

Building Peace Together

Youth-led
initiatives to
prevent violent
extremism

Inspiring practices from
South & Southeast Asia



About the partners



The Kofi Annan Foundation & Extremely Together, Switzerland

The Kofi Annan Foundation is an independent, not-for-profit organization that works to promote better global governance and strengthen the capacities of people and countries to achieve a fairer, more peaceful world. One of our key areas of focus at the Foundation is promoting youth leadership in the context of preventing violent extremism which we work on with our Extremely Together initiative. Launched in 2016, the Extremely Together initiative works with a global network of young people who help us respond to the increasing threat of recruitment and narratives of violent extremist groups. The network is made up of ten young leaders from around the globe and four country chapters in the Philippines, Pakistan, Somalia, and Uganda. Through our initiative, we aim to provide a sense of identity and purpose to young people worldwide, helping them to take action for positive change and peace in their communities.

Learn more about the Foundation: <https://www.kofiannanfoundation.org/>

The College of Youth Activism and Development (CYAAD), Pakistan

CYAAD is a non-profit organization based in Pakistan which aims to empower local youth. Its main areas of focus are poverty alleviation, youth inclusion in politics, countering extremism and radicalization, and empowering young people through education and technical training to encourage entrepreneurship and social development. It subscribes to the philosophy that young people are brimming with energy and potential, and that they should be given the knowledge and confidence to act.

Learn more about the organization: <https://www.cyaad.org.pk/>

The Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF), Bangladesh

GCERF is the global fund dedicated to preventing violent extremism. They connect local communities to global resources and support grassroots initiatives that are typically out of reach for international donors to help them develop and thrive. GCERF has been active in Bangladesh since 2016 and supports local level initiatives that work to strengthen community resilience against violent extremist agendas.

Learn more about GCERF's activities in Bangladesh: <https://www.gcerf.org/bangladesh/>

The Kristiyano-Islam Peace Library (KRIS), Philippines

KRIS is a non-profit organization based in the Philippines that aims to promote peace through education by empowering young people to become pillars of peace in their own families, schools, and communities. KRIS commits to developing Filipino youth by building avenues that cultivate a cycle of peace and empowerment. The organization aims to strengthen the networks between the youth and its fellow civil society organizations through different projects, campaigns, and exhibits to showcase unity in the country despite differences between individual Filipinos.

Learn more about the organization: <https://www.krisforpeace.org/>



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Editing contributors	Maud Roure, Sofia Anton
Editor	Nicole Winchell
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About the project

From 2020 to 2022, the Kofi Annan Foundation's Extremely Together initiative worked on the "Leading the Way to Peace – Youth Together for Social Cohesion" project with the financial support of the European Union. We partnered with the Kristiyano-Islam Peace Library (KRIS) in the Philippines, the College of Youth Activism and Development (CYAAD) in Pakistan, as well as the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) and Rupantar in Bangladesh to promote youth engagement in peacebuilding efforts in urban communities across the region. Together, we conducted

extensive research¹ in three countries on how and why urban youth may be vulnerable to recruitment by violent extremist organizations. We tested different strategies to strengthen social cohesion in these settings in which we trained over 2600 young people and empowered them to act for peace in their communities by supporting over 30 youth-led initiatives. Through this collaborative effort, we were able to learn from one another's experiences, improve our practices and share our insights with partners and other youth organizations from the region.

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- Hive, Pakistan
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¹ Read about our research here: https://www.kofiannanfoundation.org/publications/research-urban-youth-building-peace-in-south-southeast-asia-key-drivers-of-violent-extremism-and-ways-to-prevent-it/attachment/urban-youth-building-peace-in-south-and-southeast-asia_2021_final/

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Acronyms and key definitions

ET: Extremely Together

Launched in 2016 by the Kofi Annan Foundation, the Extremely Together initiative global youth-led network made up of ten young leaders and country chapters who respond to the increasing threat of recruitment by violent extremist groups in different parts of the world. Through this network, Extremely Together aims to empower young people to prevent violent extremism and promote positive values of “togetherness” in their own countries and communities. The initiative uses a peer-to-peer approach to equip young people with the tools and knowledge needed to lead peace efforts and activities to prevent violent extremism locally. This challenges the global narrative whereby young people are perceived as threats to security rather than enablers of peace.

PVE: Preventing Violent Extremism

According to the UN-Secretary General’s Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism², preventing violent extremism is understood as work that is undertaken to structurally dismantle the root causes and drivers of violent extremism, such as socio-economic disparities, discrimination, marginalization and collective grievances. Thus, the prevention of violent extremism around the world calls for “a more comprehensive approach encompassing not only ongoing, essential security-based counter-terrorism measures, but also systematic preventive steps to address the factors that make individuals join violent extremist groups”, including a deep sense of injustice and discrimination, human rights violations, bad governance and a lack of economic opportunities.

CVE: Countering Violent Extremism

Countering Violent Extremism is focused on countering the activities of existing violent extremists, whereas Preventing Violent Extremism aims to prevent the further spread of violent extremism.

VE: Violent Extremism

There is no universally accepted definition of violent extremism and several countries and researchers have proposed their own. For this publication, we embrace the United States Institute of Peace’s suggestion which defines violent extremism as “a form of violent conflict in which people espouse, encourage, and perpetrate violence as they seek to replace existing political or social institutions with a new political or social order governed by an absolutist and totalitarian doctrine that denies individual liberty and equal rights to citizens who identify differently”³. In the words of Extremely Together Leader Bjørn Ihler, violent extremism can also be understood as “the violent denial of diversity” in which differences between groups are over-simplified and expressed in terms of the violent opposition of ‘the best versus the rest’.

2 Read about it here: <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/plan-of-action-to-prevent-violent-extremism>
3 Task Force on Extremism in Fragile States, Preventing Extremism in Fragile States (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2019)



HUMANITY

CTIVE

FREE DOM



Diverse Inclusive
Extremely Together
Connected Tolerant

#Pakis

@extremelytogether

Executive summary

Do you want to rally other young people to help you prevent violent extremism (PVE)? Do you want to foster a strong sense of shared responsibility and create a healthy environment in which they can grow and thrive? Do you want to grow your PVE movement and maybe even create systemic change on a wider scale? Then this guide is for you! We have assembled learnings and advice from diverse civil society and youth-led organizations to help guide and inspire you on your own journey to build peace in your community.

The guide is structured around three main goals for fostering a youth-led approach to preventing violent extremism and seven main challenges that PVE practitioners face. It offers solutions for overcoming these challenges and takes you through the process of reaching out to young participants through to scaling your movement and putting it on the global map. It also includes ten case studies from diverse local civil society organizations to demonstrate how these principles work in practice and inspire you when thinking about implementing your own creative approaches to PVE action.

So why this guide? Since 2020, the Kofi Annan Foundation and its Extremely Together initiative have been working with young leaders in South and Southeast Asia on preventing violent extremism in the region in the context of the “Leading the Way to Peace – Youth Together for Social Cohesion” project supported by the European Union. The project has been carried out in collaboration with our partners the Kristiyano-Islam Peace Library (KRIS) in the Philippines, the College of Youth Activism and Development (CYAAD) in Pakistan and the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) and Rupantar in Bangladesh. Together, we researched the motivations behind youth involvement in violent extremist activities, trained over 2600 young people in PVE, and supported the implementation of over 30 participant-led projects designed to promote peace in their communities.

In the past decade, the South and Southeast Asian region has witnessed a series of attacks that were perpetrated by educated, middle-class and urban youth. These attacks challenged the PVE approach in the region, which had been focusing on low income, marginalized communities. A new, more holistic approach was needed. When it comes to applying fresh approaches to social problems, who better to do so than youth? With their energy, creativity and idealism, young people are uniquely positioned to push for positive change and prevent violence in society. And that is where you come in!

Sometimes it can feel hard to know where to start. Getting your peers and other young activists excited about preventing violent extremism (PVE) and peacebuilding can often be the greatest hurdle, but it can be done. The first step is to make the topic as fun and relatable as possible; organizing recreational activities is a good way to attract new members

Getting started

and make the topic more engaging. It is also critical to be specific about your target group. Understanding who they are, what they do, and where their interests lie will help you create activities and messages that are tailored to their needs. Partnering with local youth organizations and engaging with as many community actors as possible will help establish trust and credibility from the onset. Once you have crafted a strong message and know who you want to reach, the guide highlights how you can spread your message via online campaigning and how to make your activities more approachable.

A second challenge that many PVE organizations and actors face is how to create meaningful inclusion of youth and foster belonging – especially when it comes to youth from marginalized communities. To do so, you must first be aware of your contextual biases. We have found that professional training in the forms of workshops on stigma, discrimination, and cultural biases can be useful. Once you have worked on internal awareness, it is also imperative that you communicate this outwardly. If you are part of a formal organization, your organization must be willing to publicly challenge discriminatory narratives and support the inclusion of diverse communities. Creating meaningful inclusion of young people also involves engaging them in every step of the process, from ideation to implementation, as this will strengthen their sense of ownership. Whenever possible, co-create and co-lead projects to help guarantee their long-term engagement. Special attention should be paid to ensuring that minority groups and marginalized communities feel included. This can be done by challenging stereotypes, building trust, listening to their needs, and elevating their voices.

Gaining momentum

Once you have initiated contact, it is time to turn your attention to sustaining engagement and gaining momentum. One way to sustain participation is to offer members of your movement incentives. The guide outlines suggestions for various incentives that you can use and how you can strengthen a sense of ownership. We have found that engaging young leaders both online and in face-to-face activities works best for sustaining engagement. While a strong social media presence will help you stay connected to your online community and rally youth to PVE action, regular in-person meetings are important for creating strong emotional connections. By utilizing both approaches, you can stay connected with young participants and retain engagement over time. Building trust, friendships, and encouraging community participants to find common ground will help your movement grow more unified. This will directly impact participants' capacity to work together and the quality of output.

A second aspect of sustaining engagement and growing momentum is guaranteeing the physical and emotional safety of young practitioners and those working with them. Guaranteeing the reputational and physical safety of participants should be of utmost priority and this guide will

Scaling up

outline the steps for you to take to do so. Reconciling different points of view goes hand in hand with building a healthy and unified movement, but this needs to be done respectfully and sensitively. It is also critical to provide mental health support to help manage the heavy impact of social pressure and loneliness experienced by those working in PVE. When guaranteeing the physical and emotional safety of young people, pay attention to your movement's cyber health and make sure everyone is aware of the safety tools at their disposal. In an increasingly hostile cyber world, it is critical that youth can identify and call out hate speech and disinformation.

Once you have solidified your engagement strategies, you may want to start scaling up your activities beyond your local level to reach more people either nationally, regionally, or even globally. Fostering mutual learning and joint action between young PVE activists at different levels is an important first step. One way of doing this is by setting up networks of peer-to-peer learning which provide an opportunity for groups to increase their visibility, elevate their voices, get inspiration, share experiences and lean on other likeminded networks to build their capacity. In addition to connecting with national, regional or global networks, creating partnerships with larger organizations will help to strengthen your credibility if you are still operating on a smaller scale. To scale and grow your movement, and create systemic change, it is helpful to gain the support of policymakers and government leaders to advocate for and invest in youth-led PVE actions. For this, a first step is to identify the key priorities for policymaking and align your thematic focuses with those of policymakers. Once you have defined these, it is time to reach out to multipliers and allies within government who can help advocate on behalf of your cause.

