PROMOTING SOCIAL COHESION AND TOLERANCE IN MALDIVES AND BANGLADESH

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key Takeaway: UNDP's "Building Social Cohesion and Tolerance in Maldives and Bangladesh" project is an initiative to understand and prevent violence, hate speech and extremism in Bangladesh and the Maldives. The project period from 2019-2020 marks the second year of Japanese Supplementary Budget funding for the project. Due to Japanese support, the project has achieved many critical milestones towards its goal of promoting social cohesion and prevention of violent extremism in both Bangladesh and Maldives.

Innovative activities, including Bangladesh's Digital Peace Movement (with a reach of 17m Bangladeshis) and the Maldives' "Aikya" Migrant Short Film Series, supported the strengthening of peaceful and tolerant themes in the cultural conversation in both countries. Youth Dialogues with the Dhaka Police in Bangladesh, and the Senior Educators Training in the Maldives affirmed strong links between the project and the governments of both countries. Meanwhile, citizen engagement was at the heart of the project, strengthening Bangladeshi and Maldivian voices while building the capacity of civil society, women, youth and religious leaders to independently promote peace and social cohesion in their communities.

Research initiatives using open-source intelligence, including the Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO) and research on the roles of women and youth in PVE in the Maldives were significant in dispelling rumours and laying the groundwork for further positive change. Understanding the Role of Women in PVE in the Maldives and Maldives Youth Vulnerability Assessment are among key knowledge products from the project. This research also informed policy directives, contributing directly to the formulation of the First National Action Plan on Preventing Violent Extremism in the Maldives and National Counter Terrorism Strategy in Bangladesh.

COVID-19: The escalation of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 had a significant impact on the project's ability to function as intended, but the project responded swiftly and reoriented its energies and successfully conducted a range of COVID-19 activities supportive of tolerance and social cohesion. The outbreak effectively highlights the project's adaptability and strengths. Several years of reporting on online narratives in Bangladesh has given UNDP unique insight into how pre-existing grievances have been absorbed into the COVID-19 discourse, and weaponized by a small but loud group of opportunistic and divisive actors. Similarly, UNDP Maldives adapted its previous flagship programs such as the Social Innovation Camp and support to CSOs to fit to the context of the realities of COVID-19 to ensure vulnerable groups were catered to. The project's existing investments allowed UNDP to transition its resources and analytical capacity to understanding the social implications of the COVID-19 crisis to a degree that other agencies and partners were not equipped to do, and to develop emergency programming promoting peace and awareness during this challenging time. Overall, the project's performance improved when compared to the previous year, reaching over 18 million Bangladeshis and more than 50,000 Maldivians with messages promoting peace, social cohesion, and digital literacy online.

COUNTRY CONTEXT

WHY DOES PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM (PVE) AND HATE SPEECH MATTER?

Studies conducted by American Political Scientist Erica Chenowith have argued that support from just 3.5% of a population can be enough to prompt peaceful systemic change.

Though this small percentage is exciting to those seeking progressive reform (this statistic is championed by climate change protesters, environmentalists, and democracy activists around the world), 3.5% becomes a frightening number if, via fake news and incitement, 3.5% of people are also all that is needed to mobilize negative change, including action against vulnerable minorities. New internet users in Bangladesh and Maldives, whether they interact with written messages or with pictures (26% of Bangladeshis are illiterate), encounter a broad range of credible and non-credible content online. Violent extremists and malicious actors, though a small minority in Bangladesh, can have a disproportionate reach — enough, perhaps, to act as a tipping point if they gain a comparatively small but loud base of loyal supporters, roughly in line with Chenowith's 3.5%. This project recognizes that a small, angry minority can have a disproportionate impact, and that the peaceful majority cannot passively be confident in its success through numbers alone. Concerted, locally-led efforts to actively promote relevant and timely peaceful narratives are critical to ensure the forces of tolerance and coexistence retain the upper hand in both Bangladesh and Maldives.

PVE IN SOUTH ASIA:

Violent extremism is a global phenomenon and a pressing issue in South Asia, which is home to a quarter of the world's population. Violent extremist ideologies continue to infiltrate island communities in the Maldives,[1] while crises like the Rohingya refugee situation in Bangladesh have been appropriated by extremists to justify calls to violence. Extremism in both countries is fuelled by pre-existing inequalities, vulnerabilities, social exclusion, and political instability, especially for young people who have started to seek alternative ideologies.

Intolerance towards ethnic and religious identities have been major drivers for violence against minorities in India (Muslims), Myanmar (Rohingya) and Bangladesh (especially the 9% Hindu minority, but also those from the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Buddhists and animists).

Two 2019 events in India, perceived by some as anti-Muslim, have provoked a rise in anti-Hindu rhetoric by Bangladeshi actors online. The revocation of Kashmir's special status in August 2019 raised concerns that Indian Hindus will now move into Kashmir, changing the demographics of the predominantly Muslim population. Meanwhile, in Assam, 1.9 million people, most of them Bengali-speaking Muslims, were omitted from the updated National Register of Citizens (NRC), provoking fears of a Rohingya-like forced exodus to Bangladesh. Extremist social media channels

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[1] The Maldives in 2018: Facing Uncertain and Unpredictable Times https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/ISAS-Briefs-No.-542-Maldives-in-2018.pdf

are spreading misinformation that Bangladeshi Hindus are planning actions against Bangladeshi Muslims, with government backing, and are calling for resistance through violence against minorities. Given historical patterns of violence across the broader region, extremist actors have strategically aimed to exacerbate inter-communal tensions which could lead to violence. The fear is not just about possible terrorist attacks, but about growing majority intolerance towards other identities, leading to further escalation of violence against minorities.

Over the course of a year in the Maldives, acts of violent extremism has continued to gain pace. 3 foreign nationals were stabbed in the urban city of Hulhumale and a local group claimed responsibility for the stabbings and branded themselves as soldiers of ISIS in the Maldives.

According to the group the stabbings were revenge attacks against the government following its crackdown on violent extremism in the country. This was followed by arson attacks on a number of vessels, including Police Response Vessels in 2 islands, for which Islamic State (ISIS) claimed responsibility. This is the first time ISIS has claimed responsibility for attacks in the Maldives. The COVID-19 crisis and chaos that ensues creates further space for extremists to get organized and spread their agenda in the Maldives. With the pandemic already gravely impacting the country's critical tourism industry, which directly or indirectly accounts for two-thirds of GDP, with a large majority of the young working population losing their livelihoods, many are left in dire socioeconomic situations, creating an extremely risky environment for extremists to capitalize on.

BANGLADESH:

In Bangladesh, national PVE programming has addressed an urgent need. Extremist attacks in Bangladesh in 2013-2015 most often took the form of targeted killings. The July 2016 suicide attack on Dhaka Holy Artisan Bakery drew international attention after 24 people (including 7 Japanese citizens) were killed. Unlike previous VE attacks in the country, these attacks appeared to be designed to maximize international exposure.

Most alarmingly, research indicated that extremist support in Bangladesh is most pronounced among youth (over 60% of Bangladesh's population is under 30), among the urban middle class, returning migrant workers, and most notably among women, who were disproportionately likely to support both extremist goals and terrorist actions.

This prompted a review of the VE landscape in Bangladesh, leading the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) as well as international and national CSOs and development partners (including UNDP) to increase investment in PVE through programming and financial support. Moreover, extremist trends in Bangladesh have significant regional implications. According to a preliminary study conducted by UNDP Bangladesh, Bangladeshis working as migrant workers abroad are at a significantly greater risk of radicalization, and risk importing radicalized views back to Bangladesh upon their return. Migrants are up to 400 percent more likely to interact with violent extremist content online, including fake news, deliberate misinformation and religious incitement. Deliberate online incitement via social media has led to riots and violence against minorities and secularists. Urgent interventions have been needed to address these key demographics, protect against online incitement (by promoting digital literacy), and safeguard Bangladesh's economic stability.

MALDIVES:

Violent Extremism is a major challenge to peace and prosperity in the Maldives. Preventing violent extremism (PVE) is a priority for the Maldives. The Youth Vulnerability Assessment[2] launched in 2019, under this project, indicated important and serious areas of concern for young Maldivians especially. Efforts to improve the well-being of young people seems to have lagged behind economic growth in the Maldives. Tourism has turned the atolls into the richest country in South Asia but the benefits are concentrated in few hands, power is misused for personal gain, public institutions are weak, and many people lack the tools they need to improve their lives. Disengagement or exclusion from the norms of society is particularly stark among the young: whether it is because of drugs, criminal gangs, or extremism, too many Maldivians are living on the margins of a society that offers them little.

Although the country has not seen the levels of terrorism experienced by its neighbors, it has seen a worrying rise in extremist hate speech and intimidation, some incidents of violence and vandalism linked to religious extremism.

As is often the case with extremism, there are few discernible patterns in terms of geographic origin, education, or employment. What it is clear is that youth in the Maldives – like – elsewhere are disproportionately vulnerable to radicalization. This appears to be related to a complex nexus of issues including exclusion, lack of opportunity, the easy availability of drugs, crime, gangs (often involved with politicians), and violence.

UNDP AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS):

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is a development organization at the forefront of supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Bangladesh and the Maldives. UNDP's PVE initiatives in Bangladesh and Maldives were among the first dedicated Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) initiatives in both countries and UNDP's Asia-Pacific region. Started in 2016, the Bangladesh project was designed to experiment with new solutions for promoting diversity, inclusivity, and tolerance, all while building on common bonds, shared values, and a diverse Bangladeshi identity. In response to the COVID crisis, the PTIB project now also monitors the social and economic implications of the virus across Bangladesh.

This project is a major component of UNDP's Democratic Governance Portfolio in Bangladesh and the Maldives, which supports Bangladesh's achievement of key targets under Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16): "Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions". Specifically, the project supports progress towards SDG target 16.1, which calls on states to "significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere". The project also contributes to SDG target 16.6 to "develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels", and target 16.7 to "ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels".

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[2] Link to YVA 2019 https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/youth-vulnerability-in-the-maldives.html

BANGLADESH-MALDIVES LINKAGES:

A joint project between UNDP Bangladesh and Maldives was requested since these two countries have become increasingly linked through migration.

The International Organization for Migration estimates (prior to the COVID-19 outbreak) that Bangladeshi migrants comprise 58%[3] of the foreign population of the Maldives, amounting to 25% of the Maldivian population.

