase emerging content creators and young role models presenting alternatives to extremism. This ‘*Creators for Change*’ project will a series of national workshops to bring together a diverse group of community change agents and creative artists to develop communications campaigns and content that not only counter the influence of violent extremists, but also encourage and enable community members to develop and promote their own positive content to promote values of pluralism. The winning teams will receive small grant awards and work with mentors and content producers from national academy programmes which will culminate in a regional networking event and content challenge.
3. To address the issue of economic grievances and target socioeconomic drivers of violent extremism, this component will also provide economic opportunities for young people through entrepreneurship. The activities will empower aspiring entrepreneurs in less advantaged communities by building a network of investors, incubators and accelerators, mentors, entrepreneurship programmes and others who want to participate and help. It broadens economic inclusivity and helps build supportive ecosystems that make entrepreneurship accessible for everyone.

**2.3 Structure & Implementation Arrangements**

As per the approved project document, a regional office was established to create networks, commission research, host dialogues and provide quality control ensuring a transnational analysis. The in-country work would partner with national institutions and civil society to address the root causes of violent extremism specific to the country context.

The Regional team in Bangkok took responsibility for regional activities – research, *Creators for Change, Extreme Lives* etc – as well as responsibility for narrative and financial reporting, coordination with UNDP HQ, regional and HQ units of UNOCT and UN Agencies, liaison with the EU Task Manager.

Country teams, reporting to UNDP Country Office management, were responsible for the detailed design of activities at the national level, according to the broad outline given in the Description of the Action, and according to a budget division between countries established by the Bangkok Regional Hub.

The project was conceived as a partnership between the EU and UNDP, and a Joint Steering Committee was proposed to ensure that the EU had direct engagement with UNDP and its partners on the choice and steering of activities. The project aimed to promote collaboration and engagement between UNDP and the EU in project implementation.

**3. Evaluation Findings**

**3.1 RELEVANCE**

Relevance refers to the extent to which the design of the PVE project responds to the needs of the region, and how well it adopted a policy and context sensitive approach. It looks at the responsiveness of the project to understanding and capacities of counterparts and partners. Also considered is whether the project has been able to adapt and learn during delivery, and to cope within a fast-changing environment and challenges arising.

* + 1. **Adequacy**

The phenomenon of violent extremism remains both current reality and potential threat in Southeast Asia, as elsewhere in the world, and the concept of programmatic intervention to prevent it remains relevant accordingly. Terrorist bombings in Indonesia and the events and aftermath of the “siege of Marawi” in the Philippines, , and the prospective return of significant numbers of FTFs are all different aspects of the phenomenon which will require the continued attention and response of Governments and broader civil society in the region.

Beyond such global headlines, research undertaken in Indonesia in the first phase of the project indicated that campus-mosques in 10 targeted universities were all exposed to radicalism or have been used as venue to spread out the values of radicalism. Additionally, according to recent information gathered during the evaluation process, approximately half of first year University students had already been ‘radicalised’ in high school, to the extent that they rejected key elements of the national constitution in favour of democracy, religious tolerance, and free speech. In Thailand and the Philippines, a sense of the growing prevalence of fake news and hate speech online bespeaks the development of similar attitudes – and potentially fertile ground for violent extremist recruiters – in regard to a variety of causes.

The design of the project was found to reflect well the different dimensions and needs in regard to the prevention of violent extremism of south-east Asia in terms of a first pilot phase of assistance. The focus on regional networking, through research and exchange of perspectives and views, has established an embryonic regional community of practitioners in support of the regional effort, and instrumental in driving engagement on the issue in their own countries. As momentum has built for Governments to prepare and implement their own NAPs, the project provided timely assistance, in the right manner, to raise understanding of counterparts and partners to the scope of the undertaking and to facilitate the processes – including the “whole of society” approach – essential to ultimate success of the work.

The focus of Output 3, essentially efforts to build the resilience of specific communities – whether geographic, sectoral, or communities of interest in the online space – has proven a laboratory for the development of innovative and promising approaches to counter extremist narratives and promote values of peace and democracy.

The project was found to be both policy and context sensitive. In line with the approach outlined in the project document, the work clearly takes as its starting point the UN Secretary General’s Plan of Action for Preventing Violent Extremism, and the seven key actions identified: (1) Dialogue and conflict prevention; (2) strengthening good governance, rules of law and human rights; (3) engaging communities; (4) empowering youth; (5) empowering women; (6) education skill development and employment generation; and (7) strategic communications and media.

The project’s programming and activities for the prevention of violent extremism was also in line with the recent recommendations from Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism. Project activities and engagements were compliant with international human rights laws and due diligence policies of the United Nations and strove to ensure that all policies and programmes supported by it were governed by a clear and human-rights-compliant legal framework, subject to monitoring and evaluation.

The project was also aligned with the overarching UNDP global programme “*Preventing Violent Extremism through Inclusive Development and the Promotion of Tolerance and Respect for Diversity*”, which addresses underlying factors that drive violent extremism through longer-term, inclusive and rights- based development. UNDP’s approach is to address two inter-related challenges:

1. To address the rise in violent extremism using a development and peacebuilding approach firmly grounded with human rights and gender equality principles;
2. Strengthen and promote tolerance, political and economic empowerment, and reduction of inequalities.

This design of the project took this global framework and successfully adapted it to the regional context of South East Asia, customising implementation to each country while maintaining key principles such as the need for a “*whole of society*” approach”. In all countries with the current exception of Malaysia, the project has managed to sensitise, mobilise and articulate key civil society and even private sector partners to PCVE work and the process of preparation of NAPs.

The regional context and policy framework continued to evolve during the period of project implementation. Adopted at the 12th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC) at the end of October 2018, the ASEAN Plan of Action to Prevent and Counter the Rise of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism (hereafter also referred to as the RAP) was established to follow up on the mandate given by the Manila Declaration to Counter the Rise of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism (2017) and contribute to the realization of the agenda ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together. In November 2019, ASEAN Member States, following an extensive consultation process with all ASEAN Sectoral Bodies and Dialogue Partners (including the UN), agreed on a road map for the implementation of the RAP. This document, known as “the Bali Work Plan (2019-2025)”, contains specific initiatives to be implemented across the RAP’s priority areas, and outlines plans for an effective multisectoral coordination platform through which to manage and monitor activities.

Development of the ASEAN regional policy framework gave political momentum to the efforts of Member States to prepare their own national action plans, and a conducive environment for the provision of technical expertise to ensure normative alignment and adherence to global good practice in regard to a developmental approach and attention to gender issues and human rights.