In addition to working towards systemic change, it is essential to translate your work and message into the broader arena. To gain visibility and scale up your PVE efforts, align your programming with local, regional, and global agendas for peace. Capitalize on critical moments that galvanize public attention (e.g., mass protests, elections, constitutional reforms, or security incidents) as these defining moments can help you change narratives. The fact that people are more open to change at these pivotal points in time can also give you just the right impulse to transform your movement into tangible organized action. Finally, to scale your activities and reach more people with your message, you should put an emphasis on campaigning and outreach.

Take it away

Outlined in this guide are a set of proven practices from countries across South and Southeast Asia that can serve as inspiration and guidance for your PVE activities, especially when aiming to engage urban youth. However, we also invite you to explore new avenues for PVE action, including building bridges with academia and adopting an intersectional mindset. There are many ways of linking these major challenges of our time – you will never succeed if you do not at least try.

Remember, even if it can sometimes feel daunting, you are not alone. Youth actions are driving positive change around the world and proving that it can be done. By sharing these tips about youth engagement, we hope youth movements for peace will grow, connect, and flourish. Together we can make peace happen. Now take it away!

Introduction

What inspired these practices?

Who is this guide for?

What can you expect?

Since 2020, the Kofi Annan Foundation Extremely Together initiative has worked with urban youth in South and Southeast Asia on preventing violent extremism in the context of the “Leading the Way to Peace – Youth Together for Social Cohesion” project supported by the European Union. During this time, Extremely Together and its local partners⁴ trained over 2600 young people in urban areas on PVE, helped them implement the 30+ youth-led activities they designed to promote peace in communities, and facilitated exchanges and mutual learning between participants from the three countries. After two years of working together, we organized a workshop with other youth organizations and practitioners in the region who also work on youth-led PVE action. At the workshop, we reflected on the collective lessons we could draw from our different experiences, and how we could all contribute to truly youth-led peacebuilding efforts.

While these practices are mainly inspired by our work with urban youth in South and Southeast Asia, we believe that the lessons learned from our experience can provide valuable insight into youth-led PVE action in various settings. By sharing these inspiring practices, we hope to encourage national or community-level grassroots organizations to pursue their efforts to prevent violent extremism in their area and give them the confidence to lead. You may be an established organization operating on the national level, a grassroots movement working within your local community, a young activists’ association wanting to shake things up in your country, or simply a group of young people wanting to instigate change. Regardless of which level you operate on (or aspire to operate in), we hope that this guide will give you some useful tips on how to overcome challenges commonly encountered when working in youth-led PVE action. Seeing as this is a collection of practices from various organizations of different sizes, you may not identify with all the advice that we share – but that is ok! We encourage you to make these practices your own and draw from them in a way that emboldens you to act, promotes youth-led action, and drives positive change in the region and beyond.

In the first section, “Planting the seed”, we examine common challenges faced when trying to engage youth in PVE, and ways in which you can make this a fun and attractive cause for them to get involved in. In the second section, “Harvesting growth”, we go on to discuss the challenges of sustaining young people’s interest in the cause, while also focusing on how to create a healthy and compassionate environment in which they can grow and thrive. Finally, in the third section, “Spreading your roots”, we explore ways of scaling up action beyond the local level and promoting mutual learning with other actors in your region and beyond. We also look at the challenge of making your voice heard at a higher level and ways in which you can step up your influence on the global stage.

4 View ‘About the Partners’ section (back of the front cover).



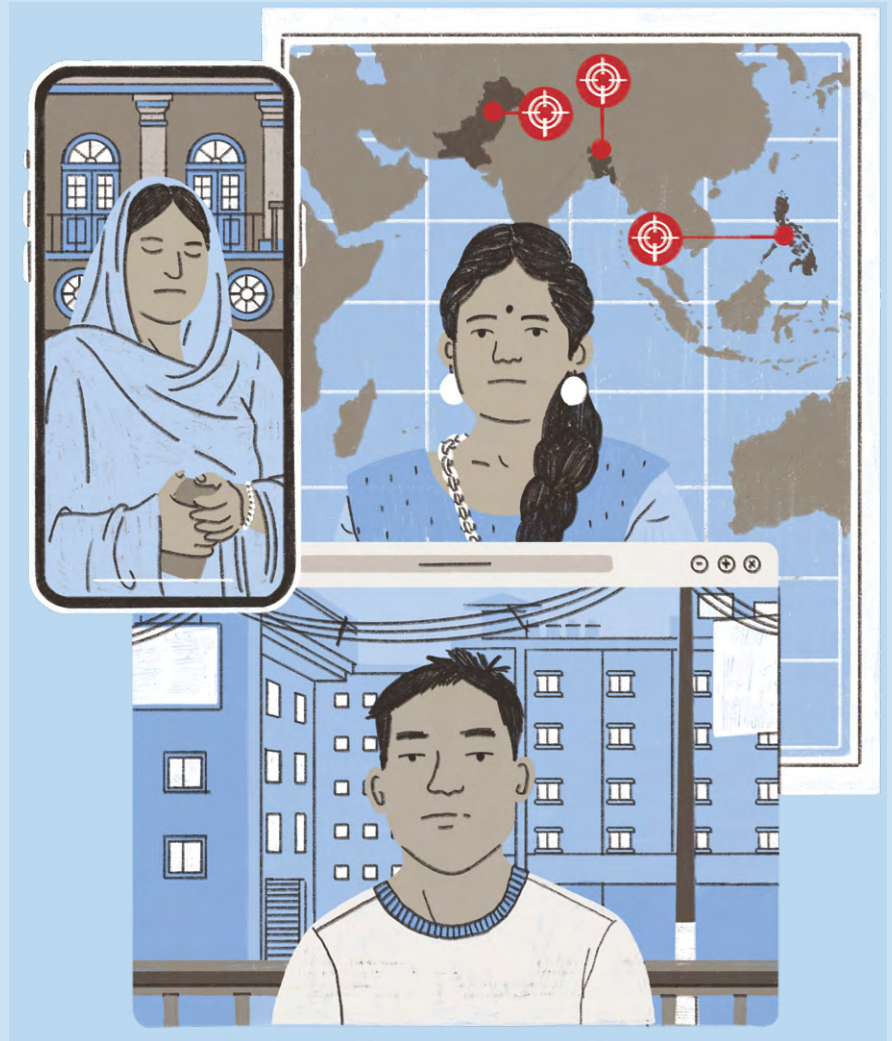
Laying the groundwork

Background and context

1.

What is the context of violent extremism in the region?

1.1.



In 2019, South Asia had the highest average impact from terrorism according to the Global Terrorism Index⁵. The emergence (or, as it is often the case, the “re-emergence”) of different violent extremist organizations in South and Southeast Asia has led to an increase in violent attacks, as well as a rise in the number of people being recruited by VE groups. Young people are especially being targeted by VE groups, mainly because it is understood that the transitional phase between childhood and adulthood makes young people more action-oriented and less risk-averse than adults. During this transitional stage, young people are more inclined to be attracted to groups, ideas, or influences that can provide them with a sense of identity and belonging⁶.

Although a lack of economic opportunities and lower levels of education are often seen as driving forces behind this resurgence of recruitment and

⁵ The Global Terrorism Index 2020: <https://visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/GTI-2020-web-1.pdf>

⁶ <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/conference-reports/lessons-learned-pcve-youth-mentorship>

violent extremist attacks, recent studies⁷ have in fact shown that middle-class educated youth are increasingly behind terrorist activity in the region. In addition, current trends seem to indicate that VE recruitment strategies are shifting their focus from rural settings to urban ones. Urban settings are attractive targets for extremist groups for several reasons, including looser community structures that have less capacity to hold youth accountable. Finally, research suggests that VE recruitment is expanding beyond the scope of religious communities to also include secular groups. This was most recently exemplified by the attacks in Bangladesh and Pakistan between 2015 and 2020, where students from secular universities in the main cities were engaged in violent attacks⁸.

More generally, the Asian continent is currently increasingly vulnerable to extremist propaganda and divisive narratives. The COVID-19 pandemic, which fueled fear and insecurity, combined with the 2021 takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban have reinforced the VE narratives in the region. Moreover, certain countries in the region have been very significantly affected by recruitment to extremist groups, such as the Maldives which has the highest number of people who joined ISIS per capita⁹.

Here is a snapshot of the situation in the different countries where we led our program:



The Philippines

In 2019, the Philippines ranked tenth in the Global Terrorism Index¹⁰ of top countries most affected by VE. In the past few years, VE organizations have carried out an average of one assault per day which has had a profound impact on young people and marginalized communities across the Philippines. A study conducted as part of ET Philippines in 2020 identified poverty, historical injustices, and external influences – from parental figures, instructors, and even government representatives – as the main contributors to youth vulnerability¹¹. At the same time, Filipino youth see access to basic needs and education reform as the most effective means of reducing the effects of VE on young people.



Pakistan

In 2019, Pakistan ranked fifth in the list of countries most affected by terrorism in the world. 63% of Pakistan's population is between the ages of 15 and 33 years old, making Pakistan one of the youngest countries

7 https://www.kofiannanfoundation.org/publications/research-urban-youth-building-peace-in-south-southeast-asia-key-drivers-of-violent-extremism-and-ways-to-prevent-it/attachment/urban-youth-building-peace-in-south-and-southeast-asia_2021_final/

8 Ibid.

9 <https://www.efsas.org/publications/articles-by-efsas/the-maldives%E2%80%9999-foreign-fighter-phenomenon-theories-and-perspectives/>

10 The Global Terrorism Index 2020: <https://visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/GTI-2020-web-1.pdf>

11 <https://www.krisforpeace.org/research-page-1>



Why do youth need to be engaged in PVE?

1.2.

worldwide. This poses a particular challenge to PVE strategies in the region because VE ideology has gained traction amongst the urban, middle class and educated youth. Urban youth have adopted a worldview that is restricted to ‘us’ versus ‘them’, reinforced by social pop culture that emphasizes violence and toxic masculinity. These worldviews held by many urban youth create an opening for VE recruitment. In fact, in the past years, the country experienced several incidents of ideologically motivated violence against women, civil society, and religious minorities carried out by young, educated people from middle or upper-middle-class backgrounds¹².

Bangladesh

A series of incidents were reported in the country in the last several years, including the murder of an atheist blogger, the murders of LGBTQ+ activists, attacks on foreigners, and the Holey Artisan attack of 2016 that killed 20 civilians and was partially perpetrated by middle-class university students. More recently, in 2019 alone, Bangladesh experienced six attacks claimed by ISIS. Like Pakistan, the radicalization of students in Bangladesh’s capital Dhaka is a concern. This has been exacerbated by the increased usage of online social media platforms by young people, which is being taken advantage of by VE groups who now conduct more than 80% of their recruitment activities online¹³.