The Maldives thus has the highest proportion of Bangladeshis anywhere in the world outside Bangladesh when compared to home country population. The proposed joint project is unique because it investigates just how vulnerable this severely disadvantaged population may be to extremist appeals, without stigmatizing communities, and the degree to which extremist trends in broader Maldivian society resonate among migrant workers. Lessons learned from the proposed research and engagement activities have been critical not just to understanding trends in these two countries, but contribute to an essential understanding of migrant dynamics in dozens of countries to which Bangladeshi migrants emigrate, including ASEAN nations.

PVE AND COVID-19:

The COVID-19 pandemic put both Bangladesh and the Maldives under additional and unexpected strain this past year. In Bangladesh, the violence monitoring capacity set up by UNDP quickly shifted from monitoring possible extremism and violence to tracking all forms of online incitement and disinformation during the pandemic. The Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO) was quickly involved in monitoring the social fallout from the virus, tracking violence against patients, medical professionals, disinformation and incitement of all kinds, releasing multiple weekly reports on various trends and data. UNDP's established monitoring capacity allowed it to transition almost immediately to monitoring and addressing violence and incitement of all types across the country as COVID-19 spread.

In the Maldives, the virus and its consequences threatens to severely impact Maldivian economy and society. The economic shock to both to the tourism sector alone, has gravely impacted people's livelihoods and exacerbated pre-existing vulnerabilities in the island nation. Understanding the long term of effects of these circumstances, and to prevent any residual social tensions, UNDP has been supporting civil society actors in the provision of legal aid and psychosocial support to those most impacted by the crisis, the majority of the impacted being undocumented Bangladeshi migrant workers.

Already psychologically impacted by limitations on human movement and contact, with everyday activities heavily curtailed, and coupled with a real risk of loss of financial independence and a fall into poverty, a largely young and a relatively small but very vulnerable ageing population may suffer a rapid series of unprecedented shocks.

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[3] http://www.wjsspapers.com/static/documents/July/2016/13.%20 Zaheed.pdf

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

OVERVIEW:

The Building Social Cohesion and Tolerance in Maldives and Bangladesh project is a continuation of a similar project (Partnerships for a Tolerant, Inclusive Bangladesh & Maldives) which received funding under the Japanese Supplementary Budget in 2018-2019. This project was designed to assess and respond to the identified drivers of extremist violence in both countries using a human security approach. By integrating the responses of relevant actors in a more coherent and efficient manner, the project builds on the comparative advantages of a wide range of actors. In its second year with JSB support, the project expanded its citizen and government engagement work and responded to the effects of COVID-19, all while strengthening the research capacities and partnerships established during the first year.

WHAT DOES PVE LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE?

One of the biggest challenges at the outset of the project related to the field of PVE itself — though the expression "Prevention of Violent Extremism" had emerged from high-level international diplomatic discussions, strategies and press releases (including the UN Secretary General's 2015 Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism), what did this concept really look like when applied in a complex country context like Bangladesh? What were the practical solutions, and how could these be measured? UNDP was operating in relatively uncharted territory, and so developed a data-driven experimental programme structure to ensure that, at minimum, preliminary activities in such a sensitive field followed the principle of "do no harm". In time, the project learned to integrate this new framing with older but compatible aspects of the peacebuilding literature,

as well as with more modern trends targeting hate speech. Simultaneously, the project team recognized that sustainable change, especially on complex issues of national and community identity, could not be effectively promoted by internationals — PVE in Bangladesh and Maldives became, in practice, a task of analyzing the current trends and cultivating or coordinating local partners to help act on this information. These partners included a range of Bangladeshi and Maldivian academic, civil society and government, most of whom would not have been able to start working on these issues without UNDP support.

SUMMARY OF THEORY OF CHANGE:

This project has created measurable change in public attitudes by empowering, strengthening, and expanding existing grassroots networks promoting peace and tolerance. Given the size and diversity of the population in Maldives and particularly in Bangladesh, UNDP maximized its impact by focusing on assisting key segments of society. This involved prioritizing demographic groups deemed most vulnerable to extremist narratives and messaging, and those segments of society best placed to naturally and strategically obstruct the spread of extremist or violent attitudes. The project experimented with engagement activities focusing on 5 key sets of beneficiaries: gender, migrant workers, youth, interfaith leadership and government partners.

DIGITAL LITERACY:

Particularly to Bangladesh, the project addresses complex issues of identity and inclusion by promoting a digital literacy model. Digital literacy is not a measure of standard literacy, or whether someone can read or write. Digital literacy reflects a person's ability to critically engage with Bangladesh's online

environment, to identify and question any misleading or incendiary online content they may encounter. This decentralized, critical-thinking approach is more transparent, effective and democratic than simply removing online posts or directly limiting online speech. This model is fully evidence-based, and relies on superior monitoring and analysis of online trends, as well as an adaptable communications strategy and programme design. Specifically, a focus on promoting digital literacy and safe use of online platforms (like Facebook) can empower some of Bangladesh's most vulnerable women to identify and speak out against incitement and violence that might disproportionately affect them.

DIGITAL LITERACY:

Both Maldives and Bangladesh's approach to sensitive but critical issues of peace, inclusion and digital literacy is innovative for both the country and the region. Proposed solutions are focused not on banning or restricting speech (which can inflame tensions further), but openly and creatively countering divisive messages in the public space. This is done by supporting the development and strengthening of Bangladesh's 'online immune system' to improve citizens' ability to independently counter and question misinformation and incitement tactics. The project's implementation through national partners has ensured that peaceful and inclusive messages retain their essential character, drawing on lessons from national history. Its deliberate experimental and evidence-based design has allowed UNDP to rapidly adjust its planned activities based on a reliable stream of data on trending issues.

KEY PROJECT PRINCIPLES - A HUMAN SECURITY APPROACH:

After reviewing a range of best practices, and in line with the Secretary General's and UNDP's global guidelines on preventing violent extremism, UNDP in Bangladesh and Maldives have identified five key criteria for programming that helped ensure maximum impact, in line with a human security approach:

1. PEOPLE-CENTERED

The need for local ownership takes on added importance in the context of supporting tolerant institutions. UNDP's role must be, wherever possible, to support local initiatives, and to empower Bangladeshi and Maldivian nationals as the central actors. UNDP programming must facilitate, assist, and enable these discussions. This is in line with the UN Secretary General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, which lists "Engaging Communities" as the third of seven priority areas to take action. Youth, Women, advocacy, media, religious and academic partners are the real agents of change. UNDP programming facilitates, assists, and enables difficult discussions.

2. COMPREHENSIVE

Programming must be comprehensive on two fronts: a) comprehensive in adapting to the local cultural and political context, and b) comprehensive in relation to UNDP's capacity and mandate. UNDP guidelines produced at the Global Meeting on Preventing Violent Extremism & Promoting Inclusive Development, Tolerance & Diversity in Oslo, March 2016, list eleven critical "building blocks" that should underpin UNDP support for inclusive society programming. UNDP Bangladesh and Maldives will follow these global guidelines to provide a comprehensive approach to addressing the drivers of violence. For example, gender is an essential and core component to all UNDP projects – creative and thoughtful means of promoting women's advancement are not only desirable but required. This becomes especially true when working with delicate and divisive narratives and issues. Women's inclusion and contributions are systematically promoted throughout the project, with a dedicated focus on incidents targeting or affecting women;

3. CONTEXT-SPECIFIC

UNDP encourages programming that is grounded, not in rhetoric or assumptions, but in hard data. All PVE programming must be justified by reliable, independent, professional-grade research. At-risk segments of the population must be clearly and precisely identified, whether by region, class, gender, or other affiliation. Thought must be given to challenges at the individual, community, regional and national levels in promoting tolerant and inclusive institutions, and where UNDP programming might best meet a legitimate and pressing need. As described above, UNDP will focus on a number of well-defined facets of the wider PVE problem, with clear objectives and indicators for measuring progress.

4. PREVENTION-ORIENTED

When responding to a threat as high profile and shocking as extremist violence, the focus has too often been on short-term solutions that strain both resources and relationships. Though sometimes necessary, this is not an effective way to create lasting change, to forge enduring partnerships, or to support inclusive institutions. The ideal is to create tolerant society programming whose impact is designed to strengthen over time, to the point that progress is not only maintained, but continues to expand independently. Once implemented, activities must be made sustainable - follow-up is not just important, but is the most critical part of the process, to ensure activities or training leads to demonstrable change. To do this, UNDP cooperates with government agencies not traditionally associated with preventing violent extremism, to introduce PVE concepts into a broader government and social discourse.

All projects shall adhere to a pre-approved workplan, schedule and budget, and will meet regular reporting deadlines. All activities should be completed within the one-year time-frame. Should further activities be deemed worthwhile and necessary, an extension period or a third phase of the project will be considered at that time.

5. DELIVERING AS ONE

The initiative will partner within the UN, especially with UN WOMEN, UN Office of Drugs and Crime, and the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism to help expand the thematic reach when promoting peaceful narrative content.

RESULTS

OUTCOME 1: GOVERNMENT ENGAGEMENT

OVERVIEW:

UNDP supported government agencies in both Bangladesh and the Maldives to develop their understanding of PVE principles, to produce effective policy and meet their obligations under SDG 16. Bangladesh's government has committed to supporting violence prevention strategies and has a broader commitment to improving transparency and human rights. UNDP Maldives worked closely with the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC) which is the national lead agency for coordinating counter-terrorism and counter violent extremism efforts as well as other relevant government stakeholders mandated to work on P/CVE efforts.

Inauguration of conference on national counter terrorism strategy for Bangladesh

ICT Minister of Bangladesh speaks about importance of digital literacy among migrant workers

INFLUENCE ON NATIONAL POLICIES IN BANGLADESH:

UNDP's engagement with government counterparts has contributed to nearly every aspect of the project. Joint research between the police and the Bangladesh Peace Observatory has given academics access to key data for the first time, producing five joint research publications on the sources and expressions of extremism. Cooperation with the Dhaka Police's Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) Unit, then helped to integrate findings into the National Counter-Terrorism Strategy (developed by the CTTC with UNDP support), which emphasizes a preventive approach built on community participation. Through collaboration with UNDP's Digital Peace Movement, the Bangladesh Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications has also increased its influence and ability to help promote tolerant, unifying messages which diminish hatred and misinformation in the Bangla language online.