* + 1. **Responsiveness**

While regional momentum may have established a supportive context, however, the need to ‘frame’ PVE correctly for NAP preparation in each country, for it to be understood as relevant and accepted as necessary by all stakeholders, emerged as a consistent theme of the evaluation, raised by all categories of respondent – Government counterparts, civil society partners, international interlocutors and project teams in each country. PVE work exists as a sub-discipline of counter terrorism, and for those countries which have not experienced terrorism, or which do not choose to acknowledge its reality, likelihood, or possibility within the current bounds of political discourse, then a broader conceptualisation is required if the effort is going to be driven by a “whole of society” approach that moves beyond ‘ownership’ of a narrow group of security-oriented stakeholders.

Government development of NAPs is a voluntary process, and the project was found to have demonstrated a patient and responsive approach which supported internal debate amongst national stakeholders and facilitated appropriate national framing of local challenges and approaches to be achieved by consensus.

Respondents described essentially a similar process in each country, by which Governments agreement to preparation of PVE NAPs initiated internal debate amongst line Ministries, Departments and security agencies as to what this should entail, who should ‘own’ the effort, and how best it might be managed.

Quite understandably, different pillars of Government see PVE from different perspectives. While the evaluation noted differences between the countries, possibly due to inconsistency in the nature of Government interlocutors interviewed, an aggregation of responses suggests at least four axes of understanding: Foreign Ministries and others concerned with external relations, and the need to comply and align regionally and internationally with treaties, standards and good practice; security agencies with responsibility for counter-terrorism and the monitoring of threats to public order; line Ministries, with varying degrees of understanding as to their relevance to the issue; Finance Ministries, who need to be engaged from the outset if necessary resources are to be made available to NAP implementation.

Specific national Focal Points are responsible for ensuring consistency and coherence of PVE understanding and response within Government, as part of their responsibility for organising preparation of NAPs. All Focal Points (with the exception of Malaysia, where the process has yet to gain traction) expressed appreciation of UNDP assistance to their work in this regard, a desire to build on the partnership as NAP preparation turns to NAP implementation, and the need for the process to be accompanied by continued capacity building to mainstream PVE across Government policy and programming.

Critically, the issue of process management includes when, how, and to what extent to articulate civil society groups to the PVE effort (the ‘*whole of society’* approach). To a greater or lesser degree in all countries, the evaluation found Governments still debating internally the right balances to strike: on the one hand, the need to respect the independence of NGOs and civil society generally – given that it is often that independence, and the credibility it brings in key communities – that makes civil society an effective partner; on the other hand, hesitation to draw attention to the issue and give a platform to potential political opponents, along with a security impulse toward the need to control and/or surveil interventions in sensitive areas, thematic and geographic, which could result in the deliberate or inadvertent diversion of funds or other resources to extremist groups.

The project is yet to navigate this issue in Malaysia, and the necessary pathway to an inclusive and participatory process. In Thailand, however, the project is credited with having done a good job in promoting a more developmental approach to the issue, which focuses less on ‘hard’ terrorism and more on the prevalence of fake news, hate speech and incitement to violence, and a sense of growing majoritarian intolerance toward minority culture and needs. This focus – essentially one of monitoring and maintaining the health of civic discourse in Thailand – has made the PVE effort more palatable politically, given sensitivities within Government against international attention toward the ongoing insurgency in the Deep South of the country. It has also allowed a much broader range of civil society stakeholders to ‘locate’ themselves in relation to the issue, and to come on board the overall effort.

In all three countries where the project is operational, civil society practitioners spoke of the importance of the role of UNDP as neutral convenor on the issue, establishing the correct framing to allow an inclusive and participatory effort, and trusted with ensuring the right relations between civil society and Government where sensitivities exist. While this reflects the position of the Agency as part of the UN system, it also reflects the capacity and experience of UNDP in working with Government counterparts and civil society partners in all aspects of its work, and the networks and credibility it has built in the process. These points were made by two groups of interlocutors in particular: research partners, often working on sensitive topics, and local NGO representatives working in ‘hotspot’ communities.

**3.1.3 Adaptability**

The project structure and design allowed a flexible approach to be taken to implementation, which suited the changing regional context and facilitated the responsive approach to counterpart needs noted in the section above.

Decentralisation of detailed planning of project activities to the UNDP Country Offices and project teams for each country allowed both customisation to national needs but also sequencing of implementation to meet local realities.

As noted above, specific activities to secure the project outputs were listed in the project document as “indicative”, which allowed UNDP to assess effectiveness and cost-efficiency on an ongoing basis, and to adjust plans accordingly. While the third output for community resilience can be considered generally successful, for instance (see section “Effectiveness”), the component proposed to address the issue of economic grievances and target socioeconomic drivers of violent extremism, was not implemented, largely given budget constraints.

While support to entrepreneurship can provide alternative development pathways for individuals, it is hard to achieve impact at scale in many places, given both the costs involved for donors, and limited market opportunities for the necessary number of graduates. While the activity was geared only toward the planning of such interventions, it is not clear why entrepreneurship was selected as an entry-point rather than, for instance, an approach that could reach more beneficiaries in a more participatory way – community-identified public works projects for instance.

The key disappointment of the project was clearly the disinclination of Malaysia to participate in a meaningful way. While progress has now been made in reassuring national authorities in regard to the nature and approach of the assistance to be provided, and Malaysia is slated to participate more fully in the second phase, the lack of programming under the project to be evaluated dictated the relocation of funds and activities to other participating countries. This was agreed in a flexible and equitable manner between the Bangkok Regional Hub and UNDP Country Offices, in sufficient time for all project funds to be expended (see Section 4, Efficiency).

In the Philippines, the establishment of the BARMM, and the need for reconstruction following the violent conclusion of the “siege of Marawi”, dictated close coordination between UNDP’s work for PVE in the country – not limited to the EU-funded project herein – and UNDP’s wider work for governance, development and peacebuilding on Mindanao. Such work is in its early stages and should be monitored particularly carefully as a test case for provision of PVE assistance in an immediate post-conflict environment in Southeast Asia, and for how best the specific work of PVE projects can be most effectively coordinated with broader PVE-relevant development work to ensure that the two tracks are mutually supportive.

In Thailand, project start-up proceeded virtually in parallel with democratic elections and a circumscribed return to civilian rule. While it is still early days for the new Government, and political constraints remain, the transition from military rule allowed the project to initiate a broader, less security-oriented dialogue on PVE with national authorities, and to establish positive relations with the Government Focal Point tasked with preparation of the NAP. This also entailed outreach to civil society groups to support the efforts of the National Security Council, careful attention to reassuring stakeholders of each other’s relevance and role, and to building relations of trust.

* + 1. **Flaws in Project Design**

While the overall design of the project was considered to be a good one, and the theory of change a reasonable proposition, two areas for improvement can be noted for attention in the prospective second phase of assistance.

First, the need for a more rigorous results framework, better informed by recent attempts to define M&E good practice in regard to PCVE programming. Targets and indicators of the results framework of the project evaluated are considered too inputs-based, concerned for instance with measuring the number of participants of a workshop rather than the effectiveness or impact of the event in terms of contributing to the Output.