Youth have the energy, creativity, and idealism to challenge entrenched patterns of exclusion and injustice that serve as recruitment grounds for violent extremists. Even though they are not a homogeneous group, young people are uniquely positioned to push for positive change and prevent violence in society due to their privileged understanding of social media and new technologies. They also have an impressive capacity to mobilize their peers behind a commitment for change.

12 https://www.kofiannanfoundation.org/publications/research-urban-youth-building-peace-in-south-southeast-asia-key-drivers-of-violent-extremism-and-ways-to-prevent-it/attachment/urban-youth-building-peace-in-south-and-southeast-asia_2021_final/

13 According to a speech by Abdul Mannan, the Deputy Commissioner of the Counter Terrorism and Trans-national Crime Unit (CTTCU). <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/dhaka/2020/02/17/police-82-of-terrorist-radicalization-happens-through-social-media>

Let's take a closer look at key facts on why youth should be involved:

Fact**1**

Young people have a direct stake in peace since one young person out of four lives in settings affected by armed conflict or organized violence.

Fact**2**

The overwhelming majority of those who join violent extremist groups are youth. While this only represents a small proportion of young people across the world, other young people are well positioned to help identify vulnerabilities and address the root causes that drive youth to join VE groups. Peer networks are also better equipped to reach out to young people and more credible in acting and advocating for peace.

Fact**3**

A significant improvement in the quality of decision-making and policymaking is observed when youth are consulted properly. Therefore, empowering young people and elevating their voices is also becoming a higher priority worldwide. It is not a coincidence that over one third of the 169 targets established by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) relate to empowering young people.

Fact**4**

The generation of new digital citizens are youth between 18-29. Young people can be powerful agents for peace in the digital sphere and provide alternative narratives to the divisive content propagated by violent extremists on social media.

Fact**5**

Youth have an impressive capacity to mobilize and give impulse to a movement. Take for instance the recent movements addressing climate change, racial justice, or demands for democracy – all great examples of movements propelled by youth engagement.



Planting the seed

Engaging and mobilizing young people into PVE action

2.



Getting other young people excited about PVE and peacebuilding can often be a difficult task, especially if they are not accustomed to being engaged in community work, or if they were made to feel like their voices do not matter. In this section, we will look at ways to get fellow young people interested in the PVE cause and how you can make this a fun and attractive cause for them to get involved in.



Challenge

How to generate initial interest in PVE-related activities for groups that are not yet engaged?

2.1.



Making PVE relatable

For many young people, “Preventing Violent Extremism” can come across as intimidating – an issue that is obscure and unfamiliar, or that invokes uncomfortable conversations. Even for young people who may be initially interested in this topic, the political or religious stigma associated with the term may constitute a major barrier to engagement. Therefore, before attempting to rally other young people to your cause, it is essential that you make the topic more **relatable** to the communities you are wanting to engage with.

Demystifying PVE requires you to have a **deep understanding of the cultural and social context** you are working in, regardless of whether you are a local or an external actor. More practically, you may want to think about communal perceptions of ideologically motivated violence, how people from a given community engage with it as an idea, or even the language and key symbols they use to describe it. Exploring how individuals are exposed to violence, and their direct experience of it, can give you clues about how to discuss issues related to PVE with them.

A good way to start thinking about this is **asking yourself how PVE resonates with your audience** as a practical concept. PVE remains a very new and highly conceptual term which is not broadly used by all of those involved in peacebuilding activities. In fact, many groups that are just starting out in the sector or who have a history of engaging with VE propaganda may have never heard of it before. Instead, you might find it easier to introduce PVE as an umbrella term which encapsulates different aspects of education, health, minority rights, economic livelihoods, or even environmental concerns, with the common goal of working towards peace. The term's political connotations may also offend certain people. For example, the Extremely Together chapter in Pakistan has worked with a variety of groups who are usually open to discussing topics related to PVE until religious connotations are attached to it. Even though avoiding politicization altogether is extremely difficult, using more nuanced terms like “social cohesion” or “peacebuilding” will minimize the risk of offending certain people.

Determining your target audience

Targeting the right groups of young people is an important starting point for engagement. From the onset, you should make a conscious decision about which groups you would like to engage with. This prevention spectrum might help you decide where you would like to focus your efforts.



When deciding on your target, you should consider which communities you have access to, as well as the security implications of engaging with certain individuals and groups. Remember that for effective PVE, you should not only focus on people who are vulnerable to recruitment by violent extremists, but also on those who are most susceptible to engaging in PVE activities and those who have the potential to mobilize at-risk youth and encourage them to join PVE activities.

To choose which other young people to work with, you will need to carry out a **baseline study** to understand youth vulnerabilities and recruitment strategies used by violent extremists. Regularly monitoring radicalization trends among young people in digital spaces is an effective way to define your targeted demographic within the wider society. However, it is also crucial that you keep an eye on young people in particularly fragile environments and hotbeds of VE activity. These can be prisons, juvenile detention centers, extremist political parties, or even underground clubs and societies. Being **consistent in your monitoring** will help you react faster, improvise, and reinvent yourself in a rapidly changing environment. Lastly, throughout your activities, it is important to run **regular needs assessments** within your target group to make sure your activities respond to their needs and interests, which tend to evolve over time.

Initiating contact

Remember that first impressions matter and they can make or break the relationship you are trying to build. To guarantee a successful first contact with members of your target group, make sure to be well prepared and set your objectives ahead of time. Before initiating contact, make sure to **do your research** on who they are, what they do, and where their interests lie. This will allow you to anticipate their reaction to your work and prepare for any questions they may have. For example, you may want to approach things differently if you are targeting sympathizers of VE narratives than if you are reaching out to families of vulnerable groups.

Designing an effective outreach strategy will require you to acknowledge that **different contexts call for different responses**. Context, demographics, perceptions, and needs differ according to the city or area you are working in. That is not to say that programs and activities are not transferrable, or that you cannot draw inspiration from other outreach initiatives you conducted in other communities. However, you should make sure to contextualize so that your message resonates with the audience you are trying to address. Communities will appreciate the effort made to cater to them individually and be more responsive because of this. Remember that the more tailor-made the program is to your targeted groups, the better!

It is also important to **clearly define the extent of your target group's engagement** and communicate that with them from the onset. Being transparent about their participation in PVE activities from the start will allow you to better manage expectations and meet objectives, but also prevent your movement from growing stagnant in the long-term.

Meeting a few people within your target group and explaining your initiative to them is an important first step. Engaging in early consultations is also critical. Months ahead of planned activities, make sure to consult with local organizations that can give you precious advice on how to best interact with your target group.



Case study

Using local partnerships to expand your reach Extremely Together Philippines, The Philippines

Launching the local chapter of Extremely Together in the Philippines¹⁴ amid the pandemic presented so many challenges, but our partnership with youth groups, educational institutions, local government units, and other relevant organizations was the superpower that allowed us to spread our wings.

At the beginning of the program, our objective was to train 500 young people on preventing violent extremism and peacebuilding in five urban areas in the Philippines. However, we quickly realized it would be difficult to do so, given the physical distance between those five areas, the restrictions presented by COVID-19, and the lack of access to digital resources for the youth we were targeting, which prevented us from doing comprehensive online activities.

Luckily, we were able to identify key organizations in each of those areas that helped us address those challenges. Prior to our face-to-face training program, we were able to work with youth organizations, student councils, and grassroots groups that allowed us to prepare ahead of time, select and orient participants on the ground, organize some activities digitally, and comply with health regulations.

Our other partners, such as local government agencies, have also been extremely helpful in supporting Extremely Together activities. For our training in Davao Del Norte, Tagum City Mayor Allan Rellon and the local youth development office offered the use of government facilities, transportation, human power, and other resources that have gone a long way in ensuring the most impactful experience for our participants, while respecting all local health regulations.

To help boost the access of trainees to the digital components of our training program and activities, we have also partnered with private sector organizations - including a telecommunication company in the Philippines - that donated tablets, electronic load, and Wi-Fi units which we were able to provide to some participants.

Another particularly important aspect of our partnership with youth organizations has been being able to co-create and co-lead activities that connect and engage with local youth. Without the input and ownership from our grassroots partners, we would not have been able to facilitate customized training programs that are suited to the specific needs, concerns, circumstances, and aspirations of local youth.

¹⁴ Follow ET Philippines' activities on their social media:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/extremelytogetherph/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/extremelytogetherph/>

Using youth networks as entry points

Local youth networks have strong knowledge of the people and realities within key target groups: use this to your advantage! Developing strong partnerships with either youth-led or youth-centred networks that bring young people together can provide you with critical insight on the priorities, interests, and motivations of young people. Youth culture is constantly evolving, with new trends always surfacing online and offline, and these networks are ideally positioned to help you keep on top of things. In addition, working with youth-led or youth-centred groups who already have an established presence in their communities can help bolster the legitimacy of your work and establish an important foundation for trust-building.

The key is to remain inclusive when identifying the youth to involve in your PVE activities. Try to engage young people from both well-established institutions and loosely formed structures, ranging from universities, local school clubs, religious schools, and community youth leaders. Oftentimes, young people with little to no experience in PVE or leadership prove to be important assets in the formation of youth-led movements. **Be as inclusive as possible**, you can only reap the benefits of it!





Case study

Working with educational institutions to build trust

Rupantar,
Bangladesh

Since 2016, Rupantar¹⁵ has chosen to work with a range of different educational institutions (considered a vital part of our holistic approach) as a way of building trusting relationships with the young people we are trying to engage and include in our PVE activities.

Over the years, we have worked with a range of institutions including 52 madrasas¹⁶, 22 universities, 94 secondary schools and 38 colleges. Partnering with these different educational institutions has allowed us to tap into pre-existing networks like university clubs, youth debate teams, or even prayer groups, which help us build connections with young people more easily. It is more straightforward to introduce various PVE activities when we can engage with a network of young people that is already established. For example, we worked closely with different institutions to introduce activities that built young people's capacity, self-esteem, and agency. Through this, we managed to empower

young people to become "everyday heroes" who can help tackle VE at their own individual level.

At Rupantar, we also work with these educational institutions to create specific activities that are tailored to the interests of the different young people we are trying to engage. This helps build their confidence, but also encourages active learning. For example, we organized "Peace Corners" with books on peacebuilding for young people who liked to read. For those seeking to develop their self-expression skills, we helped them develop their leadership and charisma through different workshops and mediums like radio shows, filmmaking, or social media posts. Others who wanted to support their peers were capacitated in non-violent conflict management and cyber-awareness, for instance. These activities were supported by teachers, parents, authorities, or other influential actors in youth-centered networks.