Project board meeting at the Bangladesh Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

SUPPORT TO CROSS-GOVERNMENT COORDINATION IN BANGLADESH:

UNDP Bangladesh has brought together the Bangladesh Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications, and the Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime Unit (CTTC) to facilitate a range of community centered-initiatives which promote tolerance and inclusive dialogue both on and offline. Involving government partners in the project's board has also been particularly helpful in giving them a direct stake and influence on the project. As a result, PVE and digital literacy are increasingly discussed concepts in Bangladeshi government circles, in large part due to UNDP.

Youth dialogue organized by Counter Terrorism Unit of Police

BANGLADESH YOUTH DIALOGUES WITH DHAKA POLICE:

Five youth dialogue sessions in 2019 allowed young people expressed their ideas directly to the Dhaka Police's Counter-Terrorism & Transnational Crime Unit. The dynamics of these discussions strongly influenced the CTTC's National CPVE Strategy produced at the end of 2019. But the dialogues also benefitted both sides –young people benefited from an improved understanding of violent extremist recruitment methods, while the police came away with a better understanding of youth concerns. Around 200 participants were present in each dialogue, for a total of around 1000 students directly engaged.

The Training Course on "Extremism and Counter Terrorism" in collaboration with Naif Arab University for Security Sciences and with assistance from Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan

MALDIVES SPEAKER SERIES – EXCHANGING GLOBAL BEST PRACTICES:

The Speaker Series on prevention of violent extremism focused on capacity building of stakeholders through knowledge exchange on different aspects such as the role of families, women and educators in prevention of violent extremism and engaging religious scholars in prevention through alternative narratives. The series aimed to share this knowledge through global PVE experts, human rights champions and explore avenues to localize these global best practises in the Maldives. UNDP in partnership with the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC) conducted two training sessions in 2019 with speakers from 2 prominent global organizations working in PVE.

The training facilitated by Hedayah Centre[4] focused on basic concepts of PVE, significance of evidence-based prevention methodologies, national strategies, de-radicalization, rehabilitation, reintegration, community engagement and the significant role of religious scholars and imams in preventing and countering violent extremism. While the training with the Naif Arab University[5] focused on indicators of extremism, ideologies of extremist organizations, methods and means of traditional and modern recruitment by terrorist organizations, polarization by terrorist organizations, interventions and importance of the participations of CSO's in prevention programs.

A total of 98 stakeholders including national service providers, NGO representatives and religious scholars have been trained as part of the speaker series. This series provided an unprecedented platform for dialogue between government agencies, civil society organizations and religious leaders alike.

Details of the workshop including the agenda and stakeholder list is in Annex I

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[4] Hedayah Center is an international organization working to counter violent extremism in all of its forms and manifestations through dialogue, communications, capacity building programs, research and analysis.
https://www.hedayahcenter.org/

[5] Naif Arab University for Security Sciences (NAUSS) specializes in graduate studies, research and training in all areas of security.
https://nauss.edu.sa/en-us/about/Pages/About.aspx

"For us to prevent violence, we need to rebuild our country as a peaceful, tolerant & respectful nation & all of us have a role to play. CSOs are present in every community & can make a huge impact in all prevention efforts"

-Akiko Fujii

The first national action plan on prevention and countering violent extremism

MALDIVES FIRST NATIONAL ACTION PLAN ON PVE:

The first national action plan on prevention and countering violent extremism was developed by the National Counter Terrorism Center with technical assistance from UNDP, through a consultative process with the key stakeholders including national partners, NGOs and religious scholars. In July 2020, the NAP was endorsed by the President of the Maldives and the Cabinet Ministers. This milestone document focuses on consolidating the efforts of PVE in the country and prioritizing and strategizing the countries response to violent extremism through a holistic, coordinated and evidence-based approach. The NAP is a five-year plan with an increased focus on coordination, institutional capacity building, support for young people, reintegrating returnees and foreign fighters, and social cohesion. A communications strategy and communications action plan were also developed for the National Action Plan, which mirrors the whole of society approach of the NAP and tailors messaging to all sectors of society, aligning messages with both online and offline activities and identifies strategic communications interventions towards a more tolerant, resilient society for all Maldivians including those at greater risk of radicalization and recruitment.

CAPACITY BUILDING OF SENIOR EDUCATORS IN PVE:

UNDP in partnership with NCTC has been conducting sensitization training for the senior educators in the outer islands on PVE. The training focuses on capacity building of these educators to identify and counter disinformation in their respective schools and foster resilience to VE through awareness, counter narrative, digital literacy and critical thinking. A total of 182 senior educators from 60 schools were trained, including principals and leading teachers covering 6 atolls. The participants of the training were encouraged to develop action plans to prevent and counter VE in their respective schools. The action plans and recommendations from these training will contribute towards future programmatic intervention of the Ministry of Education, NCTC and UNDP.

As a follow-up, a national dialogue is planned in 2020 to discuss the experience of the educators in countering disinformation and sharing of good case studies from across the country and developing a national action plan on the response of the education sector to PVE.

Participants had a chance to discuss the framework of the NAP throughout the day to minimize redundancy & ensure roles & responsibilities are clearly defined.

PVE CAPACITY BUILDING FOR LOCAL COUNCILS:

UNDP is working on developing trainings targeted at local actors such as councils and educators. Research has shown that globally involvement of councils and educators have proven successful in prevention and early detection of radicalization and violent extremism in their communities. Furthermore, the Decentralization Act mandates councils to enable peaceful and safe environments in their islands, therefore such trainings will support them in implementing this mandate. As part of this effort, training modules have been developed for councils, educators, police officers, social workers and CSOs. The modules include an introduction to P/CVE country context, multisectoral approach to P/CVE, understanding violent extremist narratives and operational skills for P/CVE. The modules will be complimented with a 5-day TOT for the stakeholders, followed by the rollout of the trainings in the Maldives Police Service, Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services and for senior educators. Simultaneously, UNDP together with the Local Government Authority and NCTC will conduct the training for the councils. The council training will first be piloted in two atolls for over 15 councils with implementation monitored for 3 months. Additional council trainings will be conducted based on the learning from the pilot.

Dr. Ibrahim Zakariyya Moosa from The Islamic University of Maldives conducted a session on Counter Narratives.

Enabling the power of quality education to prevent and counter violent extremism. workshop for all the heads of schools in R. Atoll, on the Role of Senior Educators in PCVE.

OUTCOME 2: GOVERNMENT ENGAGEMENT

OVERVIEW:

Citizen Engagement is the core of the project. The project adapts the findings produced by the research, and channels them into messaging supportive of peace and tolerance. A key principle underpinning the project was that the project should strengthen Bangladeshi and Maldivian voices, and minimize channeling messaging through UNDP. This core principle has made the project's social engagement approach especially effective in the local context as evident with Bangladesh's Digital Peace Movement and the Maldives' innovative engagement approaches.

Model to engage mothers in tackling violent extremism and de-radicalizing young minds at a household and community level.

MOTHERS AS AGENTS OF PEACE - A MALDIVES' COMMUNITY MODEL:

UNDP Maldives identified and developed a model to engage mothers in peacebuilding and preventing violent extremism at the grassroots level. UNDP consulted key stakeholders, women leaders and mothers across the Maldives to understand the complexities and contexts of women's engagement in social and community settings, and thereby developing a fit-for-purpose model to engage mothers in tackling violent extremism and de-radicalizing young minds at a household and community level. The models were developed with a strict adherence to the do-no-harm principles, by way of respecting cultural roles of women at home and at community settings.

Armed with the knowledge and skills from this toolkit, mothers and women in communities would be able to band together to form support and advocacy groups while cultivating the spirit of peace and tolerance in their communities.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN BANGLADESH:

UNDP Bangladesh ran pilot grassroots engagement activities promoting digital literacy in rural areas, run in partnership with the Rupantar foundation. Pilot training started for 25 youth in Khulna region, aged between 18 and 35. All are frequent users of social media. The training uses a variety of materials like photos, videos, screenshots, news and focuses on participants' own reflections. Through interactive case scenarios participants were encouraged to identify which content is misinformation, extremist messaging and fake news.

ENGAGEMENT WITH MALDIVES' CIVIL SOCIETY, WOMEN AND YOUTH:

UNDP Maldives in partnership with the NCTC and Hedayah[6] organized a three-day training for government agencies and NGOs on the basic concepts of PVE and international best practices on PVE. NGOs from Male' and Addu City were invited as the locations were identified by our partner, NCTC as areas where interventions were much needed to address the growing issue of violent extremism. The training included exchange of knowledge products on PVE, understanding the impact of violent extremism on women and exercises to map the existing programmes to create synergies between CSOs and/or government agencies.

Following the training, the 13 NGOs that participated from both Male' and Addu City were presented the opportunity to propose programmes around the broad theme of reducing vulnerabilities of youth and women to violent extremism. As a result, Nalafehi Meedhoo, Meedhoo Ekuveringe Cheynu and Mulimathi United were then selected to partner with UNDP Maldives and implement the proposed initiatives in their islands.

COMMUNITY PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

1. EDUCATING AND EMPOWERING PARENTS:

To tackle the unprecedented increase in violence among youth groups in the island of Hulhumeedhoo, the NGO, Nalafehi Meedhoo implemented a programme where parents were engaged to empower their children and safeguard them from the negative influences in the community and from the Internet. Internet Safety sessions were held for 47 mothers and 20 fathers with children aged 15 years and above and focused on increasing the parents' understanding on the content, conduct and contact risks associated with using the internet and measures that can be undertaken to ensure their children's safety including learning about the behavior change model. As a follow-up, complementary Parenting Education sessions were held which focused on learning effective parenting methods including communication and conflict resolution and educated parents on fostering positive relationships with their children and subsequently helping them to empower their children on being safe.

[6] https://www.hedayahcenter.org/

2. MEEDHOO EKUVERINGE CHEYNU (MEC):

Used a two pronged approach to addressing the vulnerabilities of women in Hulhumeedhoo, building skills of older women for their economic empowerment and a targeted programme for young girls in secondary school.