While PCVE work has always suffered from the obvious in difficulties of isolating and measuring its own success in terms of disrupting radicalisation processes and reducing violent extremism, significant steps forward have been taken in thinking through proxy indicators and data sources by both UNDP and the EU. This includes UNDP work with International Alert in the Arab States[[1]](#footnote-2), with more general applicability, as well as EU guidelines for the sector and for IcSP-funded projects specifically. While it is likely that the new project document will still need to have a relatively general set of targets and indicators for the project aggregated at regional level, Inception Phase work to define specific activities and results to be achieved in each country should be accompanied by the preparation of detailed results frameworks (logical framework matrices in EU-language) that align with and model global good practice in this area.

The second, and related, deficiency of project design relates to the attention paid to gender. While the work was implemented by project teams with a clear understanding of the importance of gender to PVE[[2]](#footnote-3), concrete attention to this dimension was surprisingly absent in the formulation of the original project document and specifically the results framework. Future assistance needs to ensure that the M&E framework for the project aims to achieve a GEN-2 marker[[3]](#footnote-4), and that indicators and targets are disaggregated by gender as fully as possible. Similar attention needs to be paid to supporting Governments to establish gender markers for monitoring of implementation of NAPs and prospective Sub-National Action Plans (SNAPs).

**3.2 EFFECTIVENESS**

Effectiveness refers to the extent to which the project contributed towards its planned outcomes. This is done through looking at the degree to which the project contributed to the prevention of violent extremism through delivery of its key outputs: establishing a regional network of practitioners, developing National Action Plans, and strengthened community resilience.

The project is evaluated as being highly effective, although it is considered too soon to judge impact and sustainability. These have not been addressed in any detail by the evaluation, given the limited duration of the project, the pilot nature of many activities, and issues with the inputs-based nature of the original M&E framework. While allowing some important work to be initiated, and innovative activities to be piloted, the 18-month duration of the project, determined by the regulations of the funding instrument, was not well suited to implementation of a developmental approach to PVE.

At this stage, the effectiveness of the intervention can really only be measured in terms of the delivery of inputs and achievement of outputs rather than evaluation of impact at outcome level, and the views of key stakeholders captured in support of design of a next phase. The findings below are not intended to record and assess each and every activity undertaken by the project over its 18-month duration, but rather to evaluate the overall approach and selected results which elucidate the later section on Lessons Learnt, and which underpin the final section on Recommendations.

A very promising indicator of effectiveness is the relationships established by the project in all areas, with Government counterparts, civil society partners, and with the private sector. Evaluation interviews with Government Focal Points found that project staff have built strong relations of trust, based on impartial advice, practical support and a neutral, developmental approach to the issue. The project is also working with recognised and well received civil society actors, giving additional credibility to the activities undertaken, and has forged a number of innovative and promising partnerships. At national level, two particularly noteworthy examples are the collaborations with the Thai Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), and in Indonesia, with private-sector INDIKA Foundation[[4]](#footnote-5). At the regional level, the project has achieved acclaim and visibility in documenting the impact of extremism on people and communities (the *Extreme Lives* series organised in conjunction with Facebook) and in forging partnerships to mobilise young people against intolerance and violence (*Creators for Change,* organised in collaboration with Google).

**Output 1: Regional network of practitioners that conducts research, holds forums and develops policy recommendations for preventing violent extremism in Asia established**

The project made good progress in establishing a “community of practice” in three of the countries (Thailand, Philippines and Indonesia), mobilised around the need for a developmental approach to PCVE.

Evaluation interviews found a nascent, but skilled and active, cadre of respondents in each country, forming a core group of partners interested to take forward PCVE work as a specific discipline. The Philippines is most advanced in this regard, as might be expected, given the vibrancy of civil society in the country and the long-standing problems of Mindanao. In Thailand and Indonesia, respondents were generally ‘newer’ to the issue, and in Thailand several acknowledged feeling their way to an understanding of the developmental rather than security-oriented approach, the scope of what role civil society could play, and relations with Government-military authorities in undertaking it.

Respondents in all countries welcomed the substantive workshops and other forums organised by the project, as events which built their understanding of PVE and networked them with others working on different aspects of the issue. At the same time, in Thailand and in Indonesia in particular, UNDP implementing partners were not found to be always aware of each other’s work, and of the overall scope of the project. More could have been done to bring them together on a more regular basis, to share information and experience and to manage implementation issues.

Many interviewees mentioned the importance of the meetings being organised under the UN umbrella, given the sensitivities of the issue, and a more systematic schedule of inclusive and participatory meetings (beyond just with project implementing partners) will be required if the project is to develop a wider community of practice to underpin the “*whole of society*” approach and its application to NAP development and implementation as global good practice.

There is a clear sense of demand for experience-sharing at regional level, where correspondents appreciated the ability to learn of experience elsewhere, what is working and how, but felt that there had been insufficient time or number of activities for an effective network to coalesce or for results of cross-fertilisation to be demonstrated. Aggregating civil society voices to regional level was also noted as a way to promote participation and transparency and encourage Governments to allow more space for civil society engagement domestically.

The research component of the project was well received by both Government counterparts, civil society partners (in many cases parties to it), and by international audiences. While the evaluation found regional research undertaken to be interesting and potentially useful for overall advocacy and visibility purposes, research undertaken at national level was appreciated by respondents in all countries as both useful for advocacy and as an evidence-base for further programming.

In Indonesia for instance, national project research conducted appears to have had a profound catalysing effect. One research study found that all campus-mosques in 10 targeted state universities have been used as central point to disseminate virtues of radicalism and hard liners had developed a pattern of recruitment processes through various means relating to the campus-mosques. In another research study, findings obtained during the evaluation reflected that as many as half of University- entrants in one State Islamic University already held attitudes and beliefs incompatible with freedoms and values enshrined in the national constitution. In an interview with the coordinating Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Culture Affairs, officials had prepared a summary of project work and research findings and used it as a basis to request specific follow-up work to address them. The Ministry has requested further research and a closer relationship with UNDP’s research partner INFID. INFID itself proposes two specific topics – a study of radicalisation of high-school teachers and students, in response to previous findings, and of the potential role of revisions to teacher training; a study on the potential role of local Government in PCVE work.

In Thailand, a particularly interesting piece of research has established online data mining to record the prevalence and nature of religious fake news and hate speech, and is now monitoring majoritarian discourse as it relates for instance to complaints about mosque building, the halal industry, and perceived need to ban the hijab, as well as minority social media discourse, in the campaign for donations for the Myanmar Rohingya community for example. The research has led to policy recommendations in favour of campaign to promote multi-culturalism in southern Thailand, and to establish open space for youth dialogue, shared with the National Security Council, fellow academics, civil society organisations and the media.