¹⁵ Rupantar, which means "social transformation" in Bengali, is a national NGO working on peace, democracy and just governance all around Bangladesh. They are one of ET's main partners in Southeast Asia and lead ET affiliated PVE efforts in Bangladesh along with GCERF. Find out more about Rupantar on their website: www.rupantar.org or Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/rupantarkhulna/>

¹⁶ A madrasa is an educational institution offering instructions in Islamic subjects. Learn more here: [https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/RS21654.html#:~:text=The%20Arabic%20word%20madrasa%20\(plural,%2C%20the%20Quran%2C%20the%20sayings%20](https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/RS21654.html#:~:text=The%20Arabic%20word%20madrasa%20(plural,%2C%20the%20Quran%2C%20the%20sayings%20)

Working with all sectors of society

Partnering with local youth organizations is a good start but building trust with your target group will also require you to **engage with the broader community that surrounds them**. This includes local governments, community leaders, religious leaders, their families, local sports clubs or even businesses – the possibilities are endless. You will need to get creative. Do not hesitate to reach out to as many local community actors as possible, the only criteria being that they constitute a positive influence in young people's lives and can help you convey and amplify your message in the way you would like it to be received.

Different community actors can act as ‘**middle people**’ between you and the group you are trying to work with. This is particularly useful in the context of COVID-19, where outreach has been made a lot more difficult due to reduced face-to-face interactions. In these cases, community ‘middle people’ can act as great **points of contact**, and help you retain a presence in the hardest to reach communities even if you are not physically there.

Approaching local community actors will require a good understanding of socio-cultural norms, customs, and expectations, especially if you are not a member of that community. This is where your partnerships with local youth networks will come in handy: you can ask them to introduce you to different relevant actors and **vouch for your trustworthiness**. They are also best placed to provide critical insight into local customs and ways of navigating them.



Case study

Involving religious communities in PVE

The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, Asia

The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers¹⁷ uses a ‘whole of society’ approach to work on PVE and peacebuilding. This means that we bring together different actors from a community to work jointly towards sustainable peace. This includes youth, religious leaders, and women who are often overlooked in these processes.

Examples of ‘whole of society’ peacebuilding include our peer-to-peer network called the “Inclusivity-based Community of Practice and “Asia Working Group” that provide spaces to analyze the role of religion in conflicts. They help us understand the role religious ideology plays in conflicts that involve VE groups, and how certain religious minorities or moderate religious leaders can be wrongly targeted by VE groups or other groups because of this.

This has shown us the importance of working with religious communities to combat the misconceptions surrounding VE narratives and motivations for violence. Religious and faith-based communities often play a central role in people’s everyday lives and are trusted

go-to-networks for support in moments of crisis. Religious communities can also act as go-to-places for support in communities that do not have access to material or emotional support in conflict torn areas, or in communities who cultivate a certain distrust of the outsider.

It is helpful for young peacebuilders to be aware of this and to have the opportunity to engage with trusted and influential religious peacemakers. Religious communities can provide theological expertise and help create alternative narratives to address extremist propaganda in a way that can resonate with certain vulnerable individuals, or people who want to disengage from violent extremist groups. Vice versa, it is equally important that religious actors learn from young people to make sure their strategies are up-to-date, especially when it comes to social media. Often it is about creating spaces for peacemakers from different parts of society to connect and combine their strengths for more effective PVE – being stronger together.

¹⁷ The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers works to strengthen work on sustainable peace by building bridges between global players and peacemakers at a grassroots level. The Network collaboratively supports the positive role of religious and traditional actors in peace and peacebuilding processes. Find out more on their website: <https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/>

Adopting recreational engagement strategies

Fun and original recreational activities tend to be more successful in engaging young people than input alone. Be honest – have you ever garnered outstanding levels of engagement from a PowerPoint presentation or Q&A session? If, like many people, you find yourself struggling through a lecture, try using different recreational activities connected to culture, the arts or sports. Recreational activities can help you spark engagement and make PVE sound **less technical and more relatable** to younger demographics.

That said, finding the right activity that will resonate with your target community can prove quite challenging. Giving your target audience the **opportunity to choose** their own means of expression is an almost sure-fire way to spark interest and initiate dialogue.

Case study

Engaging young people through music

Extremely Together Pakistan,
Pakistan

At Extremely Together Pakistan, we found that engaging young people through musical activities is a great way of making them excited about PVE. For example, we organized a Music Baithak¹⁸ at a community space, the Rose Youth Point in Lyari, where more than 30 people attended. Lyari, is one of the oldest urban slum settlements in Karachi and is home to many ethnic-religious communities including Muhajirs, Sindhis, Bengalis, Pashtuns, Seriakis, Balochs and Memons. These groups are divided along ethnic, sectarian, and cultural lines and refuse to interact with one another. This lack of social cohesion and interaction has given several VE groups ground to spread misinformation and spew hate, division, and segregation.

To create counter narratives to this, Extremely Together Pakistan¹⁹ collaborated with our Peace Leader from Karachi, a Sindhi Baloch CVE activist and filmmaker, to organize a Music Baithak that featured freestyle rap battles that challenged identity-

based conflicts. We also held an array of smaller breakout activities like open mic sessions and poetry readings, in which participants were given the chance to explore a broad range of revolutionary, divine, and Sufi themes. Though these activities, we aimed to highlight the commonalities of the struggles among different groups and to inspire them to create social change.

The audience's response was overwhelming. During their conversation with media, the participants shared that this art-based intervention was much needed for the youth of Lyari who have grown up witnessing sporadic violence, street crime, sectarian conflicts, political instability, and gang wars²⁰.

This musical event brought people from diverse religious, ethnic, and socio-economic groups together to share a space and connect with one another. We found that music and poetry are cathartic ways to influence narratives around community resilience, peace, harmony, acceptance, and inclusion²¹.

18 Baithak is a long-practiced tradition in Pakistan where people meet up amidst music, food, and stories.

19 Follow ET Pakistan's different activities on their social media:
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ExtremelyTogetherPakistan/>
Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/extremelytogether_pk/?hl=en

20 <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=187496832753647>

21 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hfUmCJkXurc>

Scaling up outreach activities through online campaigning

Investing more heavily in online engagement activities will also allow you to conduct outreach activities on a much **larger scale** and mobilize far more people than in-person activities alone. However, designing an effective online campaign that generates a positive reaction does require a certain degree of thought. Before you start, you will want to think carefully about the following four questions to optimize your capacity to engage people online²²:

- 1. Who is my target audience?** Be strategic about who you are trying to reach. Choosing a specific group may be more useful than trying to reach as many people as possible. Targeting key demographics who are interested in PVE will increase the likeliness that your audience will engage with your message and subsequently, with your work. Designing a campaign around a target audience will require you to research language and symbols, but also track trends – such as popular formats and platforms, and peak times on social media.
- 2. Where do I situate my campaign?** More simply put, we invite you to think about what you want to achieve with your campaign. Are you focused on preventing violent extremism or countering it? To what degree do you want to engage with and attempt to debunk VE narratives? How are you going to interact with your target audience to achieve that goal? Asking yourself these questions will help you redirect your focus and create more targeted content.
- 3. Does my campaign look approachable?** As obvious as it seems, your audience must resonate with your campaign for it to gain traction. People tend to respond better to content that sounds more conversational and authentic than content that is too heavily curated. Moreover, content that has a visual component to it generates on average 80 percent more traction online – do not forget to include the occasional GIF!
- 4. Am I giving my audience the opportunity to act?** Your aim as a practitioner is both to sensitize your audience to PVE and provoke action by prompting them to join your movement in one way or another. To achieve the second goal, your online outreach activities must systematically incorporate active calls to action to turn a passive campaign into an active one. You can encourage people to call a hotline, ask them to donate to a certain charity or even prompt them to visit a given website. This will make all the difference in terms of breadth and scope of engagement.

22 For more useful information on this topic, visit the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT)'s website: <https://gifct.org/>



Challenge

How to create meaningful inclusion of youth and foster a sense of belonging?

2.2.



Deconstructing your own biases

When working towards meaningful inclusion, we found it is important to take a step back and **listen** to the people you are trying to help. As practitioners, we should learn to shift away from the doctor-patient mindset and recognize that we might all be patients who still have much to learn from one another – especially when it comes to diverse contextual realities. Deconstructing biases is particularly critical when trying to encourage cross-cultural or interfaith collaboration as part of your action since you will likely interact with people that have very different worldviews, some with opinions that may even conflict with your own beliefs.

Make sure you are aware of your contextual biases. Developing a habit of checking yourself on certain social or cultural assumptions that you may have can more easily encourage the people you are working with to share their own ideas and take initiative. To take things further, it is also important to encourage others to work on their internalized biases. This can be achieved by working to create a culture of trust and acceptance within your movement. If you have the means, a substantial way of putting

this into practice is by running regular workshops on stigma, discrimination and cultural biases mediated by a neutral third party.

However, deconstructing biases must not only be done internally. Make your stance very clear to people looking at your work from the outside. A straightforward way of conveying your message is through communication activities that you share with external audiences (e.g., your website, brochures, or even at public events you plan to organize). **Showing you are publicly willing to challenge discriminatory narratives** and support the inclusion of diverse communities can go a long way in terms of progressively changing mindsets around you. However, you must also walk the talk when it comes to the partners and organizations you choose to work with or sponsor. Make sure they also share the same internal values and are willing to work with you to show that representation matters!

Creating opportunities for ownership and participatory leadership

Supporting action that promotes **ownership of projects by young people** and their community creates greater incentives for engagement. Instead of approaching groups of young people with a pre-established plan, come to them with an idea. By doing so, you will encourage them to get involved in every step of the process, from the inception phase to the project implementation. Showing people that they can meaningfully contribute to the growth of a project can help boost their interest and show them that their ideas matter. In addition, co-creation and co-ownership of projects by communities can help guarantee their long-term engagement. If communities are directly consulted in every step of the process, this diminishes the likelihood that a given initiative will be dropped due to lack of interest.

You can give young participants a sense of **personal ownership** by allocating titles and giving them the sole responsibility for certain tasks. This will give them a stake in the work and a strong sense of responsibility. Start small then work your way up to build their confidence progressively and give them a chance to develop important **leadership skills** and **project management capacities**. Eventually, they can take on more responsibilities in PVE networks and transfer their skills to other young leaders in their communities.

Supporting people's interests

Recognizing the individual strengths and weaknesses of the people you work with and catering to their needs will make them feel included in a way that is meaningful to them. Some may want to explore PVE from a specific angle (e.g., mental health, economic opportunity, interreligious dialogues, etc.), others might be more interested in media and communications, and some may feel more at ease with fundraising. Giving participants the opportunity to develop their unique skills and interests gives them space to take ownership and grow with the project. This also benefits your project to the extent where skillsets are optimized and reattributed in a way that makes sense.

Paying special attention to minority groups and marginalized communities

Marginalized and minority groups are important communities to engage in PVE because they often are the primary victims of violent extremists. They can also be specifically targeted by VE narratives because their grievances and experiences of discrimination may provide a fertile ground for recruitment. For these reasons, give special attention to the interests of women, ethnic or religious minorities, the LGBTQ+ community, people with disabilities, and disenfranchised groups. Emphasis should also be placed on children whose parents were killed in conflict and VE attacks, as well as communities displaced by conflicts. What are concrete actions you can take to help minority groups and marginalized communities feel more included?