(I)   Arts and Crafts Training: This training conducted in partnership with TVET Authority provided an accredited short course that built women's skills in creating ornaments and souvenirs which can pave way for livelihood opportunities in the booming tourism industry. Following the completion of the first training, MEC plans to continue the partnership with TVET Authority to provide further training for Level 2 and 3 of the course and assist in establishing partnerships with the women and potential buyers in the industry.

Ever since she was young girl, Aminath Shareefa, 46, was interested in designing products and creating handicrafts so when an opportunity arose for her to build her skills in her home island of Meedhoo, she jumped at the chance.

"I have been waiting so long for a training like this. When I saw the advertisement by the NGO, I enrolled right away!"

A mother of four, Shareefa is a housewife handling all the responsibilities at home. Despite this, she joined the two-week long training programme and reveled in the new tools and techniques she had learned to use.

"The biggest achievement for me is the skill I have gained to turn waste into treasure. Things we used to throw away or burn such as the different parts of the coconut tree, I am now able to transform them into items that other people can make use of."

Fellow participant, Aminath Waseema, 44, echoed her sentiments.

"I already own a small business producing short eats and pastries to help my husband make ends meet. With this training I have acquired a new skill which I can use to expand my business."

While both women hope to create startups selling handicrafts to the local tourism industry, they have faced difficulties in entering the new market due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. But they are hopeful that once this crisis passes, they will be able to gear up and embark on an exciting new business venture.

(II) Sports Camp for Girls 'Vaane': This Camp utilized sports as a transformative activity where young girls aged 15-17 years in Hulhumeedhoo were given access to a sanctioned and safe public space and provided the opportunity to develop a social network of empowered women beyond families to realize their potential as future leaders. Aside from the Volleyball training sessions, the 7-day programme was supplemented with life skills sessions on communication, conflict resolution, leadership, understanding gender and social norms, decision making, networking, career guidance and self-awareness and relationships to build their knowledge and skills in these areas. Following the camp, participants shared their aim to apply the skills learnt in their daily life, particularly in becoming more assertive, having more self-esteem and being confident about their abilities. They also highlighted learning about financial skills as an unexpected but useful session. The initiative was a collaborative effort, with Society for Health Education (SHE) and Volleyball Association of Maldives joining as additional partners.

(II) RISE by Mulimathi United: The third NGO, Mulimathi United formed a partnership with a National NGO, Journey[7] to implement their flagship RISE programme which is an evidence and research-based prevention programme on drug abuse and HIV that has been successfully conducted in various locations across Maldives. Formulated with expert guidance, the multi-component comprehensive programme utilized a community-based approach and focused on reducing the risk factors that makes youth vulnerable to violence and abuse and works to enhance the protective factors. Apart from the participatory and community mobilizing methods, the programme in Hulhumeedhoo was also supplemented with sessions on promoting critical thinking, skill building, improving decision making skills, handling peer pressure, promoting peace and tolerance and volunteerism as means for addressing violent extremism.

A 5-day training was conducted for 22 parents which built their skills on parenting and communication as well as enhancing their knowledge on drug addiction, HIV and violence. Discussions were also held on strategies that can be utilized in monitoring their children and educating them on critical thinking and making healthy choices in life. 18 youth were also educated over the course of five days to build their skills on anger management, stress management, communication skills, coping with peer pressure and using critical thinking in decision making.

The outreach activity united the participants from both the parents and youth training where they learned the planning and implementation processes of conducting an outreach programme and applied those skills in coordinating the outreach activity and disseminating the knowledge that they had acquired during the training. As an extension to this, a youth camp coordinated and led by the parent and youth participants was also held for 45 additional youth to disseminate knowledge using fun and interactive games. Overall, the participants provided positive feedback on the sessions and considered the knowledge and experience gained through this programme as valuable and important for the community.

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[7] Journey is a non-governmental organization formed with a mission to help substance users to recover and reintegrate back to society as productive citizens; Empower and educate young people and communities for prevention of drug use and violence. https://www.facebook.com/journey.org.mv/

32-year-old Munnima's passion lies in tackling social issues in her small island community of Hulhudhoo. She avidly participates in the work of multiple NGOs and while this programme is not the first time she has joined a similar training; she admits that she has always learned something new and significant every time.

"Whenever I used to see young people under the influence and loitering in the streets, I used to get so mad at them. But now I know that these are vulnerable people who need our help to get better. And I want to do as much as I can for them to overcome their addiction and be an active citizen in our community."

32-year-old Munnima's passion lies in tackling social issues in her small island community of Hulhudhoo. She avidly participates in the work of multiple NGOs and while this programme is not the first time she has joined a similar training; she admits that she has always learned something new and significant every time.

MIGRANT WORKERS IN THE MALDIVES - "AIKYA" MIGRANT SHORT FILM SERIES:

UNDP Maldives developed the "Aikya" MIgrant Short Films series in an effort to bridge the gap between Maldivian communities and migrant communities to build a tolerant and inclusive society. Four short films were created under this series. This project provided youth participants with the necessary technical and creative skills on the art of producing short films with minimal equipment. The intended long-term objectives of this program are to foster a cohesive environment where rights of migrant workers are respected. These are the themes under which the four short films were created:

Film "Emmen": Understanding (understanding why Bangladeshi migrants seek work in the Maldives)

Film "Eh'Dhuvas": Prejudice (demonstrating societal preconceptions and resulting prejudice against Bangladeshi migrant communities)

Film "Ekai": Discrimination (demonstrating how prejudice translates into visible forms of discrimination and Human Rights violations)

Film "Ummeedhu": Moving Forward (exploring how we can to mend relationships and build a healthy relationship with our migrant communities and support the universal dream for a dignified life)

The short film series was premiered in the presence of key government and diplomatic partners in the Maldives and launched online on UNDP Maldives' YouTube channel (https://youtu.be/t8t-471Tppo) as well. Further public screenings of the short film series took places in numerous locations in Male. With the success of the film series, a local media streaming service "Baiskoafu" picked up the films and added them to their featured content.

Participants and the cast of the four films alongside senior officials of the government and representatives of UNDP at the private premiere fo the 'Aikya' programme.

REACH IN BANGLADESH:

Social media campaigns under Bangladesh's Digital Peace Movement have reached 17m Bangladeshis across the country, promoting inclusive perspectives and a spirit of national collaboration. The platform has broadcast content aimed at supporting heavily marginalized groups, including a cultural show for the transgender community which reached 60,000 people online (small numbers in Bangladesh, but nonetheless a major achievement in helping to break the transgender community's relative invisibility). This network has also already been mobilized to support reliable sources of information on the spread of COVID-19 in Bangladesh, promoting understanding of the stigma faced by front-line professionals and COVID-19 patients, who have both periodically been targets of online abuse.

BANGLADESH'S POSITIVE ONLINE MESSAGING:

When addressing divisive rhetoric, the project made a deliberate decision to keep UNDP messaging positive – to focus not on "countering" extremist or hateful narratives directly, but to promote alternative peaceful, positive narratives. For example, if the project's data analysis teams identified a major narrative targeting the Rohingya as "thieves and criminals", then the response should not simply be "the Rohingya are not thieves and criminals" as in responding to the negative frame, this in part validates it or makes it the default point of discussion. An alternative narrative would instead focus on an exclusively positive outlook, for example "Rohingya are good people in a difficult situation", or "Bangladesh should be proud of being a welcoming nation". Throughout, the project recognized that while deliberate incitement and hate speech did exist in Bangladesh, the best counter was not censorship but better arguments and better evidence.

The 'Concert For Peace' was an event organized in February 2020 to foster a greater understanding and appreciation for Bangladesh's cultural and ethnic diversity.

GRASSROOTS ENGAGEMENT IN BANGLADESH (DIVERSITY 4 PEACE):

Where the "Digital Peace Movement" has been the project's online portfolio, Diversity 4 Peace works primarily offline, at the grassroots level. The purpose of Diversity 4 Peace is to showcase Bangladeshi diversity through interactive, colourful events which bring people together. Many Bangladeshis are unfamiliar with cultural, gender, religious or other minorities, especially from rural or distant parts of the country. Diversity4Peace provides a common platform for promoting different types of diverse groups - a window from which to view the full spectrum of Bangladesh's diversity. The application process for Diversity4Peace asked for expressions of interest in either Bangla or English, which allowed grassroots groups to compete with larger, more established NGOs, receiving over 400 total applications from across Bangladesh. The project then coached and helped promising candidates to refine their proposals through a series of orientation workshops in Chattogram, Rangpur and Dhaka. 9 finalists were then selected for funding, and given further training on project implementation, financial reporting, and other essentials during a 2-day workshop in Dhaka. Through this process, dozens of organizations were pushed to link their ongoing activities to diversity and to digital literacy — far more than the 9 ultimately selected for UNDP funding. Examples of the activities conducted include:

- Youth Peace Ambassadors: 40 youths (20 men, 20 women) from Rangamati were selected to enhance their leadership skills to better support community engagement activities, take social initiative, and increase their understanding of diversity and tolerance towards building a resilient and peaceful society;

- COVID Messaging: The project supported awareness messages on COVID-19 for people with disabilities (Sign Language & Audio), COVID awareness in minority languages (Tripura, Marma), and Peace Messaging aiming to Minimize Social Tensions during COVID-19;

- Concerts: The project supported 3 Indigenous concerts (two online and one live) hosting a lineup of nine local and indigenous bands to showcase cultural diversity. The live concert included the first-ever all-female indigenous band "F Minor";

- Support to Tea Garden Communities: The project supported youth cultural groups promoting diverse cultural art forms in Bangladeshi tea garden communities. The first workshop brought together 30 members of the Protik Theatre, the biggest cultural group in the Deundi tea estate, to discuss ways of sharing their diverse cultures with the rest of Bangladesh;

- Peace Caravan Campaign: This initiative decorates city buses, rickshaws and boats with colorful art-oriented messages supporting peace, tolerance and diversity;

- Transgender Performances: The project supported two performances by transgender communities, highlighting issues faced by transgender people across South Asia.

"Boichitrer Oikoton", an event featuring performances by the first ever transgender Bharatanatym dancer from India, Dr. Narthaki Nataraj.