**Output 2: National policies and programmes on violent extremism developed and implemented within a human rights and gender equality framework**

The project achieved notable success in working with Governments toward preparation of National Action Plans in the region, with uniformly positive feedback from key counterparts. The effort has facilitated understanding of the need to take a developmental approach to PCVE, and project work in the Philippines and Indonesia to integrate gender and human rights dimensions was well-received.

The Philippines was the first Government in the region to initiate the development of a NAP, spurred by events in Marawi in 2017. The project enjoys excellent relations with national counterparts and has supported a number of workshops in support of NAP preparation, including on costing and inclusion in Government budgeting. The NAP was drafted by the National Security Council (NSC), for implementation by the Department of Interior and Local Government; it was adopted by the Anti-Terror Council in May 2019, but still awaits an Executive Order of the President for it to become operational.

Indonesia drafted a National Action Plan (NAP) on preventing and countering violent extremism (PCVE) in 2017, and the President issued the Initiative Permit on January 2019 for further development and finalization of the NAP on PCVE, which is expected to be adopted for implementation in 2020. The Government PCVE Focal Point in Indonesia, the Deputy for International Cooperation of the BNPT, spoke highly of the project, the timeliness of its intervention, and the levels of trust engendered with the project team through close and collaborative working. Both research and Government workshops were identified as activities funded by the project when no internal budget for such activities was available, which were supportive of advocacy and increased understanding across Ministries as to the nature and purpose of NAP preparation. Technical assistance on ensuring a gender dimension was also appreciated.

In Thailand, the National Security Council began preliminary work on NAP development in the wake of elections held Spring of 2019. The project responded with two consultative workshops aimed at establishing shared understanding of VE in the national context and provided informal guidance, through the national project manager and a well-received academic partner, on substance and process in regard to NAP development. Project research undertaken on religious extremism and majoritarian nationalism was suggested by the NSC, and the hypothesis that Muslim and Buddhist extremism feed off each other is credited by NSC counterparts with helping to advocate for the relevance of both the project and PVE work generally.

The project has done a good job in terms of meeting a key challenge in Thailand: the need to build relations of trust between the Government and civil society in relation to PCVE, given the sensitivity of the subject, the obvious interest of security agencies, and the power the military is suspected to still hold in terms of influence over civilian authorities. In the first workshop, CSOs were reported as nervous to identify publicly the grievances that drive violent extremism; the second workshop built on trust engendered in the first, however, spurred by increased confidence in the political transition.

In Malaysia, the UNDP Country Office spent most of 2019 in dialogue with the Ministry of Home Affairs to the purpose of the project, scope of work and governance arrangements, amid Government concerns that accepting the project could be perceived as Malaysia admitting a problem with violent extremism, and the need for external support to address it. In October 2019, UNDP was informed that the project could go ahead subject to a number of conditions, with specific national governance arrangements and Government vetting of all external reporting. It was agreed that Malaysia would participate in the second phase of the project and receive support on NAP development via a national consultant, prior to consultations potentially being held once the document is drafted. The project exceptionally requires Cabinet approval after it is fully vetted.

**Output 3: Strengthened capacities of communities to promote peace, tolerance and respect for diversity**

Implementation of the third output of the project, to build community resilience and promote positive narratives, was evaluated as both innovative and promising in terms of the results achieved.

In the Philippines, the recent history of Mindanao has spurred Government and civil society understanding of the need for PCVE work and has established a clear geographic focus for local area programming that may not as easily defined in other countries (see Section 4, Lessons Learnt). UNDP is a significant actor on Mindanao, with a strong portfolio focused on governance support and peacebuilding, and is providing multi-sectoral support to BARMM authorities, including a number of separately funded PCVE initiatives. While the separate identity of the EU-funded project is maintained for administrative and visibility purposes, it is otherwise well-integrated into the wider UNDP portfolio and articulated to an overarching conflict sensitivity strategy.

Project work on Mindanao is well-received by local administration officials, military representatives and civil society partners. The military commander working for the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) noted that while violent extremism is a global issue, 70% of the problem is local and that UNDP is “doing a great job”. The peace education work of the project was singled out for particular praise by him and by other respondents, for scaling-up as a priority of any potential second phase of assistance. Proposals were made to extend the work to nearby island provinces of Tawi-Tawi and Basilan, and interest expressed in institutionalising it within the curriculum of the BARMM Ministry of Education.

There is significant interest of all stakeholders in supporting BARMM to develop its own Sub-National Action Plan for PCVE (“SNAP”), given the specificities of the local context, the availability of potential funding from a number of donors, and the need for coordination. While some respondents felt that BARMM itself should lead the SNAP development effort, others cautioned that BARMM would be too busy with other priorities ahead of elections, and that the very localised situation calls in any case for provincial plans to be prepared by the respective Governors and aggregated into an overall roadmap. A basis for participation could be the 15 Community Security Platforms proposed by UNDP for the territory, as early warning and response fora at municipal level.

Respondents from Mindanao had far more comments to make on the importance of gender issues, and the identification of gender priorities, than other evaluation respondents. The Adviser to the Governor of Lanao enthused at the number of women, including traditional leaders, actively involved in UNDP work, and noted the significant role women are able to play in society in Mindanao. The Provincial Government reserves 5% of its budget each month for work on gender issues.

The NGO coordinator of one project partner in Lanao del Sur also noted the importance placed by UNDP on gender, the preponderance of women engaging in project activities at village level, and the way in which they now participate and speak up at broader workshops and other events. Project work to establish a Women’s Insider Mediation Network was considered a particularly promising initiative that recognised the untapped resources that exist at community level.

|  |
| --- |
| Several respondents expressed concerns at the way in which violent extremist groups have been targeting recruitment of women over the last year, through ideological means rather than financial inducement. In addition to acting as fighters, women become involved in financial and logistical support, and are often then exploited. Concerns were also expressed in relation to the situation of around 100 widows of the Abu Sayyaf Group from the siege of Marawi. Currently without livelihoods or other forms of economic support, the women are unable to educate their children, and there is a fear that their marginalisation could lead to a future repeat cycle of violence. Family breakdown was acknowledged widely as a crucial enabler of recruitment. Another example given was of the request of an imprisoned Abu Sayyaf Group bombmaker, appealing for his children to be given schooling, and of the potential for provision of such support to facilitate healing and reconciliation at community level. |

In Indonesia, the project has forged a promising partnership with the INDIKA Foundation[[5]](#footnote-6) on several activities, establishing a tolerance platform connecting youth with peace activists, several programmes; a four-day workshop training youth about fake news and responding to hate speech, and how to use social media to promote peace. Another particularly successful intervention has been collaboration with Kok Bisa, which produces science content for young people for online learning. In a collaboration with INDIKA, presented as part of the Kok Bisa brand, a series of four events was organised in different Indonesian cities to screen INDIKA videos prior to discussion and workshops to create infographics on issues of tolerance.