- 1. Challenging stereotypes:** The first thing you can do to signal that you are considering the interests of these groups is working to **actively deconstruct stigma and barriers to inclusion**. This starts with internal awareness raising within your network where you can raise discussions on the topics of inclusion and biases, but also raise awareness about stereotypes linking VE to minorities, including the tendency to blame minorities (especially religious ones) for VE activities.
- 2. Building trust:** Marginalized and minority groups often do not feel as if they belong to mainstream society, which makes it even more difficult to build trust with them. Make these groups feel as if they belong by formalizing ties with representatives of their communities. It may also help to identify a respected leader or community hero to work with who not only represents the interests of their community but can also bolster your legitimacy amongst their peers.

3. Listening to their needs: Whilst inclusion is certainly important, you also must ensure that minority groups and marginalized communities feel comfortable being included in the first place. For this, listen to their needs and create an environment where they are comfortable voicing their concerns and sharing their ideas. For example, the Pakistani chapter of Extremely Together noted that minority communities seemed more comfortable joining the discussions related to PVE using digital platforms. As a result, discussions on difficult topics such as forced conversions, blasphemy laws, and minority persecution were held online to allow individuals to remain anonymous and feel safer expressing their opinions.

4. Elevating their voices: Make sure that members of these groups are given sufficient space to voice their concerns without being invalidated or stigmatized. In doing so, it is imperative to avoid tokenism which is why we recommend you prioritize the following strategies:

- Facilitating skillset trainings which would allow individuals to develop soft and hard skills they can employ in the workplace. This is an effective way of empowering minorities and marginalized groups and giving them the tools to make their own voices heard.
- Encouraging the creation of an action plan within your movement which includes very tangible solution-oriented approaches to inclusion. For example, this could include a commitment to include quotas for minority representation at every level of the movement, from leadership positions, to on the ground activities.



Harvesting growth

Sustaining engagement and gaining momentum

3.



Once you have captivated the attention of your peers, ensuring that they remain active for the cause can prove challenging. In this section, we share challenges associated with sustaining young people's interest in PVE. In addition, we also explore ways to create a healthy and compassionate environment in which involved youth can grow and thrive.



Challenge

How to create incentives for sustained participation and optimize the engagement of young people?

3.1.



Offering incentives

Offering youth participants incentives can be a productive way of securing their engagement over time. You can offer **tangible incentives** in the form of personal development rewards such as internships, opportunities to get mentored, to speak at a conference or to travel, or contributions to their projects such as seed funding or technical support. These incentives may be used to foster **healthy competition** between members by rewarding the highest performing individuals. For instance, our Extremely Together chapter in the Philippines hosted a grant competition between its youth members. Participants were asked to pitch their project ideas and winners received seed funding to kickstart their own projects.

You can also offer members **intangible incentives** that can increase participation and create organic growth. This can be achieved through a combination of two aspects:

1. Building a sense of common belonging around the movement to make members feel part of a larger community. **Recognition for their work** and contribution to the cause is important to foster belonging. To acknowledge this, you can offer members specific roles which gives them a sense of **importance**. These roles do not need to be complex or sharply defined. Instead, they are designed to make members feel valued and see the role they play in the movement.
2. Helping young people **boost their social profile** and how they position themselves as activists or practitioners. Making them feel part of a global effort that contributes to something important will naturally motivate them to grow more involved. For example, the global dimension of the Extremely Together initiative helps boost its members' social profile by connecting them to a broader network of peacebuilders regionally in Asia, Africa and internationally. This helps instill the idea that they are working towards something bigger and gives them the opportunity to build impressive professional networks. Being part of such networks will also give them a chance to amplify their visibility through different opportunities (e.g., public speeches, interviews, guest op-eds, etc.).

However, **make sure not to over-incentivize your members!** Whilst offering many incentives can certainly boost attendance rates, members may begin to start engaging only because of the perks and benefits they are awarded simply for 'showing up'. To prevent diverting their attention away from the cause, you may find that offering incentives only to those who perform better than others can help boost participation without compromising the quality of engagement.

Trying blended engagement strategies

Promoting inclusivity and meaningful participation in the work you do is vital. However, you cannot do this without adapting to the unprecedented situations created by the global pandemic. Despite a slow return to "normalcy", it is no secret that COVID-19 has radically transformed ways in which PVE networks engage with their participants. Remaining active on digital media platforms is a central ingredient to rallying youth to PVE action. Digital engagement allows for a tailor-made approach which lets you interact with groups differently depending on what is most appropriate. In addition, the wide range of social media platforms allows you to reach different audiences through alternative formats and encourages co-creation of content more easily.

That said, when planning your activities, you may want to consider coupling **consistent social media outreach** via online communication tools and audio-visuals with **periodical face-to-face gatherings**.

This hybrid approach allows you to create strong emotional connections with your participants through occasional in-person meetings.

Increased digital engagement also implies new challenges, such as participants' lack of access to a computer or stable internet connection, or more widely, online censorship from governments. Acknowledging these potential obstacles and **anticipating the need for material support** (i.e., internet bundles, bus fare to internet café, travel cost to in-person activities for those who are censored or unable to join online, etc.) will help you broaden the reach of your activities and optimize engagement.

Another common challenge with online engagement is the rise of digital fatigue because of too many 'socially-distanced' events online. To counteract this, try using innovative online activities which tap into the interests of young people. For example, conveying your message through online games, storytelling or even interactive films would be a great way of catching young people's attention.

Case study

Gaming for peace and socio-emotional learning in the form of storytelling UNESCO MGIEP, Southeast Asia

At UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development²³, we focus on creating innovative solutions to engage young people digitally in a fun and original way. We run two main programs, namely the Digital Games for Peace Challenge, and the Social Emotional Learning for Youth Waging Peace (SEL4YWP) Online Course.

The Digital Games for Peace Challenge, supported by the United Nations Office of Counterterrorism, is designed to encourage creativity, innovation, and resilience. It aims to enhance skills and competencies of young people for intercultural dialogue and social-emotional learning to prevent violent extremism through digital games. We trained 57 young participants who were selected from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka in conscious game design that engages young people. They were invited to play the games, critically analyze them, and engage with experts on how digital games can be an effective tool for PVE, particularly among youth. In addition, youth participants were given

the opportunity to apply what they had learned onto the game-design process and were given the opportunity to create a comprehensive game proposal with the help of video game developers and other experts.

Our SEL4YWP Online Course is more geared towards young adults (18+) who would like to learn how to use social and emotional learning for the prevention of violent extremism, especially within the framework of empathy, mindfulness, compassion, and critical inquiry (EMC2). This course uses storytelling to invite learners to explore topics alongside a fictional main character, Kalamfariku, and dive into the experiences and viewpoints of four other characters living in the imaginary land of Ahayou. By providing a flexible and reflective space, this method helps learners to arrive at their own conclusions and to develop skills in PVE, including systems thinking and media literacy. By 2022, it is expected that more than 1000 learners from approximately 10 universities and youth organizations will have completed the course.

²³ UNESCO MGIEP is based in India and is the first and only category 1 Research institute in the Asia Pacific region. It focuses on fostering peaceful and sustainable societies, mainly through education. It incorporates Social Emotional Learning (SEL) into different aspects of its work as a way of encouraging mindful engagement and pro-social behavior in working towards a peaceful and sustainable world. Find out more on their website: <https://mgiep.unesco.org/>



Challenge

How to guarantee the physical and emotional safety of young practitioners and those working with them?

3.2.



Facilitating difficult conversations

Tackling difficult or contentious topics is vital to building a healthy and unified movement. It can, however, be extremely difficult to reconcile different points of view and make it a pleasant experience for all participants involved. That is why establishing the parameters of the conversation before starting is crucial to ensure different groups feel safe to express their ideas. You can **establish a safe space that is both physical and emotional** wherein different participants agree to adhere to principles of confidentiality, empathy, vulnerability, openness, and non-violence. However, you should make it clear that this does not mean that participants should censor themselves to avoid offending others. On the contrary, participants should feel comfortable expressing their opinions on sensitive questions, if it is done respectfully. Other participants should also feel comfortable being challenged on their own opinions and respect points of view different from their own.

Do keep in mind that it might be difficult for participants to come to terms with the idea of a physical and emotional safe space the first time

around. For this reason, do not feel like you must limit yourself to one conversation on a given topic. Instead, conceptualizing these discussions as dynamic and ongoing, and acknowledging that some people may start feeling comfortable at a later stage, will help you reach deeper levels of conversation. Remember that **there is no 'right' way of holding these conversations**, and that the format will depend on the level of comfort of the different participants as well as your objectives as a group. You can also hold open discussions in multiple spaces for different purposes. For instance, you can use anonymized chatrooms to protect vulnerable people, use open café formats to encourage more informal discussions, or encourage cross-sector discussions with law enforcement, community leaders, governments, etc. You can also use original discussion formats like PechaKucha²⁴, pop-corn conversations²⁵, or even fishbowl discussions²⁶.

- 24 PechaKucha is a storytelling format where a presenter shows 20 slides for 20 seconds of commentary each. At a PechaKucha Night, individuals gather at a venue to share personal presentations about their work. You can create your own PechaKucha here: <https://www.pechakucha.com/pkcreate>
- 25 In a "popcorn" conversation, people "pop" or speak when they are moved to and only speak once.
- 26 In a fishbowl discussion, people rotate between seats that are inside and outside a circle. Those seated inside the circle actively participate by asking questions and sharing their opinions, while those standing outside listen carefully to the ideas presented. This is also very easy to re-create on a videoconference with people turning their camera on when they are actively participating, and off when they are listening to others.





Case study

Fostering interfaith dialogues for peace Interfaith Colombo, Sri Lanka

When we established our youth group called Interfaith Colombo²⁷ in 2017, we wanted to show how important it is for young people to have open dialogues with one another despite growing tensions between religious communities in Sri Lanka.

In these open conversations, we invited our participants to shed their roles as religious representatives for their groups and hold a dialogue based on their own personal beliefs and practices. We used both religiously neutral and religious places as venues for the conversations to give people of different faiths the opportunity to converse openly in a comfortable environment.

Our aim is to create opportunities for people with different levels of comfort to engage with each other in dialogue and challenge the status quo. We have held interfaith meetups to help people get to know each other and build trust, religious festivals open to all, and even interfaith walks in the cemetery with dialogues about our beliefs around death and afterlife. We also had a

series of dialogues called “No Taboos Allowed” which discussed more critical issues like “Why are we so behind in creating space for women?”, “Religion and Conversion – Is it freedom and coercion?”, “Are religions monoliths?”, “Religion and Extremism – Are they inseparable?”, etc. It was also important for us to organize politically sensitive commemorations of the end of the armed conflict which were all-inclusive.

In addition, we engage in advocacy and activism by joining several initiatives, protests and other advocacy that work to denounce hate speech and promote social justice in Sri Lanka. We also use ‘reverse mentoring’ as an indirect advocacy strategy which consists of engaging with senior religious leaders to receive advice, and at the same time asking critical questions respectfully to encourage pluralism. Finally, we organized an event where we walked as a group of young people of different faiths and beliefs to places of worship and religious festivals as a way of reclaiming spaces that are often segregated according to religion.