DIGITAL LITERACY CHALLENGES AND PEACE QUIZZES:

Many of the project's most successful initiatives have taken-off because they engage youth and other target demographics in a fun or unorthodox way. The Digital Literacy Challenge and Peace Quizzes are consciously designed to be relaxed, fun and enjoyable, making the spread of positive ideas easier and far more natural. The online Digital Literacy Challenge is a quiz designed to help Bangladeshis to question and identify untrustworthy sources of online information. Two of these quizzes were issued. The Quiz for Peace series engaged Bangladeshis to test their knowledge of relevant issues throughout the year – four of these quizzes were issued between April 2019 and July 2020.

Initiatives support by the Diversity For Peace fund, aimed to promote the diversity of Bangladesh

Promoting talents of transgender people:

Positive messaging in social media, street campaign.

Community lead org.

Peaceful tolerance among the CHT communities:

Clean Rangamati Campaign

Peaceful coexistence of diverse ethnic and religious communities:

Peace football match, Inter-ethnic/religious dialogue, Street drama

Promoting cultural identities of Tea communities:

Map their language and cultural elements, mentor cultural groups, documentary.

Concert for Diversity:

9 Indigenous bands performing ethnic songs at open concert giving peace messages

Accessible Dhaka Campaign:

Campaign, social media videos on real life experience of people with disability on Dhaka street and public places

Disable people lead org.

Peace Caravan:

Curate city buses, rickshaws and boats with colorful art-oriented message on peace, tolerance and diversity

Comic book:

With folklores of different ethnic groups

Exchange programme:

Among youth from different cultural, religious, ethnic, educational and ideological background

Youth lead organizations

The first session of Peace Talk Café

PEACE TALK CAFES:

Activities like the Peace Talk Cafes have taken a radically different approach to social engagement than was traditionally done in Bangladesh. Events allow youth to interact directly with experts, government officials, and noteworthy figures on important subjects. The Peace Talk Cafes create an informal, approachable, and even cozy atmosphere in local environments, completely different from formal discussions in expensive hotels. 5 Peace Talk Cafes were held in Bangladesh in 2019-2020:

- Peace Talk Café 1: Pilot theme **(Engaged 6,606,546 people over social media).**

- Peace Talk Café 2: Cybercrime and Online Violence Against Women **(Engaged 1,586,369 people over social media).**

- Peace Talk Café 3: Fake News and COVID-19 **(Engaged 20,172 people over social media).**

- Peace Talk Café 4: Women in Pandemic **(Engaged 14,000 people total, with 3.3k people viewing the live discussion over social media);**

- Peace Talk Café 5: Front Line Workers And Patients Fight COVID-19 and Stigmatization **(Engaged 135,094 people total, with 6.6k people viewing the live discussion over social media);**

Peace Talk Café attendees

GENDER-THEMED EVENTS:

UNDP ran numerous events focusing on women's challenges and experiences with violence and intolerance. For example, in Bangladesh, a special Peace Talk Café held during UN Women's "16 Days of Action against Violence Against Women" focused on addressing various forms of gender-based violence in Bangladesh as part of the project's broader commitment to addressing all forms of violent behaviour. Similarly, after COVID-19, the Peace Talk Café on "Women during the Pandemic" brought together numerous female professionals to comment on gender-specific challenges during COVID-19, and to engage with comments from an online audience. Another example is UNDP's support for a Diversity4Peace concert featuring Bangladesh's first all-female indigenous band from the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Bangladesh's first all-female indigenous band on stage at "Concert for Peace"

A practical session of religious leaders' training on fostering peace through social media

ENGAGEMENT WITH RELIGIOUS LEADERS:

In Bangladesh, UNDP supported 50 Muslim religious leaders to be trained on interfaith peacemaking dialogue and Social Media. The 4-day workshop gave participants a hands-on orientation for how to develop Facebook and Youtube content which rejects and counters hate speech, violence, and upholds meaningful dialogue from religious and human rights viewpoints. UNDP has also circulated messages stressing the importance of interfaith solidarity, especially during COVID-19, including a video by 4 religious leaders urging mutual understanding.

A multifaith online video on COVID awareness, featuring Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Christian religious leaders

Migrant worker shares his experiences with the participants of the Digital Khichuri Challenge on digital literacy for migrant workers

MIGRANT WORKERS IN BANGLADESH:

In Bangladesh, UNDP partnered with the University of Dhaka's Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) to conduct a dedicated study on digital literacy and online behaviours among migrant workers who had returned to Bangladesh. The study found that only 11% of male migrants and 4% of female migrants had exposure to social media before they left Bangladesh, rising to 65% of the men and 35% of the women while abroad. Of these, 60% admitted that they did not verify the legitimacy of news stories online before sharing, while 28% did not know how to verify online information they encountered. Knowing now that migrant workers faced significant digital literacy challenges, UNDP organized a hackathon (Digital Khichuri Challenge) to engage young Bangladeshis to help develop solutions which would improve digital literacy and critical thinking among migrant workers. This hackathon was held in December 2019, with a winning team (team Probash Kotha, described above) producing a web platform on social media (including youtube and facebook) which in 2020 has a total reach of 18.8 million views, including millions from Bangla-speakers outside Bangladesh. Their most viral campaign was an interview with a migrant worker who survived a widely-reported attack on migrants by Libyan militias, including an interview with the Libyan ambassador to Bangladesh. The new platform published a total of 491 posts through its website and Facebook presence, and became a reliable source of information on COVID for migrants. As a result of the study described above, digital literacy among migrants is now increasingly understood to be a critical problem for the Bangladeshi diaspora, and a basis for new interventions. Where RMMRU was not even aware of the concept of digital literacy prior to collaboration, they are also now pushing their government contacts to take the challenge seriously. Numerous government counterparts, including the Bureau for Manpower, Employment and Training and the Dhaka Police have since expressed interest in training migrants in digital literacy before they leave Bangladesh.

OUTCOME 3: RESEARCH FACILITY

RATIONALE AND OVERVIEW, RESEARCH FACILITY:

Effective responses to public policy challenges depend on reliable, up-to-date evidence. In Bangladesh and Maldives, PVE is a field with little-to-no established baseline.[8] As such, UNDP's primary task is to better understand the scope and nature of violence, against which a PVE activity's impact can be measured.

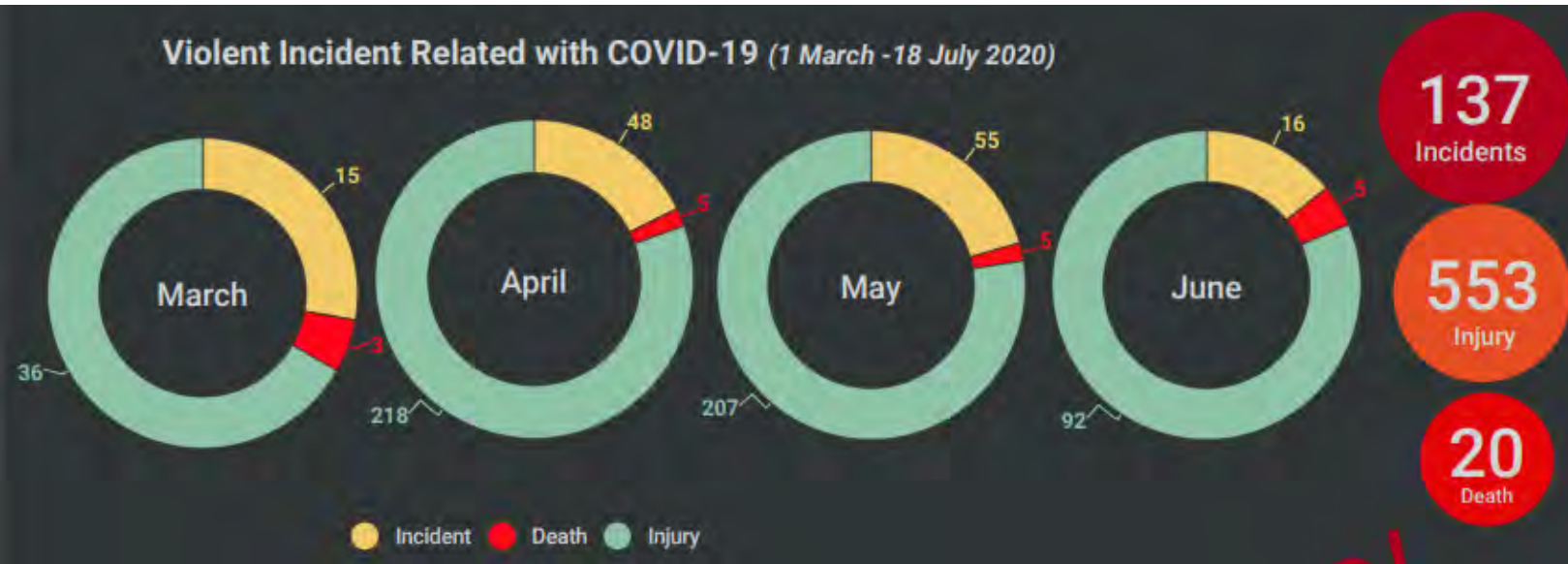### THE BANGLADESH PEACE OBSERVATORY (BPO):

The BPO catalogues, aggregates, maps and visualizes nationwide statistics on violent incidents using a combination of open data and media reports. Based at the University of Dhaka and supported by UNDP, the BPO produces targeted analyses and updates, identifying new avenues for research. A variety of qualitative (micronarrative) and quantitative methods (media monitoring) are used to help identify violent trends.

Participants at the 2-day Data Visualization Training, organized to improve the capacity of 14 data analysts at the Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO).

[8] Previous data initiatives, notably one run by the University of Dhaka's Micro-Governance Research Initiative (MGR), in partnership with the University of Ghent, Belgium, expired in 2013, just as extremist violence began to increase. Moreover, MGR's dataset has been used mainly to inform a small number of journal articles and was not accessible to external parties. The Bangladesh Police also publish crime data periodically, but their data lacks standardization, clarity, and granularity. Other international academic entities have collected and published data on Bangladesh, but their accessibility and impact have been limited.