Respondents from both Kok Bisa and INDIKA Foundation noted unsatisfied demand for youth engagement and activities, and the potential of online working to mobilise and engage large numbers. The Kok Bisa events were widely over-subscribed almost immediately they were announced, with 1422 applications for 200 places. Promotion of the events received 4,000 likes; 27,000 likes were posted for the winning infographics posted from the four workshops. The Managing Director of the INDICA Foundation, who also holds a part-time position as youth adviser to the President, spoke of the potential for using the online space to teach peace at scale, and of the exponential impact that could be achieved by “*empowering the ecosystem*”, including by working with micro-influencers to ‘feed’ online communities.

This sense of strong demand for narratives of peace and tolerance is underscored by the project collaboration with the Thai Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). Student workshops supported by the project led to the development of 30 videos, six of which aired as part of the regular daytime *Citizen Reporters* show, and another 15 utilised for a show on *Embracing Diversity*. The workshops generated interest to participate over and above places available. Although viewing figures for particular episodes are not disaggregated, *Citizen Reporters* has a regular audience of up to a hundred thousand viewers; Facebook Live broadcasts generated more than 110,000 views and 80,000 likes.

*Extreme Lives* has emerged as something of a signature product of the project and was presented as one of a 100 innovate ideas for peace at the Paris Peace Forum, achieving high-level visibility for the project. The project team has good ideas for tweaking its production and direction, and to extract additional value-added by organising preparation of new episodes in local languages as public awareness/learning tools around VE for use by practitioners.

The *Creators for Change* initiative with Google is another example of an excellent partnership established by the project, and – as with many of the national activities in this component – the downstream work with youth has been over-subscribed and well-received, and holds out the promise of reaching a mass audience in a credible way. However, the ‘when’ and ‘how’ of implementation are outside of control of the project team and further discussions are needed as to how this can be reconciled with contractual requirements for the delivery of project assistance under a new phase.

**3.3 EFFICIENCY**

Efficiency looks at the extent to which the project delivered its outputs and issues arising from that delivery, including an assessment of whether the results of the project and the benefits attained by project stakeholders were proportional to the efforts invested. It also analyses the adequacy of the project organisation and structure, as well as whether there has been consideration of alternative models of implementation conducive to improved efficiency.

**3.3.1 Delivery of Outputs & Issues Arising**

The project concluded with a total of 95.81% funds expended. Overall, the consultant found that project resources had been spent in an appropriate manner. In terms of key activity areas, the funds were divided between Outputs as follows:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Output** | **USD Amount** | **% of Total** |
| Regional Networking | 1,204,260.46 | 34.36 |
| Support to NAPs Preparation | 501,423.19 | 14.31 |
| Community Resilience | 1,253,715.68 | 35.77 |

Staffing and other direct costs represented the remaining 11.39 % of the total.

In terms of distribution by year, expenditures were as follows:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **2018 (H2)** | **2019** | **2020 (Q1)** |
| REGIONAL HUB | 482,089.40 | 850,864.27 | 68,421.81 |
| THAILAND | 17,429.12 | 415,051.53 | 22,595.05 |
| INDONESIA |  | 657,054.33 | 118,829.63 |
| PHILIPPINES |  | 528,024.17 | 19,046.54 |
| MALAYSIA | 100,337.77 | 77,853.63 | -872.27 |

The 7% overhead costs charged by UNDP were in line with UNDP’s corporate policy and agreement with the EU under the EU-UN Financial Administrative Framework Agreement (FAFA).

Given the good results delivered by the project, and the fact that they were achieved within the original ratio of direct costs to programme costs of the agreed budget, the evaluation concludes that the project was overall a cost-effective as well as successful intervention.

It should be noted formally that the project to date has not been audited. However, the consultant has been informed by Bangkok Regional Hub that this will happen during the course of 2020, in line with UNDP’s corporate policy for DIM projects.

The main issue affecting deliver of inputs was the tension between the short 18-month duration of the project, reflecting the crisis response purpose of the EU funding instrument, and the rather ambitious scope of activities proposed in the project document. While the project was established relatively quickly by UNDP at the regional level, time was needed to agree division of budgets with Country Offices, recruit staff and contract partners, and initial activities were only really launched from the first quarter of 2019. This resulted in a compressed implementation timetable which put real pressure on implementing partners to deliver and report upon activities quickly, and which strained relations with the EU (see Section 4.3.3 below).

At least one of the project’s implementing partners in each country raised frustrations in regard to administrative issues with UNDP procurement procedures or regulations concerning payments, although all conceded these were a relatively minor issue within the overall relationship. In most cases, the frustrations related more to the mismatch between normal administrative processes and the speed at which partners were asked to conduct activities, rather than inefficient administration *per se*, and were a function of the compressed project timetable. However, while partners reported excellent relations with the project teams, the evaluation suggests that more regular group meetings might have been usefully used to explain UNDP procedures, regulations, and administration.

**3.3.2 Project Structure & Organisation**

Responsibility for project implementation was divided between a regional team based in Bangkok, and small project teams in each country working under the guidance of relevant UNDP Programme Officers with Government counterparts, civil society organisations and affected communities. In Malaysia, no team was established – instead, the project part-funded a UNDP Programme Officer in the Country Office, who liaised with Government counterparts to secure their eventual agreement to limited participation (which will now happen under the second phase of the project).

The project structure responded efficiently to the design of the project, with a regional team based in Bangkok implementing regional activities and operating as a Secretariat for the work conducted at national level. This allowed UNDP Country Offices, and project teams concerned, to customise the design of the project to local requirements, build relations of trust with Government counterparts and civil society partners, and to operate in the responsive and flexible manner already noted, constrained only by the need to respect budget envelopes provided by the regional team and to ensure a certain consistency of approach encouraged by regular dialogue between colleagues and project assurance activities conducted by the Bangkok Regional Hub.

Project assurance and the provision of substantive technical expertise to support the work at country level was negatively affected by the departure of both international staff members of the project in early Autumn 2019, mid-way through the implementation period. With insufficient time to replace them, the regional component of the project, and overall Project management, was successfully undertaken by a number of resident and full-time consultants, who worked closely with national teams to organise and report delivery of activities, and to make adjustments to division of funds as necessary for the remainder of the six-month implementation period. While the interim management team managed to bring the project to a successful conclusion on time and on budget, the proposed second phase of assistance will require more stable and continuous substantive technical support to the decentralised project teams (see section “Recommendations”).

The decentralised approach to project implementation was evaluated as working successfully, both substantively and operationally. The Regional team, entirely composed of young IC holders, deserves significant credit for the job they have done in the absence of technical guidance and support, and missing middle management in Bangkok Regional Hub.