²⁷ Interfaith Colombo is a platform for enhancing understanding, relations, and trust between people of different faiths and beliefs. They work with the intention of fostering meaningful people-people and institutional relations. They aim to be a safe, inclusive, and exciting space for interfaith cooperation. They are not a group focused on debating religious dogma nor a space to promote any particular religions/groups or to convert people. Find out more on their Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/Interfaithcolombo/>

Providing mental health support

Establishing strong support networks for participants is a vital component in the creation of safe spaces and healthy movements. In particular, the creation of mental health support groups allows participants to **manage the heavy impact of social pressure and loneliness experienced by those working in PVE**. It can also help deal with the experience of exclusion that vulnerable youth have gone through.

Reprioritizing mental health within your immediate network will help **break down the stigma** that is often attached to it. You may find that you will have to encourage certain participants to overcome the taboo of

seeking psychological support for them to participate in these initiatives. This may prove challenging at first but will become easier as more participants partake in support activities. Mental health support is even more important now in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic during which young people have experienced overlapping crises.

Hiring mental health experts or psychologists can help build members' self-esteem and grapple with the feelings of injustice or abandonment young people in these situations regularly deal with. **Peer-to-peer support networks** are also a very efficient way for you to provide support to young participants. Young people may be more inclined to speak to someone their own age with similar lived experience who can closely identify with their struggles.

Guaranteeing the reputational and physical safety of participants

Ensuring the safety of your team and participants should be your first concern. Given the political and religious sensitivity of PVE activities, building resilience of the project teams amidst precarious security situations and adapting to adversity needs to be a constant priority.

There are several concrete measures you can take if you perceive a **threat from VE groups**:

- 1. Choosing your target audience:** Working and targeting young people who are at risk of joining VE groups instead of those who have already joined will minimize the risk of being targeted by VE groups.
- 2. Protecting sensitive data:** Ensuring the safety of young participants requires strict measures in handling and sharing of data with other organizations, especially if the data contains personal and sensitive information. Special attention should be paid to minorities and marginalized communities, as well as the teams working with them since they are at higher risk of being targeted by violent attacks or verbal assault.
- 3. Conducting risk assessments:** When organizing in-person activities, it is important to choose the location and activities carefully and enquire about security conditions with relevant authorities. Doing this will help you decide whether to keep a low profile and when to raise the profile of your activities depending on the context.

We recommend you take different measures if you perceive a **threat from government entities and law enforcement**:

- 1. Being aware of government labels:** Working with groups that are perceived as ‘extremist groups’ or ‘terrorist groups’ by the authorities (even if you do not agree with that label) can put you at risk in different ways. Not only can it jeopardize your reputation and funding, but it can also alienate other groups your teams are already engaging with. In certain cases, this may also have a direct impact on your physical safety which is why it is crucial to carefully select your partners.
- 2. Framing your work positively:** The language you use can directly play into perceptions of your group, network, or movement by local government entities. If you would like to avoid using any contentious language, try framing your activities under more accepted terms and goals, such as “building harmony”, “youth empowerment”, or “social cohesion”.
- 3. Partnering up:** Partnering with reputable organizations, international networks and forming local coalitions with other like-minded local actors will make you less vulnerable to threats from the authorities.

Accounting for cultural sensitivities in the areas you are working in

Remaining aware of social and cultural sensitivities in the areas you are working in and **briefing your teams accordingly** can help you ensure the safety of your participants. Ahead of community interventions or local events, make sure your team is up to date on the current landscape and briefed on any sensitivities to avoid unintentionally stigmatizing or targeting certain groups.

This may prove especially tricky when working in multi-ethnic or multi-religious contexts. In these circumstances, **adopting a neutral stance** and introducing activities that emphasize bonding over thematic discussion is a productive way of easing into the conversation without offending people. You can slowly introduce more topical dialogue once you are comfortable with one another as individuals. For example, the Extremely Together chapter in Pakistan is using recreational activities such as athletic tournaments to introduce discussions on PVE in areas with multi-ethnic and religious tensions that have protracted histories of gang and political violence. This avoids introducing PVE in an abrupt manner and protects practitioners and participants from violent outbursts.

Remaining neutral in your external communications will also enhance your legitimacy among local communities and youth movements before you even reach out to them. The easiest way of doing this is to review documents that you have made publicly available on a regular basis, and to update any content which may be deemed culturally sensitive to avoid controversy.

Building your movement's 'digital health'

Creating a presence in the digital sphere is an important part of movement building and awareness raising. Nevertheless, increased digital presence comes with certain safety and reputational risks for you and your participants. This includes cyber bullying or trolling of PVE activists, hate speech and disinformation, or, more rarely, cyber-attacks and attempts to breach systems. **Raising awareness around 'cyber etiquette' amongst your participants** will help minimize the risk posed by the digitalization of VE narratives and mitigate the adverse effects of it. When it comes to cyber bullying or trolling, **knowing the safety tools at your disposal** and sharing them with your team is an essential part of guaranteeing your participants' online safety:

- 1. Share safety center resources:** Every large social media platform has a safety center²⁸ where they share useful information on managing cyberbullying, trolling, and hurtful comments. Share those resources with your participants and encourage them to read them!
- 2. Show them how to block out hate:** There exist various tools²⁹ on social media that allow you to either block, report, or hide hurtful comments. This is also the case for end-to-end encrypted platforms like WhatsApp or Telegram that allow you to report a message which can be decrypted without having to decrypt the entire thread. These companies will then review the message and act accordingly.
- 3. Learn to disengage:** Having a discussion with your team on cybersecurity and bringing awareness to the importance of

28 Here are a few handy links to keep in your back pocket:
 WhatsApp: <https://www.whatsapp.com/safety>, <https://www.whatsapp.com/security/> and <https://faq.whatsapp.com/general/security-and-privacy/account-security-tips/?lang=en>
 Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/safety>
 Instagram: <https://about.instagram.com/safety> and <https://www.facebook.com/help/instagram/811572406418223>
 Discord: <https://discord.com/safety>

29 Check out the safety center links from the previous point for detailed lists of these tools. You can also refer to the website of the Global Internet Forum for Counter Terrorism (GIFCT) for more tips on how to protect yourself: <https://gifct.org/resource-guide/>

disengaging with VE groups, members of extremist associations or trolls can help you manage your movement's digital health. Calling out hurtful comments and responding with productive resources that counteract their statements is a good way of disengaging without having to block content. Have a set of ready-made answers that your team can share whenever they encounter such online behavior.

Sensitizing participants to hate speech and disinformation

Encouraging your movement members to be **active allies** helps build their confidence and acceptance of the fact that they do have agency and can stand up to hate. Teaching them to counter hate speech and disinformation even when it is not directed at them is also an integral part of creating a culture of tolerance. You can facilitate this by encouraging participants to join social media literacy workshops to help them identify what is fake and what is not, or by getting training on how to monitor platform analytics and online trends. If you have the means, you can also host workshops directly by inviting organizations specialized in social media literacy training, associations of bloggers or fact-checking bodies to train your teams.

Depending on the extent of your online presence, **partnering with companies** that work on different aspects of internet safety can also help you identify content standards and do basic reporting of hate speech and disinformation. If you would like to do counter-narrative work, you can collaborate with technology companies who can redirect search results for targeted audiences, including vulnerable groups you are working with, away from misinformation and towards more helpful information. Alternatively, consider partnering with different ethnic or religious groups to deliver awareness campaigns on promoting harmony and bring about behavior change.

**Case study****Countering hate speech and disinformation online**
Hashtag Generation, Sri Lanka

Hashtag Generation³⁰ is a non-profit organization led by a group of young tech-savvy Sri Lankans working towards building a society where citizens have the skills, information, and tools to be active participants in making the decisions that affect their communities, technologies, and bodies.

In Sri Lanka, social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp and TikTok have become important mediums for people to circulate news – including fake news – and their opinions, as is the case around the world. On the island, the proliferation of dangerous speech, including viral hate speech and disinformation, have exacerbated tensions which have existed between different communities for a long time. This has led to outbursts of violence on the ground, some resulting in deaths and loss of property.

More generally, hate speech and disinformation also have a lasting impact on the country's electoral and extra-electoral political landscape. They can affect healthy debate, skew public opinion, and act as catalysts for

a breakdown of trust for mainstream media intuitions which are often hyper partisan. What is more, social media platforms have merely implemented a lacklustre approach to content moderation which is insufficient and inadequate. While these companies have content moderation policies in place, they have not invested sufficient resources for their effective enforcement.

This is where Hashtag Generation comes in. We run a “Social Media Newsroom” which operates as a watchdog for dangerous speech narratives. We also develop counter and alternatives narratives to dangerous speech including fact checks. In addition, we conduct training on critical thinking in the digital age. Once a participant completes our training, they become a Citizen Reporter, who then reports harmful content to us. They also pledge to train the members of their own community to do the same. We are determined to make the Internet a kinder, safer, and braver space for Sri Lankans in all their diversity.

30 Find out more on their website: <https://hashtaggeneration.org/>

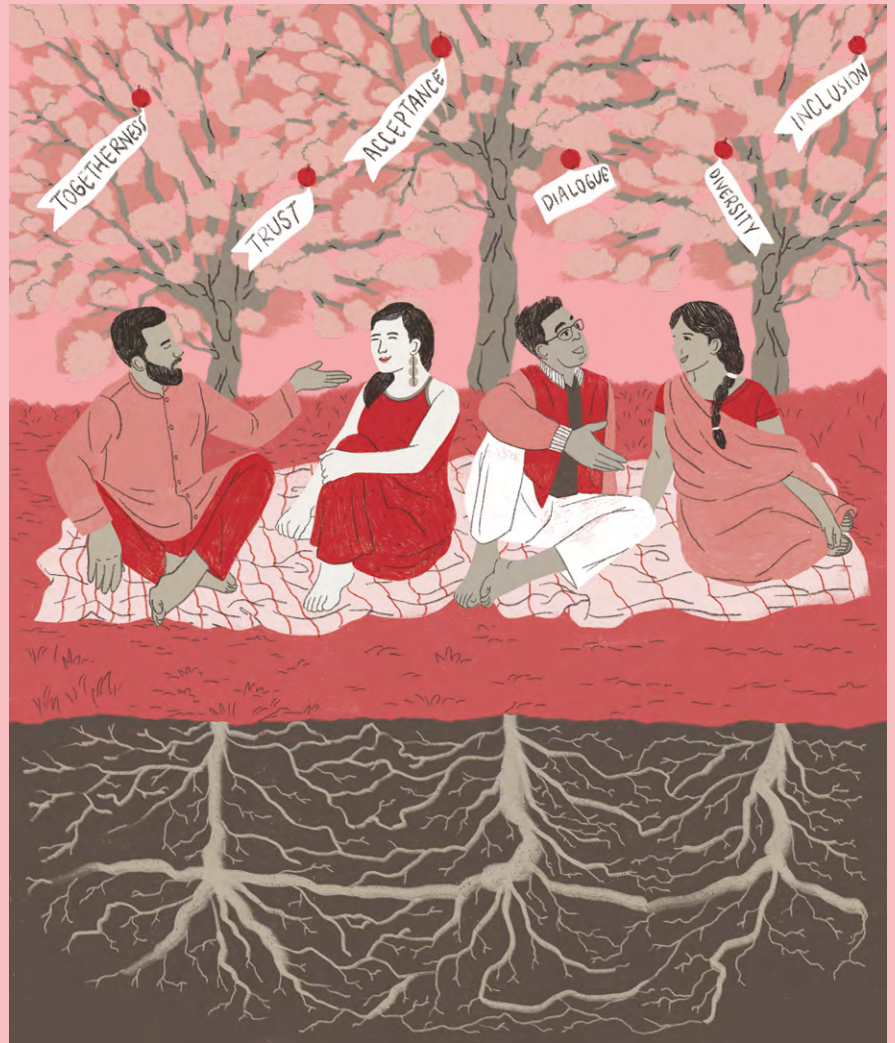




Spreading your roots

Scaling up action and promoting mutual learning in the region and beyond

4.