Violent Incident Related with COVID-19 *(1 March -18 July 2020)*

March — 15, 36, 3
April — 48, 218, 5
May — 55, 207, 5
June — 16, 92, 5

137 Incidents
553 Injury
20 Death

Incident Death Injury

BPO COVIDgraphics displaying the impact of the virus from March-July 2020

OPEN-SOURCE INTELLIGENCE AND COVID-19:

The COVID-19 crisis in Bangladesh led to an urgent need for additional information on the spread of the virus across the country, and the associated social and political impact. The BPO was well-positioned by the start of the outbreak to expand its focus from tracking violent incidents to also tracking unofficial deaths and disinformation on COVID-19. This additional information helped to put the possible spread of the virus in context, as the official numbers only counted individuals who had died after testing positive. That the BPO could provide estimates for additional numbers of suspicious deaths, beyond the official national tally, provided significant added-value and made national headlines. As a result, the BPO's online profile and engagement is rising. The BPO has provided evidence to other UN agencies and international partners to take stigmatization and the social impact of COVID-19 seriously, actively shaping the COVID-19 policy conversation in the country.

BPO DATA ENTRY AND VALIDATION:

With Japanese support, the quality of the BPO's data and products has improved dramatically since 2019. For the first two years of the project, the data quality was poor, and data entry processes were not standardized or fully aligned to international standards. In 2019, the BPO team was retrained on improved methods, and validation safeguards were implemented. For example, the BPO team had initially believed it should publish any media information it came across, even if the source was unreliable or flawed. The data scientist hired in 2019 changed the BPO's validation process to actively identify and correct for inaccuracies, introducing an extra safeguard to validate key incidents only at the end of the month once all the information was in. As of 2020, 30% of the BPO team now actively reviews the BPO's data to check it is accurate and has been entered correctly. The BPO now also conducts 3-4 data quality spotcheck assessments each year, to ensure that the team is following the new procedures and eliminating gaps in the data. Any team members who lag behind are retrained. As a result, when BPO data is now compared to other sources, the

rate of matching has increased. The BPO's data has reached a 95% match with data collected by the UN Department of Security Services (UNDSS), partial datasets assembled by NGO alternatives like Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), as well as the available police data.
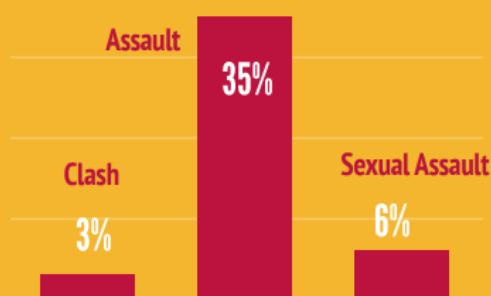

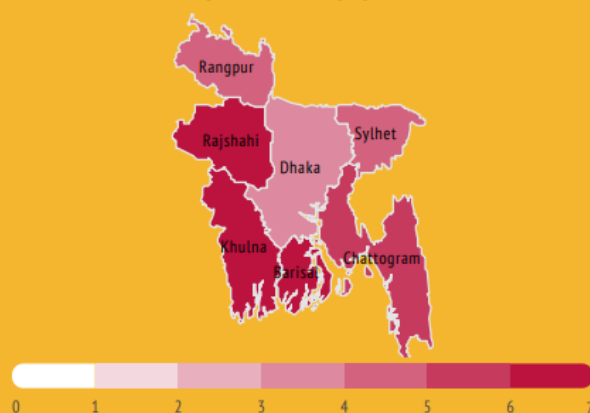
Peacegraphics
- a BPO eNewsletter
24 July 2020

Period: January-June 2020
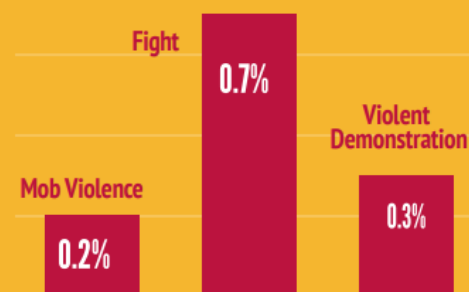Mapping based on reported incidents
(for sources, see below).

Top 3 reported incidents in June 2020

Assault
35%

Clash
3%

Sexual Assault
6%

Incidents per 100,000 population

Rangpur
Rajshahi
Sylhet
Dhaka
Khulna
Barisal
Chattogram

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Bottom 3 reported incidents in June 2020

Fight
0.7%

Violent Demonstration
0.3%

Mob Violence
0.2%

BPO Peacegraphics newsletter has become very popular with partners and the media.

DATA VISUALIZATION:

The quality and effectiveness of the BPO's visualizations and peace graphics have substantially improved. The UNDP data scientist hired in 2019 trained the BPO team every week on how to use excel and create charts and graphs, to help the BPO tell a more compelling story using the available data. Since monthly peacegraphics were difficult to produce in 2018-2019, UNDP supported the BPO to hire 5 more research and data analysts, who have contributed to the increase in quality and timeliness. The team was also trained to use infogram software to produce graphics, with additional levels of review to check the quality of graphics before they are made public. The improved accuracy and accessibility of the peace graphics have made the BPO's website more intuitive and attractive, and have also been a major factor in the BPO's increasing media coverage.

Mr. Robert Templer, Research Consultant for UNDP Maldives and National Counter Terrorism Centre - Maldives. The discussions deliberated on assisting the study on social cohesion and the vulnerabilities facing Maldivian women and their role as peace builders and agents of change.

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PVE IN THE MALDIVES:

Understanding the relationship between women, radicalization and violent extremism in the Maldives is crucial given the large number of women travelling with their husbands and families to Syria. In order to better understand the context and provide policy makers with quantitative and qualitative data UNDP undertook an in-depth study on the role and influence of women in radicalization and violent extremism in the Maldives and root causes unique to women which increases their vulnerability to radicalization and extremism. The initial findings of the study indicate that women aspire participate more in public life and believes they can play a key role as peacebuilders and agents of change in their communities.

The report is expected to be published later in the year, with its findings contributing to knowledge generation and development of an alternative narrative in the Maldives. The report will also support UNDP and national partners in designing and implementation of interventions focusing on prevention of radicalization and violent extremism in the Maldives.

Launching of Youth Vulnerability Assessment

MALDIVES YOUTH VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT:

The "Youth Vulnerability Assessment in the Maldives" was launched in 2019. The findings of the research informed the policy directives of the Maldives National Action Plan on Prevention of Violent Extremism and was carried out with the important objective of identifying the root causes and vulnerabilities that could make Maldivian youth susceptible to radicalization and violent extremism. Corruption, Education, Drugs, Unemployment, Housing, Gang violence, and Violent Extremism were identified as key issues leading to social exclusion and dissatisfaction among young people. Participants also identified these issues as possible challenges that need to be addressed when tackling violent extremism. The report recommends 10 policy priorities to address the situation, ranging from the urgent prison reform to critical legal reforms such as reviewing the Disability Act and Drug Act.

The report can be accessed at https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/youth-vulnerability-in-the-maldives.html

YOUNG MALDIVIANS, A SNAPSHOT

Just under
50%
felt the government cared about young people.

57%
believed that they had a say in their future.

81%
of the young people interviewed said they were optimistic about the future.

only
35%
felt that the Maldives were heading in the right direction.

84%
believed women should work outside the home.

70%
believed women should have a greater role in government.

PROGRAMMING DURING A PANDEMIC: TACKLING THE CHALLENGES POSED DUE TO COVID19 IN THE MALDIVES

The spread of the Covid19 pandemic is an alarming cause of concern in the path to tackle radicalization and violent extremism.

Likened to the 2004 Tsunami in terms of the sudden effects these shocks have played on an already vulnerable country, the virus and its consequences threatens to severely impact Maldivian society - families, individuals and communities on islands and in the urban centres from north to south. It will undoubtedly place stress on society's coping mechanisms over what may potentially be an extended crisis timeline. The temporary closure of resorts and drastic reduction in tourists have created not only heightened fear and anxiety, but have also shattered the bubble of economic buoyancy and prosperity that Maldives rode for more than a decade. The economic shock to both tourism and fisheries (as Maldives' two key economic pillars) could threaten to strip away more than just optimism in the peaceful, prosperous trajectory of the country that has marked the decade of political transition.

Already psychologically impacted by limitations on human movement and contact, with everyday activities heavily curtailed, and coupled with a real risk of loss of financial independence and a fall into poverty, a largely young and a relatively small but very vulnerable ageing population may suffer a rapid series of unprecedented shocks. Large population concentrations in several urban centres will be impacted almost immediately, if businesses remain shut. Many rely on holding more than one job at a time, or hold a job only for a short time, thus few will have guarantees of a stable exit strategy. Falling between the cracks of the political system or judged and rejected by increasingly worried parents,

with little or no social net to catch them as they try to avoid overcrowded, sometimes abusive homes, erring or 'lost' younger generations steer between extreme behaviour and the norms they reject. The risk of growing violent extremism becomes all the more prevalent in the Maldives.

To address these growing concerns, the project, through Japanese support, provided much-needed assistance to below initiatives through this project.

LEGAL AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT FOR WORKERS AND THOSE FACING SOCIOECONOMIC HARDSHIPS

Through project support, prominent human rights and anti-Corruption NGO, Transparency Maldives, supported the provision of legal aid for vulnerable groups affected by the COVID socioeconomic downfalls. In addition to legal aid towards the Advocacy and Legal Aid Center of Transparency Maldives, the project will also link clients to the job market at Business Center Corporation (BCC) under the Ministry of Economic Development in the Maldives, thereby increasing resiliency and preventing exacerbation of vulnerabilities. The grant has enabled the organization to assign legal representation for vulnerable migrants with several of the cases now being lodged in authorities. It will further see a Call center established for individuals to reach out to access legal advice on employment related matters through which 600 people are expected to be reached with legal aid.

Furthermore, identifying the exigent need for mental health and psycho-social support, the project also supported the Maldives Red Crescent, a critical

organization that provides PSS support to those in need. This support, while contributing to the overall national PSS operation in the country, will enable the Maldivian Red Crescent to attend to referrals identified by Transparency Maldives through their legal aid support to workers. Till date, the Maldivian Red Crescent's PSS Operation have attended to over 4000 people directly, and 160000 people indirectly, affected by the COVID19 crisis.