**3.3.3 Relations with the EU as Partner to the Action**

The project documentcalls for the project to be implemented in partnership between UNDP and the European Union at the regional level (UNDPs Bangkok Regional Hub and the EUs Foreign Policy Instrument Team covering Asia/Pacific in Bangkok) and the national level (EU Delegations to Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand and UNDP Country Offices), in order for “*the project to benefit from UNDP’s on the ground capacity and networks, and the EU’s political engagement. This partnership also means the EU will have direct engagement with UNDP and its partners on the choice and steering of activities*.”

Proactive and productive relations have been established between the regional management of the project and the IcSP Regional Coordinator responsible for the project based at the EU Delegation in Bangkok, and between the project team and EU colleagues in Indonesia and the Philippines.

While EU colleagues appreciate the results achieved by the project, and have actively sought to extend the work into a second phase, relations were marred by minor but important issues, such as lack of consultation with the EU on design and finalisation of key communication and research products and/or unrealistic timelines for their review and clearance. The project would have benefited from more systematic and formal approach to involving EU colleagues from the respective Delegations.

The primary mechanism for partnership working was envisaged to be a Joint Steering Committee, co-chaired by the EU and UNDP, to support the overall strategy, planning and decision making of the project. Over the lifetime of the project, however, the Steering Committee met only once, rather than on the quarterly basis envisaged in the project document. It could be argued that the good relations between the regional programme management and the EU contract manager obviated the need for regular formal meetings. On the other hand, such meetings could perhaps have been used to provide a schedule and procedure for the production and sharing of deliverables as well as appropriate fora for the EU, as the main funder, to have had greater opportunity to contribute to the project in a substantive manner.

**4. Conclusions and Lessons Learnt**

The overall conclusion of the evaluation is that the project *Preventing Violent Extremism through Promoting Tolerance and Respect for Diversity* has been a highly successful initiative to date, well-received by all stakeholders, that has built credible and productive partnerships, achieved initial results and demonstrated potential for real impact. The project remains relevant to the context, and a second phase of assistance is needed to consolidate the results achieved to date and to further capacitate Governments and civil society in the region to undertake PCVE programming in accordance with normative standards and global good practice.

Nine key lessons can be highlighted to inform the second phase of project assistance:

1. Maintaining regional momentum

Regional momentum has established a conducive environment for the preparation of National Action Plans and a platform for collective action. However, in spite of good progress made, Southeast Asia remains at the beginning of a long journey, in which finalisation of regional and national frameworks marks only the end of the first phase. It will be critical to ensure future support to both the implementation, coordination and monitoring of the ASEAN Plan of Action to Prevent and Counter the Rise of Radicalization and Violent Extremism, and the detailed Bali Work Plan for its implementation (approved November 2019), and to ensure connection and coherence between regional and national levels.

Advocacy and material assistance will be required to ensure that a “*whole of society*” approach is domesticated and facilitated in each country, and that the right partnerships, in the right relations, are established to support NAP implementation.

Respondents valued the chance to compare experience between countries, and to learn what others are doing. Supporting regional knowledge sharing, potentially in collaboration with ASEAN, is well-received by counterparts and partners, disseminates good practice, and can help establish a cadre of independent experts in the region as a long-term resource.

1. ‘Framing’ of PVE in each country

The dialogue processes involved in implementing the project, and in preparation of NAPs, along with substantive project workshops and other training events, has helped establish a nascent cadre of dedicated and networked PVE practitioners from Government and civil society in the region. However, further support is needed to continue to ‘frame’ the issue for stakeholders appropriately in each country, so as to ensure buy-in across Government and to maximise the number and range of actors willing and able to contribute to the effort.

This requires patient and nimble support to ‘locate’ the PVE issue and potential responses in national politics and culture and has been successfully managed to date by the national project managers through day-to-day dialogue and practical support. To date, UNDP has done an excellent job building Government understanding re NAPs, content and process, and in building relations of trust with key counterparts. Government counterparts in two countries – Indonesia and Malaysia – have both indicated preference for, and the comparative advantage of, continued daily engagement via a resident Agency such as UNDP, operating via known national project staff, rather than via non-resident UN entities – such as UNOCT and/or CTED – providing important technical advisory services on periodic missions. While there is room and need for both approaches, UNDP should continue to take the lead on accompanying Governments in the process of NAP preparation and implementation.

1. The research agenda

The continued need for research offers an opportunity for the project to take a collaborative and inclusive approach. It is questionable, however, whether additional research into violent extremism at the regional level will add significant value, given the very different dimensions of the issue in each country. The evaluation found that the real impact of research was felt at national level, meeting needs for absent date, identifying areas for intervention, and in galvanising Government and/or civil society response.

The identification of national research to be undertaken should be a joint task for Government Focal Points, key civil society stakeholders, project teams and the EU Delegation in each country. This should be coordinated with other national institutions and international donors wherever possible, to avoid duplication and support complementarity, and preference should be given to research which provides an evidence-base for the implementation of specific national activities planned by the project. Stakeholders – and not least the EU – should be able to peer review research undertaken and offer additional substantive inputs during a process of finalisation, approval and dissemination as appropriate.

An obvious need remains to better understand the specific drivers and enablers of violent extremism in particular select communities, and to map and articulate the local resources that can be key to enhancing resilience. Targeted research can form the basis of future “SNAPS” – Sub-National PVE Action Plans – envisaged by Government authorities in the Philippines and Indonesia, and potentially a way forward in Thailand in the longer term.

4. Promoting the “*whole of society*” approach

Countries are more or less adopting a “*whole of society*” approach to NAP preparation and implementation, but more needs to be done to communicate its importance to the success of the enterprise, particularly in countries where work is still in its early stages. In Thailand, it will be important to formalise civil society participation in NAP development, and to strengthen relations of trust on PVE between Government and civil society actors. In Malaysia, limitations placed on the scope of project work by Government must be respected, but it is hoped that the process of further dialogue and engagement will encourage authorities to take a more participatory and inclusive approach to NAP development, as has proved the case elsewhere.

The project to date has made a Good start on establishing a regional network of practitioners and in meeting the clear demand that exists to learn from the experience of others. However, the duration of the initial project offered insufficient time or number of activities for an effective network to coalesce or become a self-sustaining asset in the overall PVE effort. The second phase of the project should place emphasis on consolidating the PVE “community of practice” in the region, through sensitisation forums and specialised workshops, through data and trend analysis to support evidence-based programming, through information sharing, networking and coordination activities.

5. Sensitivities of working in ‘hotspots’

The next phase of assistance is likely to support more local area-based programming, in response to Government interest and the obvious requirement of PCVE work to be focused on geographical areas where radicalisation and violent extremism is a particular concern. In the Philippines, there is a clear need to further gear-up international assistance on PVE in the BARMM region, and to ensure that it is coordinated and presented appropriately as part of a larger package of governance, development and peacebuilding assistance to the new authorities. In Indonesia, the BNPT has indicated an important next step as the need to support localisation of PVE programming in support of the efforts of sub-national administrations. Target area working is under consideration by authorities in Thailand for the next phase of assistance that might be based on a broader PVE narrative within a strong developmental emphasis.