Amplifying your message and trying to increase your visibility can often be one of the most challenging aspects of promoting youth-led PVE action. In this section, we will explore ways of scaling up action beyond the local level and promoting mutual learning with other stakeholders in your region and beyond. We will also look at the challenge of making your voice heard at a higher level and ways in which you can step up your influence on both the regional and global stage.



Challenge

How to foster mutual learning and joint action between young PVE activists from the region?

4.1.



Promoting a sense of commonality and regional belonging

Actively working to create a connection between people from different countries, movements, and convictions can help strengthen the reach of your PVE activities in the region and beyond. This is not easy and goes against the way we are often encouraged to think. However, encouraging cross-border collaboration can truly help elevate the quality, breadth, and scope of your mission.

When spreading your roots and reaching out to new people, make sure to reinforce the fact that you are united by a common objective, purpose, or set of values. We understand that it is not always easy to align your thinking with people from different backgrounds or walks of life. However, focusing on similar attitudes and ethical beliefs instead of seemingly obvious cultural, political, or religious difference can help you create more meaningful connections outside of your immediate community. Whether it be peace, equity, social cohesion, or justice, re-emphasizing common values and principles can help you align yourself behind a common purpose and cement strong ties with people from the region.



Case study

Creating a regional network of youth-led organizations preventing violent extremism

Kofi Annan Foundation,
South and
Southeast Asia

With the “Leading the Way to Peace – Youth Together for Social Cohesion” project, the Kofi Annan Foundation and its Extremely Together initiative³¹ aimed to connect the PVE efforts of youth-led organizations from three countries in South and Southeast Asia: KRIS in the Philippines, CYAAD in Pakistan, as well as GCERF and Rupantar in Bangladesh.

Encouraging bonding and facilitating peer-to-peer learning between three partners that had never worked together was not an easy feat. However, over the two years, we managed to create strong connections between the organizations by carving out several key moments for joint reflection and planning. This included quarterly meetings for coordination and experience sharing, a kick-off workshop during which we worked together to develop a framework for comparative analysis and mutual learning, and a lessons learned workshop to reflect on our two-year experience with the

project and create a vision for future PVE action. During these gatherings, we chose facilitation tools and session formats that encouraged collaboration, bonding, and genuine conversations between the participants from different countries. These moments of collective sharing helped strengthen the group dynamic and reinforced the sense that they were all working towards a common objective.

Our participants and the activities that were developed over the course of the project were collectively identified under the Extremely Together brand which also served to reinforce their sense of commonality and collective belonging. Identifying with a well-established global youth-led PVE movement with an active social media presence since 2016 fostered a sense of coherence and common cause across the activities that were carried out in the three countries.

31 Find out more about the Kofi Annan Foundation’s Extremely Together initiative here: <https://www.kofiannanfoundation.org/extremely-together/>

Supporting regional networks of peer-to-peer learning

The key to facilitating regional collaboration is providing spaces for **mutual learning based on shared experiences**. These spaces – either digital or physical – can be used to connect movements, groups, and individuals from across or between regions (or the globe) and give them a platform to:

- Showcase recent work
- Ask questions and receive feedback
- Share ideas and lessons learned
- Provide inspiration and mutual support

These spaces are an opportunity for groups to **increase their visibility, elevate their voices, and lean on other likeminded networks to build their capacity**. For instance, if one youth-led movement is less comfortable working on digital outreach strategies, it can reach out to other networks for help and guidance.

Spaces for peer-to-peer learning can exclusively cater to certain groups such as female activists, interfaith networks, young entrepreneurs – you can be as precise as you wish to be, the possibilities are endless! On the flipside, you can also work to expand networks and create connections between different groups, say practitioners and policymakers.

Building capacity to bolster legitimacy

Youth activists or practitioners often have a hard time being taken seriously by governments and institutions. You can help bolster their credibility by leveraging regional networks and helping them **access technical and financial support** which helps build their capacity. Financial or material support may come in the form of small grants, kickstart funds, or financing for technical equipment, for instance. Technical support may include mentoring in various areas of project management such as fundraising, enhancing visibility, or providing technical feedback. A notable area of focus is helping young people build their digital capacity. If you operate on a smaller scale, **partnering** with larger PVE organization or **creating coalitions** with other groups can help you lend support more easily.

Make sure that you accurately assess the needs of your network or movement by asking yourself the following questions: In what areas does my team need the most help? What soft skills would be beneficial for me and my teammates to acquire? What skills would help with the long-term maintenance of our programs? This will help you create target interventions without going overboard or breaking the bank.





Case study

Building the capacity of young peacebuilders in South Asia

Amplifying Leadership for Local Youth (ALLY), South Asia

From July to August 2021, UNOY and the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers joined forces as part of the EU-funded Amplifying Leadership for Local Youth (ALLY)³² project to build the capacity of 60 young people in South Asia.

We opened the program with an online regional training involving 80 young peacebuilders and the 60 most active participants were then chosen as ALLY “Fellows” which gave them the opportunity to participate in national trainings. These trainings provided them with comprehensive knowledge of peacebuilding, a deep knowledge of the local context and the tools and skills most needed to prevent VE narratives.

Through this program, our aim was to enhance the social-political agency of young peacebuilders to encourage them to work on PVE and help them overcome the challenges they may face. We built a strong relationship with the UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development and used their course on

“Young Waging Peace online course on Social and Emotional Learning for PVE” to complement the learning during online trainings. We also encouraged Fellows to share reflections through online spaces such as Padlet, Google Jamboard, as well as shared reflection spaces in each online session.

Moreover, the young peacemakers were trained to design Social Action Plans to promote peace and harmony among the targeted population they identified. Our Fellows were mentored by our national staff and supported through consistent online support, as well as receiving funding for basic needs (i.e., travel, venue, and online connectivity costs) and invitations for in-person training as soon as local and national COVID-19 policies allow.

The in-person trainings will allow Fellows to share lessons learned from the early stages of the Social Action Plans, while motivating them to stay engaged with the promise of soon being able to connect in-person with like-minded individuals.

³² The 30-month EU-funded ALLY project is implemented by a consortium of partners - The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers/ Finn Church Aid, United Network of Young Peacebuilders, Rural Development Society, Centre for Communication and Development of Bangladesh, Youth Development Foundation, and Sri Lanka Unites. More information can be found on the UNOY (<https://unoy.org/project/ally/>) and Network (<https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/ally-project/>) websites.

Collaborating with actors from other fields

If you are ready to push your thinking outside-of-the-box, why not try **diversifying your partners**? Partnering with people from completely different sectors can often give you the best ideas. Partnerships do not need to be PVE-specific. Be creative and know no limits: if the partner is aligned with your values and vision to promote positive change in

communities, why not partner with them³³? Developing relationships with partners like content creators, innovation hubs, or even research agencies can help you create new impulses for your movement and amplify your message in ways you would not have thought possible.

When reaching out to potential partners, remember to adapt your pitch to their personalities or own organizational goals. Avoid terms that are too technical and try to incorporate language from their own field to make things more relatable. Oftentimes, initiating that first contact might be difficult, so finding intermediaries to introduce you can be a good way of getting their attention.

Case study

Working with young influencers to tackle hate speech and discrimination online

UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub, Southeast Asia

In 2018-2020, United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Bangkok Regional Hub successfully partnered with Google to implement YouTube's Creators for Change³⁴ project in Southeast Asia. Building on the success of this, we replicated the same initiative in 2020 to engage top youth leaders in the Maldives and Sri Lanka, in partnership with the European Union. The project brought together proactive and creative youth from across the two countries to build digital campaigns that offer alternatives to hate speech, both online and on the ground.

Over 15 weeks, young people participated in digital peacebuilding masterclasses. This included mentorship and guidance from CSOs, tech companies, and academics. They were later able to apply their learnings to build online campaigns that tackled hate speech, misinformation, and discrimination.

This program has provided training opportunities for some of the region's most ambitious and impact-driven youth. It also allowed them to formulate cross-border networks and facilitate dialogues on important issues. Some of the participants went on to produce content beyond the scope of the program and utilized their trainings to continue engaging with their communities on issues that were important to them.

At UNDP, we have been inspired by the participants who have helped us set our priorities for future programming. While some of the topics identified by the youth were not directly linked to violent extremism, they highlighted the underlying drivers and the development of solutions that UNDP endorses to address violent extremism in the region.

³⁴ The UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub works to provide UNDP country offices in Asia and the Pacific with easy access to knowledge. It also aims to build partnerships and promote regional capacity building initiatives which allow civil society organizations, governments, and other development partners to identify, create and share knowledge that is relevant to solving the world's most pressing problems, including violent extremism. Find out more about the "Creators for Change" initiative on their website: <https://www.asia-pacific.undp.org/content/rbap/en/home/programmes-and-initiatives/creators-for-change.html>

³³ That was our thinking when we collaborated with the social impact sector to organize our South and Southeast Asia regional conference in October 2021. We partnered with Makesense, a social enterprise which designs tools and programs for collective mobilization to drive social action. Through our partnership, we managed to think of creative ways to instigate dialogue around good practices on PVE between young peacebuilders in the region and foster meaningful connections.



Challenge

How to influence policymakers and government leaders to support and invest in youth-led PVE actions?

4.2.



Advocating for systemic change

Preventing violent extremism requires not only changes in people's perceptions and attitudes but also **systemic changes that address the underlying causes of violence**, such as discrimination and injustice. Yet, our actions can only go as far as powerful groups are willing to let them. Acknowledging that you need to work with government leaders and policymakers, as well as grassroots organizations, is critical to driving youth-led PVE action. Most people in South and Southeast Asia are young, however they are not well represented at the decision-making level. Pushing back against this through **active advocacy is a good way for you to make your voice heard** and drive lasting systemic change on a wider level. If you would like to advocate directly at the government level, engaging with local government in national campaigns is a good way to bridge the gap between the grassroots and decision-making spheres.

