

GENDER CONSIDERATIONS IN PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM: PERSPECTIVES FROM WOMEN'S GROUPS AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE PHILIPPINES

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Women are often relegated as survivors of terrorism and violent extremist attacks, preventing a deeper understanding of the various roles women play in these contexts. In actuality, women can have substantial roles in preventing terrorism and violent extremism through early detection and warning of rising fundamentalism, by influencing children and youth away from radicalization and recruitment, and by delivering peaceful messages in their communities.

By recognizing women's diverse roles in violent extremism and terrorism and engaging women as active participants in its prevention, initiatives and policies to prevent violent extremism (PVE) can increase their effectiveness and be considered gender sensitive. In the Philippines, many programmes and formal mechanisms designed to prevent violent extremism have yet to fully integrate a gender sensitive strategy.

HARVESTING THE EXPERIENCE OF WOMEN'S GROUPS AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS TO PREVENT VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Women's groups and civil society organizations (CSOs) have worked at the frontlines of conflict prevention and peacebuilding interventions in the Philippines for decades. Through this wealth of experience, these groups have generated many lessons learned and best practices on how to build robust gender-sensitive approaches to counter violence and promote peace, which can be harness to improve gender-sensitive policies and programmes to prevent violent extremism. In early

2019, UN Women convened three conversations with a total of 32 male and female community peace advocates from women's groups and civil society organizations from around the Bangsamoro to discuss their perspectives on violent extremism and their recommendations for strengthening gender considerations as a method for preventing violent conflict going forward.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR PROGRAMMES TO PREVENT VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN THE PHILIPPINES

Defining “Violent Extremism”: The women’s groups and CSOs agreed that “violent extremism” is a new term not commonly used by many at the community and grassroots levels. Within the Bangsamoro region, acts that are now identifiable as terrorism or violent extremism were typically considered part of the broad spectrum of conflict, regardless of the perpetrators, intent, or victims of the act. As such, the peace advocates stressed that attempts to understand “violent extremism” require examining the broad set of actors who engage in violent conflict rather than only scrutinizing the behavior of a particular group within society.

Going Beyond Relief and Recovery to Protection and Participation: The women’s groups and CSOs noted that most initiatives addressing violent

extremism focus on relief and recovery but not necessarily targeted at prevention and protection of women and girls from all forms of violence and abuse, thus taking a more proactive and long-term approach to addressing threats and impacts of extremism. The participants recognized that the insecurity, poverty, discrimination and the effects of on-going armed conflict, make men and women vulnerable to recruitment to violent extremist organizations and subject women to violence. In addressing the interconnected impacts of violent extremism, the peace advocates asserted four areas must be addressed: prevention of conflict; protection of women and girls against human rights abuses; peacebuilding and recovery; and participation of women in decision-making.

WAYS FORWARD TO INTEGRATE GENDER CONSIDERATIONS IN PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN THE PHILIPPINES

The recommended priority actions of the women’s groups and civil society organizations were as follows:

- Revisit existing legislation – such as the Human Security Act, the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act and the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (NAPWPS) – to integrate more preventive approaches to terrorism and violent extremism.
- Uphold principles of human rights, especially women’s human rights, in the review and revision of said laws and policies.
- Strengthen capacities among various stakeholders to increase understanding of and respect for diversity, including differences in sex, age, ethnicity, belief, class, religious backgrounds, etc.
- Intensify rights education, gender equality, social cohesion and peaceful narratives in educational curricula and instructional materials of formal and non-formal education.
- Establish dialogues between the security sector and other state actors and communities, including women, to develop more preventive,

contextualized approaches to addressing violent extremism.

- Create opportunities for women’s participation in formal and non-formal peace mechanisms such as local peace and order councils, barangay peacekeeping operation teams, including normalization mechanisms.
- Utilize the mandatory gender and development (GAD) plans and budgets to address the differential impacts of conflict and violent extremism to women, men, boys, and girls.
- Strengthen the role of women in early warning and response mechanisms while safeguarding informant identities and upholding human rights standards.
- Sustain after-care support to female survivors of violence.
- Develop reintegration programs for former members of violent armed groups, including women.
- Engage women and youth in at-risk and effected communities to participate in livelihoods, employment and education