VIRTUAL SOCIAL INNOVATION CHALLENGE - MIYAHELI

The Social Innovation Camps, 'Miyaheli' is a UNDP flagship programme on youth engagement and innovation, that has been held consecutively for the past 4 years. The series brings together youth, ideas, mentors and digital and non-digital tools to create innovations on pressing social issues. Close to 160 youth from across the country have been engaged in the camps since 2016. This year's Miyaheli, supported by the Japanese, is the 5th cycle of the series, which was also the first on its kind to be held completely virtually due to the nationwide lockdown caused by the pandemic in the Maldives.
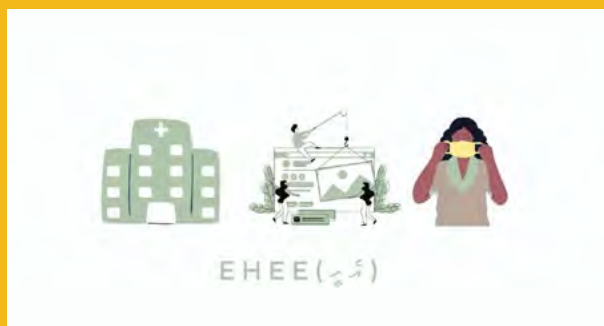
HOLHUASHI

*Seed-funding went to the following winning Miyaheli teams:*

- Holhuashi – proposes a public chat room for people to visit, premised around the concept of an island's holhuashi.

PARI HELP

EHEE (ﻉﻬﻳ)
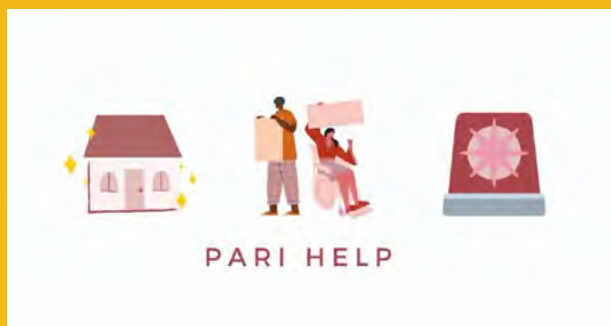
- Pari Help – proposes a silent solution to alert police to save people from abuse and harassment.

- Ehee – proposes to make a website that allows the public to easily access doctors from the comfort of their homes during COVID-19 lockdown.

BINHEYO

VISNUN THARI (ﻱﺮﺛﻥﻮﻨﺴﻳﻭ)
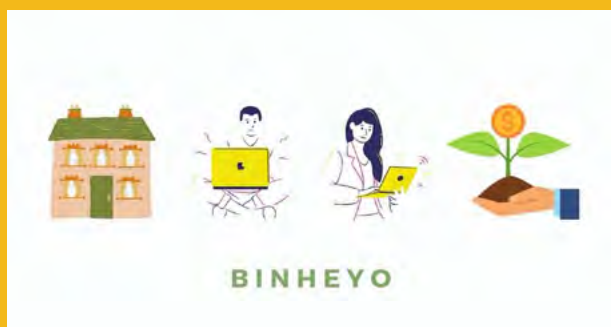
- Binheyo – a concept to provide people with equipment and expertise to farm from the comfort of their own homes and connect farmers to livelihood opportunities.

- Visnun Thari – proposes a Youtube channel that is local, relevant and educational aiming to give children a chance to learn new things in a fun way while social and physical distancing.

"A lot of the COVID-19 related issues are also things that are already happening or predicted to come up due to the ongoing climate crisis. This is another wakeup call. When figuring out solutions to the immediate crisis, these should also make us more resilient to the effects of climate change."

— Ahmed Niyaz, participant.

"Ehee was inspired by the relentless effort of our health workers, and the technologies we have in our midst right now to connect us all and help us take care of our health and well-being." - Hassan Abdul Gayyoom

—Team Ehee

"Binheyo aims to raise awareness on the importance of revitalization and strengthening of the agriculture industry. We want to propel the younger generation into this industry with our initiative to tackle the concerns of food security and unemployment."

Maahil Saeed — Team Binheyo

BEST PRACTICES IDENTIFIED

The project has identified several key dynamics and ideas that are highly transferable to other contexts and teams:

PREVENTION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND PREVENTION OF HATE SPEECH AND PEACEBUILDING:

While UNDP internally applies the Prevention of Violent Extremism label to this work, the core messages are best framed in more positive terms. This is because positive messages are more successful, as discussed above, but also because there is also a significant security risk to being seen as directly opposing extremist or intolerant narratives. Framing these activities as promoting peace and diversity is better at countering extremism while minimizing the associated sensitivity and risk. Similarly, the project has come to realize how adaptable this model is to addressing issues of hate speech, whose expression may be different, but the dynamics and the implications similar to that of extremist rhetoric.

FIND SUPPORTIVE GOVERNMENT PARTNERS:

In both Bangladesh and the Maldives, UNDP has been lucky to work with a number of government counterparts that care to work in this space and want to get it right. Building a collaborative and honest relationship with government partners (in Bangladesh's case, the Dhaka Police and in Maldives' the National Center for Counter Terrorism) has allowed UNDP access to government priorities and strategies, access to collect sensitive information, and use it towards evidence-based programming, and to influence positive policy changes.

BE EXPERIMENTAL AND CREATIVE:

UNDP Bangladesh's Digital Peace Movement initiative has reached over 17m Bangladeshis in total, and has directly supported inclusive narratives supporting women and girls, ethnic and religious minorities, persons with disabilities and transgender communities. Many of these initiatives have approached key issues in an unusual or experimental way, including a focus on Rohingya art and cultural works, or promoting awareness on private-sector buses in Dhaka. In the Maldives, utilization of innovative approaches such using film-making as a medium to promote dialogue on sensitive issues and, empowering community led solutions through Innovation Challenges has proven to be incredibly effective and grassroots oriented approaches.

LONG-TERM CHANGE SHOULD BE SELF-REINFORCING:

When responding to a threat as high profile and shocking as extremist violence or hate speech, the focus has too often been on short-term solutions that, in an attempt to regain swift control over the problem, strain both resources and relationships. Though sometimes necessary, this is not an effective way to create lasting change, to forge enduring partnerships, or to support inclusive institutions. The ideal is to create tolerant society programming whose impact is designed to strengthen over time, to the point that progress is not only maintained, but continues to expand independently. Short-term responses to day-to-day violence must complement a range of longer-term, sustained projects that help to bolster Bangladeshi society's ability to act compassionately and peacefully in a crisis.

ACHIEVEMENTS AGAINST TARGET PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Bangladesh UNDAF Outcome 2: Develop and implement improved social policies and programmes that focus on good governance, reduction of structural inequalities and advancement of vulnerable individuals and groups.

Maldives UNDAF Outcome 2: Gender equality advanced and women empowered to enjoy equal rights and opportunities in access to social, economic and political opportunities

Maldives UNDAF Outcome 3: By 2020 Citizen Expectations for voice, sustainable development, the rule of law and accountability are met by stronger systems of democratic governance

Outcome indicators as stated in the Country Programme Results and Resources Framework, including baseline and targets:

Bangladesh

Indicator 2.1.1.: Extent to which there is a strengthened environment for civic engagement, including legal/regulatory framework for civil society organizations to function in the public sphere and contribute to development, and effective mechanisms/platforms to engage civil society (with a focus on women, youth or excluded groups)

Baseline (2016): low (on 3 groups), target (2020): medium (on 3 groups);

Maldives:

1.3.2) Degree of effectiveness of mechanisms/platforms to engage youth groups.

Baseline: Low (2015) Target: Medium (2020)

1.3.1) Degree of effectiveness of mechanisms/platforms to engage women's groups.

Baseline: Low (2015) Target: Medium (2020) Bangladesh

Applicable Output(s) from the UNDP Strategic Plan: Outcome 2: Citizen expectations for voice, development, rule of law, and accountability are met by stronger systems of democratic governance.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES & OUTPUTS	OUTCOME & OUTPUT INDICATORS	DATA SOURCE	BASELINE					NOTES
			VALUE	YEAR	BGD	MDV	TOTAL	
Outcome 1: GOVERNMENT ENGAGEMENT	1.1 Number of government agencies adding a PVE element to existing programming as a result of all engagement activities	UNDP	N/A	2018	2	5	7	
	1.2 Total number of policymakers (civil servants, military, politicians) who participated in PVE training or engagement activities	UNDP	30	2018	100	100	200	
	1.3 Number of presentations made by Bangladeshi delegates, or documents submitted to conferences	UNDP	N/A	2018	3	-	3	
Outcome 2: CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT	2.1 Total number of civil society organizations adding a PVE element to existing programming, with support of UNDP training or information materials	UNDP	N/A	2018	3	3	6	
	2.2 Percentage improvement in scores from a test administered at start of training when compared to a test administered at the end	UNDP	N/A	2018	50%	50%	100%	
	2.3 Total Number of beneficiaries who have come into contact with campaigns	UNDP	N/A	2018	2m	170,000	2,170,000	
2.2 MIGRANT WORKERS	2.2.1 Percentage of migrants surveyed after a workshop who felt training was 'useful' or 'very useful' once completed	UNDP	N/A	2018	-	50%	50%	
	2.2.2 Percentage improvement in scores from a test administered at start of training when compared to a test administered at the end	UNDP	N/A	2018	-	50%	50%	
	2.2.3 Number of workers given training or materials to recognize and defend against extremist recruitment tactics	UNDP	16	2018	-	50	50	

EXPECTED OUTCOMES & OUTPUTS	OUTCOME & OUTPUT INDICATORS	DATA SOURCE	BASELINE		BGD	MDV	TOTAL	NOTES
			VALUE	YEAR				
2.3 YOUTH	2.3.1 Number of youth engaged in PVE content/narrative development	UNDP	60	2018	60	60	120	2m/ 8m Indirect Beneficiaries 60 Youth Directly Developing New Content
2.4 RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP	2.4.1 Number of religious organizations adding a PVE or digital literacy element to existing programming	UNDP	N/A	2018	1	1	2	
	2.4.2 Number of religious leaders given training or materials to recognize and defend against extremist narratives in their communities	UNDP	N/A	2018	75	10	85	75 Religious Leaders Given Peaceful Content, as part of a broader discussion on creating multi-faith networks in Bangladesh 50 young religious leaders trained
	2.4.3 Number of religious leaders provided study tour to Japan to witness ways of harmonizing traditionalism and modernity	UNDP	N/A	2018	-	5	5	