While the need to target ‘hotspot’ communities for PVE assistance may be incontrovertible, the reality of doing so can raise some acute ethical dilemmas. The selection process itself may unhelpfully reinforce perceptions of alienation or otherness in the context of majority-minority identity, and in relation to conceptions of nationality, patriotism and/or citizenship, a point made explicitly by the BARMM Minister of Interior and Local Government:

**“*Some of our fears then when we were discussing it, the concepts on PVE, is that one, it will lead to a situation where we will tag certain people or certain communities as people prone to violent extremism. Thus, tagging creates religious colour. There is a tendency, to look at the south of the Philippines, where there is predominantly Muslims, as the one that is more prone to violent extremism*”.**

Opening Remarks at a UNDP event, October 2019

Rather than badging the work as PVE, UNDP in the Philippines utilises more conflict sensitive terms at the community level, such as “promoting peaceful engagement”, “building resilience to violence” or “strengthening social cohesion.”

In Thailand, the Deep South is characterised by regional inequalities that cannot be ignored as a cause of grievance that fuels the insurgency. A broad development effort is required to support PVE; rather than focusing on violent extremism *per se*, PVE-specific initiatives can contribute by helping to build the social contract through inclusive and participatory approaches to the design, implementation and monitoring of that development effort, and through institution of suitable mechanisms for long-term community ownership of its results.

At the same time, however, any future PVE programming in Thailand cannot and should not focus simply on the minority Muslim population in the Deep South – it is equally important to acknowledge rising prevalence of more extreme forms of Buddhist discourse and an exclusive nationalist-majoritarian culture nationwide, that may not threaten peace or the social fabric in a systemic way, but which potentially risks Thailand’s reputation as “*land of smiles*” and the continued growth of its economically important tourism industry.

Given the dilemmas involved, the project’s work in target communities should be integrated into broader UNDP area-based portfolios wherever possible, subject to an overarching conflict sensitivity analysis and strategy, and conceptualised to provide a PVE-specific dimension to development-oriented interventions for peacebuilding and good governance.

6. Learning by doing

To date, the project has demonstrated an ability to broker innovative partnerships and pilot promising sub-projects to disrupt processes of radicalisation and recruitment in places where it is known to occur – eg, religious or educational institutions – while promoting civic engagement and voice, and indigenous cultural traditions of peace, tolerance and respect for diversity.

While more research and analyses are required to identify specific drivers and facilitators of violent extremism, particularly at local level, the mechanisms by which individuals are radicalised are broadly known: person-to-person, by peer-group or family members, religious leaders or teachers; online via social media platforms that disseminate fake news, hate speech and extremist narratives, and which facilitate closed-group discussion and personal networking. The project should continue to build the capacities of Government and key civil society actors to intervene with concrete activities, which have value in building understanding and capacity over and above their effectiveness in addressing the problem, and which support the premise of the *‘whole of society’* approach through demonstrable ability to reach target audiences in a credible and effective way.

1. Youth and the online space

The project has had particular success in promoting youth engagement online, and a number of lessons have been learnt by the practitioners involved. While it is often seen as awkward and potentially alienating to work directly on promoting tolerance and embracing diversity, high levels of demand for participation in project activities has demonstrated that it is possible to package activities differently to encourage critical thinking and allow young people to develop the discourse in their own way. Providing youth with an online ‘community’ in which to interact can establish sustainability and independent creation of new content; both can be usefully facilitated through partnership with youth groups able to take an innovative and social entrepreneurial approach, mobilising micro-influencers to energise and empower the liberal youth ecosystem.

These are understood as valuable lessons in meeting the ultimate challenge of delivering PVE results online at scale, and in an effective manner. While the promotion of positive messages in favour of tolerance and diversity is an indisputable public good, fake news and hate speech often works to a different dynamic, traveling at viral speed between the like-minded and establishing a malign culture and influence at the margins of public debate. Maintaining the health of public discourse requires not just renewed emphasis on the promotion and dissemination of liberal values, but also an ongoing commitment to challenge and defeat the message and mechanics of extremist proselytising.

1. Strengthening the gender dimension

The importance of maintaining a focus on gender in relation to the PVE work cannot be overstated. Over and above ensuring gender-balanced representation and participation in consultative processes at national level, project experience in the Philippines has underscored the need for a nuanced understanding of the impact of VE on women, the engagement of women in it and their ability to speak and act against it, as well as distinct strategies to engage them in PCVE work to unlock the unique contribution they can make.

While the corporate UNDP commitment on gender was well reflected in the implementation of the majority of project activities under the first phase, rather making-up for the somewhat vague injunctions of the project document itself, the second phase of assistance should establish gender disaggregated baselines, targets and indicators and mainstream gender more fully across implementation planning.

9. Monitoring and Evaluation – achieving impact and sustainability

ASEAN and Governments also require support to measure the success and cost-efficiency of NAP implementation efforts. In addition to preparing a detailed results framework for its own internal monitoring and evaluation, the next phase of the project will need to pay special attention to promoting a conceptual basis for M&E for PCVE in Southeast Asia, taking a consensual approach to the establishment of common indicators, and support institutions and processes to collect and manage data, so that comparable baselines, benchmarks and success targets are in place, for NAPs, “SNAPs”, as well as for the project itself.

In terms of sustainability, the project should continue work initiated to the integration of NAP budgets into medium-term Government expenditure frameworks. Exit plans for sustainability should be in place for any new institutions or standing processes envisaged under the new project.

The long-term guarantor of sustainability, however, is likely to be the strong engagement of civil society in each country, properly capacitated and coordinated, as partner to the implementation of activities, as advocates for policy reform and budget provision, and as monitors of the overall transparency, accountability and efficacy of each national effort.

**5. Recommendations for the Second Phase**

Recommendations for the second phase of the project need to build on the good work and lessons learned of the first phase while recognising the evolution in regional context and the potential for enhancing the response.

The advent of COVID-19 introduces unknown risk into the process of project implementation and may disrupt certain project activities until freedom of movement is re-established across the region. A robust Contingency Plan should be put in place to assess the viability of all proposed activities under the proposed new project, which should feed Inception Phase formulation of detailed regional and national planning, so that activities can best be sequenced to minimise impact from COVID-19 responses.