Currently, the momentum created by the COVID-19 pandemic offers you a unique opportunity to promote the **human security agenda**. The public health crisis created by the pandemic has forced policymakers to think beyond the traditional notion of security, namely military securitization,

and acknowledge that health, and economic and social wellbeing are also integral parts of the security agenda. Use this time to promote the idea that security in the context of VE is more than just counterterrorism but also involves prevention strategies, capacity-building, the creation of support networks and whole-of-society approaches.

Identifying key priorities for policymaking

Aligning your own priorities with key priority areas for policymakers – e.g., strengthening justice and accountability, security, etc. – can give you important **entry points to high-level discussions** and **create bridges with policymaking**. Even seemingly unrelated topics like climate change can prove to be useful entry points if you can demonstrate that environment degradation may lead to violence.

Countries often have different initiatives that allow young people to get involved in various levels of government and make their voices heard on the pressing matters of our time. You may find that these initiatives are, to a certain extent, tokenistic – making only a superficial effort to recruit youth into politics without meaningfully including them in different high-level debates. Even if getting involved with these programs may come with its own set of challenges, we encourage you to take this opportunity to collect important insight into key policymaking priorities and use these programs as entry points to meet people who can help you link your local PVE efforts with national ones.

Leveraging existing connections

Reaching out to governments or policymakers may prove challenging. You may feel like it is impossible to find high-level politicians willing to sit down and listen to you, or that you may be wasting time writing long-winded messages to policymakers who do not even check their inbox. Based on our experience, we recommend that you **start small**.

Start out by **making a list of key political personalities, law makers and representatives in your area** who have expressed positive views on any PVE-related topic like youth inclusion, peacebuilding, transitional justice, etc. These will function as allies which you can turn to for advice or support. Identifying key allies and using existing connections with likeminded politicians in your area will also save you the stress and aggravation of having to jump through hoops to reach high-level government officials. Speaking with local or municipal government and sharing your concerns might indeed help to transfer ideas up to higher levels of government, or at least give you an indication of whether that is even feasible.



Challenge

How to enhance regional and international visibility efforts?

4.3.



Leveraging global agendas for peace and their regional events

Aligning your programming with local, regional, and global agendas for peace is important to scale up PVE efforts. Global initiatives play an important role in making local action more attractive and credible. They also work to foster a sense of belonging for your members, as they feel part of a bigger purpose, and help propel action beyond the local level.

Think about how you can appeal to regional and international efforts to counter VE narratives and promote peace. **Use events or initiatives led by regional or international consortiums to promote your own ideas.** Simple actions like resharing a campaign or call to action from a regional or global event and linking it to your own activities is a first step in situating your movement within the broader context.

An easy way of doing this is by highlighting the direct parallels between your movement and the global agenda around Sustainable Development

Goals³⁵ (SDG). SDG16 on promoting peace, justice, and strong institutions is a good starting point for showcasing your own efforts to reach these objectives. We recommend you also make sure to directly reference the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda³⁶ as a way of heightening your visibility on the world stage. Finally, you might want to join international youth networks who can give you a platform to promote your work. We recommend looking into the Youth 2030 actions³⁷, the Global Coalition for Youth, Peace and Security³⁸, as well as the Youth Civil Activism Network³⁹ (YouthCAN).

Seizing ‘the moment’ to galvanize public attention

Leveraging key political moments in your region and linking them to your practical activities will help mobilize more people to your cause. It is all about timing and determining whether the conditions for change are right. **Capitalizing on critical moments that galvanize public attention (e.g., mass protests, elections, constitutional reforms, or security incidents) can help you change narratives.** The fact that people are more open to change at these pivotal points in time can also give you just the right impulse to transform your movement into tangible organized action.

Taking advantage of relevant elections and preparing yourself to generate more traction around your movement ahead of the election cycle generally proves successful. Politicians and regional bodies are more willing to react if presented with concrete demands. Creating a list of running policymakers who you think would be sympathetic to your cause (e.g., young candidates) is the first step to making your voice heard. You can then prepare a list of priorities or key items that they can add to their agendas but make sure to be as concrete or practical as possible. You can also launch campaigns on social media to reach out to them more directly and create public interest around your ideas. A movement is only a movement if it moves people or shapes history – remind yourself of that when shaping your priorities to drive change.

35 <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

36 <https://www.un.org/pga/73/priorities/youth-peace-and-security/>

37 <https://www.unyouth2030.com/>

38 https://twitter.com/gc_youth4peace

39 <https://www.facebook.com/groups/YouthCivilActivism/>

Putting an emphasis on campaigning and outreach

Campaigning is a key ingredient to enhancing regional visibility. **Effective campaigning requires a clear mapping of the movement's overall vision and objective, and the elaboration of a concise communication and media strategy to optimize visibility.** Digital campaigning should be particularly emphasized in the campaigning process. Building PVE practitioners' capacity to conduct digital outreach activities would amplify local movement-building efforts regionally by increasing their visibility on different mediums. Recognizing the equal importance of social, print, and online media helps sustain campaigning efforts in the long run and adapt to shifting media landscapes.

Creating a campaign around a sensitive topic like PVE can be a daunting task. Try adding a 'human element' by using personal stories of either survivors of VE, or people who had previously joined extremist ideology. This will humanize the topic and make it easier for the broader audience to relate to and empathize with. Working with public influencers or media organizations can also help tailor that narrative in a way that provokes a reaction from a variety of different groups.

Incorporating research results into your campaign can also make it more tangible and concrete, but this needs to be done in an organic way. Young people tend to be less captivated by raw numbers and hard data so using videos or visual support can help you present your findings in a lighter way. Creative visuals or infographics can also help you emphasize certain important set of data and draw the audience's attention to them.

Panaghiusa

PAGES

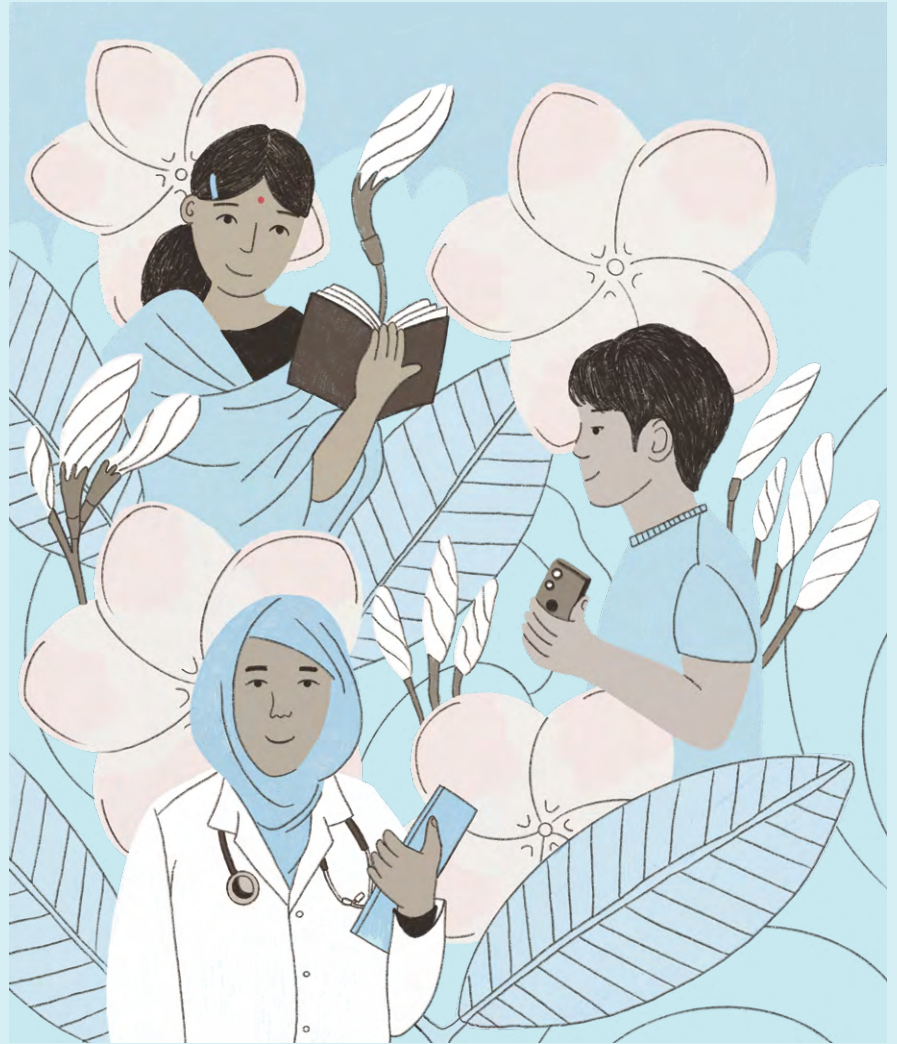




Burgeoning ideas

Exploring new avenues

5.



This document provides you with a set of tested practices that can serve as inspiration. But we would also like to leave you with a set of new ideas to explore. As PVE practitioners, we are sometimes reluctant to tackle the following issues in depth. Be brave – investigate and question the following:

Building bridges with academia: Defining and framing PVE can be a complicated and contentious process. There is no common definition of VE which makes it difficult to conduct prevention activities from a policy or advocacy perspective.

- Building a universalist definition which relies on academia can help push a unified agenda on the world stage.
- For some, the concept of VE comes with a heavy emotional baggage and certain ingrained biases which can trigger sensitivities. Incorporating academic definitions in our practical work would be a good way to create more perspective and distance oneself from the emotional aspect of PVE.
- Relying on academic definitions can also help us understand grievances, motivations, and inclinations towards VE from different angles, and how to effectively prevent this. Useful insights can be drawn from the fields of sociology, anthropology,

political science, psychology, and even biochemistry to understand the underlying social, emotional, and chemical triggers which motivate young people to join VE groups. For instance, a good place to start would be by reading up on the Terror Management Theory which provides you with a comprehensive overview of the social, evolutionary, and psychological triggers of terror, conflict, and violence⁴⁰.

Adopting a multi-lens approach: PVE can and should not be treated as a standalone topic. In fact, there are many ways of linking PVE to other topics in development, or even different fields of expertise – you must simply dare to be bold.

- Acknowledging the need for intersectionality may be the first step to reaching meaningful and lasting peace. As peacebuilders, we should start thinking about how different aspects of development play into VE and prevention strategies. This includes environmental concerns, climate action, gender inequality, food security, health, technology, education, etc. The nexus between these topics and youth-led PVE action is present yet is rarely emphasized. Get creative and start thinking of ways to link these major challenges of our time.
- Creating synergies with other fields and areas of focus can also complement our work as PVE activists and encourage us to do things differently. For example, thinking beyond the not-for-profit sector and drawing on other models like the for-profit, business, or social enterprise models is maybe the nudge we need to create wider reaching and self-sustained movements.

40 https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/The_Worm_at_the_Core.html?id=c6H3BwAAQBAJ&source=kp_book_description&redir_esc=y

HUMBLE

PEACE

CTIVE FREEDOM



LOVE ONE
ANOTHER

HUMAN-
ITY

TOWARD THEAS



Building Peace Together

Youth-led initiatives
to prevent violent
extremism

Inspiring practices from South &
Southeast Asia



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Extremely
TOGETHER

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