***Project Design***

1. The design of the project should continue to be focused upon the original four countries selected, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaysia[[6]](#footnote-7), as well as undertake targeted regional activities in support.
2. Since the inception of the first project, ASEAN has achieved significant momentum at regional level in ensuring a coherent and consistent regional framework for PCVE. The political commitment of Member States to ASEAN has been matched by renewed domestic progress toward preparation and adoption of National Action Plans. Support to these twin processes – at regional and national level – should remain a priority for the future project. Technical assistance should be provided to ASEAN for follow-up of the Bali plan, and to national Governments from the regional level, in support of policy coherence with normative standards and global good practice. Collaboration with, and support to, the Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter Terrorism (SEARCCT) should also be explored;
3. As NAPs are approved there will be a need to support Government coordination of external assistance on PCVE in each country, and to support RCO’s to ensure coherent UN-system response via UNCT working groups. In order to ensure protocol and respect sensitivities, this should be on-demand – at the request of Government and the approval of the UN RC. NAPs should be costed and integrated into Government budgeting processes, must be supported by Government budgets, accompanied by robust M&E regimes to measure impact and cost-effectiveness, and localised where needed.
4. Further efforts are required to ensure an inclusive and participatory ‘*whole of society*’ approach to PCVE in the region, often against the reflexes of some Governments, where politics or the point in the process of development of PCVE policy still privilege the voices of more security-oriented counterparts. Efforts to mobilise and capacitate civil society should be strengthened in the second phase, to ensure that issues of gender and human rights observance are respected in preparation and implementation of NAPs, and as the obvious and appropriate partner in the prevention of violent extremism wherever it occurs: in local communities, institutions, and online.
5. Regional-level research should be discontinued in favour of national research agendas, given the power of the latter to support advocacy and evidence-based programming. If useful, the Regional Office could provide technical support through the engagement of global or regional academic institutions or experts.
6. The project should support networking and development of a PVE community of practice in the region, and underwrite research, data collection and knowledge management to allow better targeted interventions informed by global good practice.
7. Development of policy frameworks, research for evidence-based policy development and programming, and building the capacity of actors are all preparatory steps in the effort. The project must also continue to support concrete activities that promote values of peace, tolerance and diversity, actively counters the prevalence of fake news and hate speech, and which ultimately disrupt the radicalisation processes upon which VE relies.
8. The long duration of the second phase of the project makes it essential that a rigorous M&E regime is in place, and that appropriate baselines, targets and indicators are established to suitably capture project impact, cost-effectiveness and sustainability upon evaluation.
9. Gender issues should be more thoroughly mainstreamed into the planning of activities, and reflected in the results framework, which should aim to achieve a GEN-2 rating, with gender disaggregated baselines, targets and indicators. UNDP might explore continued partnership with UN Women in support of strengthening the gender dimension of the project.

***Project Approach***

1. The project should continue with the patient and supportive approach taken to establish correct ‘framing’ of the PCVE issue at national level, to promote maximum buy-in across Government to the effort, and to mobilise the broadest possible coalition of civil society actors in its undertaking. The UNDP project teams should continue to lead engagement on NAPs at the Country level given the need to be resident on the ground, and to better promote the whole of society approach, which it is best placed to convene.
2. Given the physical distances involved in the region, the cost of organising face-to-face meetings on a regular basis – and now prospective limitations on ability or willingness to travel in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis – innovative online approaches to knowledge management and continued networking of the nascent PVE community of practice in the region should be explored.
3. In view of the obvious synergies to be extracted, project PCVE work in ‘hotspots’ should be carefully integrated with UNDP Country Office area-based development portfolios wherever possible, without losing the separate administrative identity of the project or visibility for the EU as donor.
4. Given the ubiquity of internet and social media in Southeast Asia, and its use as an amplifier and projector of extremist narratives and as a potential tool of recruitment to violent action, the project should scale-up its work with youth online to promote liberal values of peace, tolerance and diversity. Additionally, the project should explore possibilities not just to monitor the prevalence of fake news and hate speech, but to challenge it and/or disrupt its transmission.
5. While the documentary series *Extreme Lives* has provided valuable visibility to the project, and gained it many new and important supporters, added value can be given to its continuation by articulating more local voices to scenario development and filming in each country, and to making local-language versions that allow the product to be used as part of a portfolio of materials to raise public awareness and support peace education.

***Implementation Modalities***

1. UNDP should remain the primary implementing partner of the project for the European Commission, based on results achieved and partnerships in place, resident operational capacity in the participating countries, and long-term experience of working with both Government and civil society stakeholders.
2. In line with the global MoU on collaboration signed between UNDP and UNOCT, and in support of the UN Reform process, the EU should request UNOCT to become a co-signatory to the new project, with regional responsibility for coherence with international policy frameworks, consistency with agreed standards and global good practice, and coordination with and between UN actors.[[7]](#footnote-8)
3. While there is administrative sense in organising transnational activities at regional level, and continued value in supporting regional frameworks, actors and networking, future phases of the project should maintain a decentralised approach that allow activities to be designed and implemented by local teams in day-to-day contact with Government counterparts and civil society partners.
4. Project teams should hold regular “Partner Platforms” of project implementing partners and representatives of EU Delegations in each country to promote networking and coordination, review country plans and project “products”, contribute to EU visibility and support better awareness of UNDP operational rules, procedures and timelines.
5. PVE should be understood as a natural partnership between the UN and the European Union, which models the values and soft power of both institutions to mutual benefit, while addressing a clear set of needs in the region and globally. UNDP should ensure that the Joint Steering Committee (to be expanded to include participation of UNOCT) meets regularly to steer the project, that procedures are codified to ensure that the EU is able to input into research and other activities in a meaningful way, and which respects contractual obligations in regard to the provision of EU visibility.

1. https://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/library/Dem\_Gov/improving-the-impact-of-preventing-violent-extremism-programming.html [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. This was expressed in different ways: project teams generally achieved gender balance in regard to participation, and also ran specific activities, eg, work to initiate a Women’s Insider Mediator Platform in the Philippines, or the collaboration with AMAN Indonesia, “Can a gender approach improve response to violent extremism?” at the second Indonesia Peace Builder Forum. Regionally, the project invested in building a better understanding of the gender dynamics of VE in the region, eg the Conflicting Identities study on masculinity undertaken with UN Women. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Gender markers, introduced in 2009, rate projects on **gender** goals and results with GEN 0 meaning no results, GEN 1- one **gender** activity/result, GEN **2** – **gender** is mainstreamed in all project activities, GEN 3 – **gender** equality is the main project goal. The corporate goal is to increase GEN 1, **2** and 3 ratings and to decrease the number of projects rated GEN 0. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. The philanthropic Foundation of Indica Energy. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. The corporate philanthropic Foundation of INDICA Energy. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. While the proposed future project must be approved by a full Council of Ministers, it is likely that Malaysia will agree to participate in the next phase of the project under certain conditions, with an initial round of activities aimed at supporting the development of a National Action Plan. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. A UNOCT allocation of approximately 10% of the budget for the second phase of the project, ie, funding in the region of 800,000 Euro, might be considered reasonable. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)