EXPECTED OUTCOMES & OUTPUTS	OUTCOME & OUTPUT INDICATORS	DATA SOURCE	BASELINE					NOTES
			VALUE	YEAR	BGD	MDV	TOTAL	
Outcome 3: RESEARCH FACILITY	3.1 Total Number of Research Publications Produced	UNDP	7	2018	8	3	11	Six bi-monthly reports in 2019 covering: Violence against minorities; Student violence; Fake news; Crime, casino and corruption nexus; Boarder violence; Cross- border issues; 8 Publications Produced
	3.2 Total Citations for Research Products	Google Scholar	0	2018	5	-	5	3 citations in research monographs and articles
	3.3 Number of Times research products are presented at PVE conferences	UNDP	4	2018	8	1	9	8 Presentations at Conferences
	3.4 Number of instances media organizations reference Research Facility data in reporting	UNDP/ BPO	4	2018	8	-	8	14+ References in National Media before COVID-19
Output 3.1: MAINTAIN and UPDATE the Bangladesh Peace Observatory	3.1.1 Number of months' data on various forms of violence available in the website of "Bangladesh peace observatory"	BPO	24	2018	12	NA	12	2019- June 2020: 25,587 Incidents Logged by the BPO
	3.1.2 Number of people who have viewed the BPO website/ platform	BPO	2280	2018	2508	NA	2508	
	3.1.3 Number of online citations of BPO data	Online Journals	0	2018	6	NA	6	

ANNEX I

AGENDA FOR THE WORKSHOP ON PREVENTING & COUNTERING EXTREMISM (WITH A FOCUS ON THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS) - HEDAYAH CENTER

TRAINING DAY 1: 26TH JUNE

8:30-9:00   Registration of participants

9:00-10:00   Opening Ceremony Opening & Outline of Training Objectives & Methodology Hedayah

10:30-11:15   Overview: Provide an overview of Hedayah's history, structure, programs and publications.

11:15-12:00   Session 1: Concepts and Definitions:
Overview of key concepts & relevant definitions within the context of preventing and countering violent extremism.

13:15-14:00   Presentation on the Youth Vulnerability Assessment Study

14:00-14:45   Session 2: Evidence-Based Prevention Methodologies:
Providing an outline of the evidence based approach" to the prevention and countering of violent extremism for policy makers and practitioners.

14:45-15:30   Session 3: CVE Programs (PART 1): National Strategies, De-radicalization, Rehabilitation & Re-integration:Presenting an overview of practical framework, key programs and specialized themes on international good practices within the context of preventing and countering violent extremism.

15:30-16:00   Discussion

16:00: 16:45   Session 4: CVE Programs (PART 2): Education, Community Engagement and Communication: Presenting an overview of practical framework, key programs and specialized themes on international good practices within the context of preventing and countering violent extremism.

16:45-17:30   Interactive Discussion Session / Wrap Up

TRAINING DAY 2: 27TH JUNE

9:00-9:45   Session 5: The Significant Role of Imams in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism:Discussing the role of Imams as community leaders in the prevention and countering of violent extremism.

9:45-10:00   Discussion

10:15-11:00   Session 7: History of Extremism & Terrorism in the Islamic World: Providing a historical overview of key Extremist and Terrorist groups within the Islamic World context.

11:00-11:15   Discussion

12:45-13:30   Session 8: Prevention Methods and Programs:An outline of international good practices in the prevention of violent extremism and the practical aspects of prevention programs.

13:30: 13:45   Discussion

13:45-14:30   Interactive Discussion Session

14:30-15:00   Wrap Up & Closing

PARTICIPANTS OF THE WORKSHOP ON PREVENTING & COUNTERING EXTREMISM (WITH A FOCUS ON THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS) - HEDAYAH CENTER

ORGANIZATIONS

Female religious scholars	Maldives Red Crescent
Maldives National University	Society for Health Education
State religious scholars_Ministry of Islamic Affairs	Transparency Maldives
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Advocating for the Rights of Children
Maldives National Defence Force	Addu Womne's Association (Addu City based NGO)
President's Office - Counter Terrorism / PCVE Unit	Mulimathi United (Addu City based NGO)
Attorney General's Office	Hulhudhoo Live (Addu City based NGO)
Ministry of Youth, Sports & Community Empowerment	Addu Women's Development Initiative (Addu City based NGO)
Maldives Immigration	Nalafehi Meedhoo (Addu City based NGO)
Ministry of Gender, Family & Social Services	Horizon Academy (Addu City based NGO)
Prosecutor General's Office	Junior Chambers International (Addu City Branch)
Ministry of Defence	Meedhoo Ekuveringe Cheynu (Addu City based NGO)
Maldives Correctional Service	WEAM (NGO)
Ministry of Education	Jamiyyath Salaf (NGO)
Islamic University of Maldives	RAFY (NGO)
Maldives Police Service	

AGENDA FOR THE WORKSHOP ON EXTREMISM AND COUNTER TERRORISM - NAIF ARAB UNIVERSITY FOR SECURITY SCIENCES

MONDAY   **26/11/1440**
              29/07/2019

8:30-9:00   Registration of participants and opening

9:00-10:30   Indicators of extremism and participation of civil society in prevention programs

10:30-11:00   B R E A K

11:00-13:00   - Suspicions, indicators and methods of polarization of terrorist organizations
              - The suspicions and arguments raised by extremist organizations
              - Methods and means of traditional and modern recruitment and polarization (Al-Qaeda and Daesh phases)   Brigadier-General
                                                                         Dr. Fahad Abdulaziz Al Ghafili

13:00-14:00   Discussion and interventions

TUESDAY   **27/11/1440**
              30/07/2019

9:00-10:30   Indicators of intellectual extremism

10:30-11:00   B R E A K

11:00-13:00   - The meaning of indicators and indications
              - Identify types of intellectual and behavioral indicators
              - Identiry areas of indicators of extremism inthe social, psychological, financial and intellectual aspects
              - Highlight the importance of awareness of indicators as one of the methods of prevention in the intellectual side   Dr. Abdulaziz Abdulrahman
              - Ways of dealing with the emergence of indicators of intellectual extremism   Al- Halil

13:00-14:00   Discussion and interventions

WEDNESDAY **28/11/1440**
31/07/2019

9:00-12:00   - Workshop   Dr. Abdulaziz Abdulrahman
                - Dialogue and discussions   Al- Halil
                - Recommendations

                                                Brigadier-General
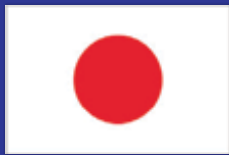!2:00   Closing and certificate awarding   Dr. Fahad Abdulaziz Al Ghafili
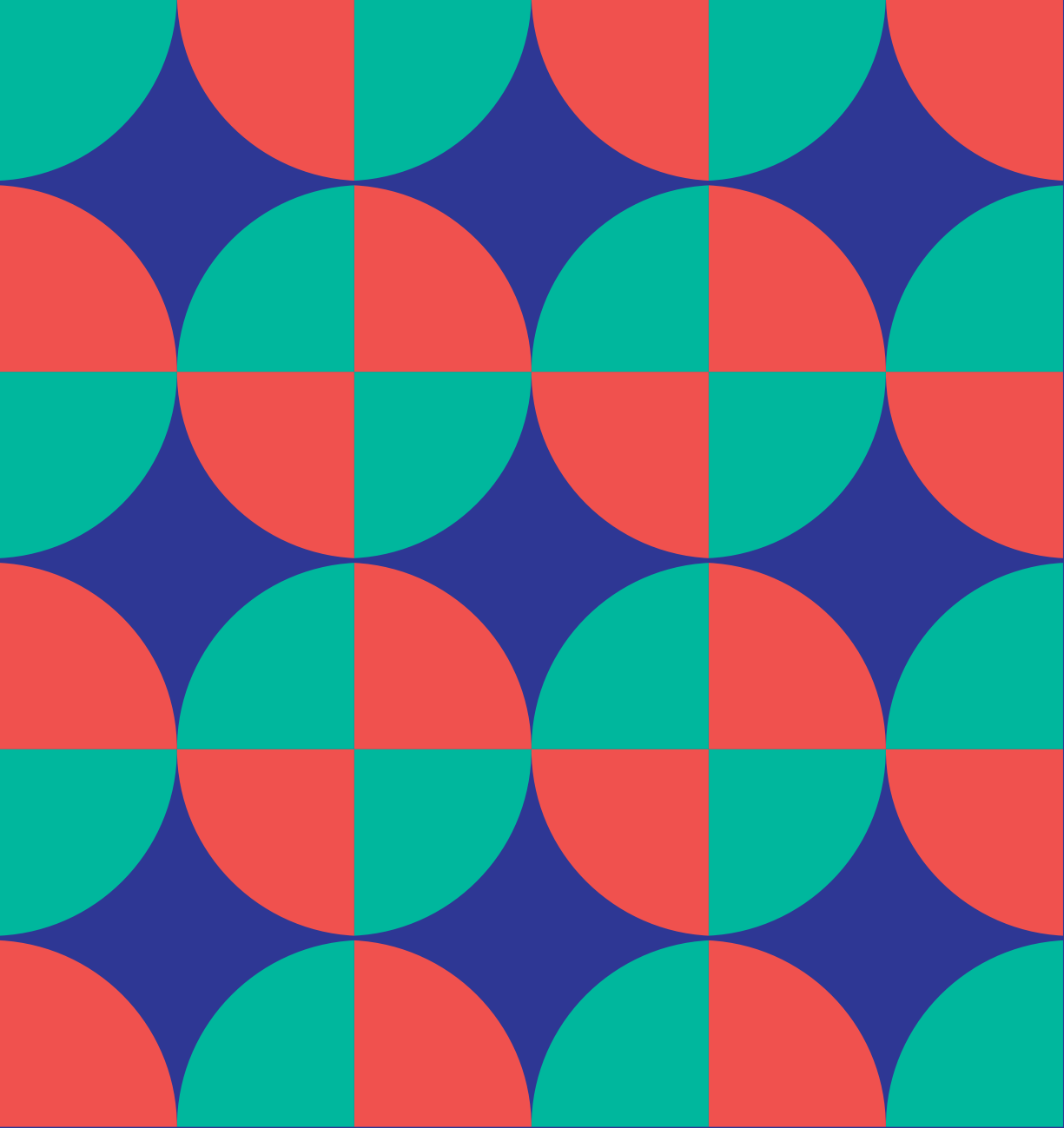
PARTICIPANTS OF THE WORKSHOP ON EXTREMISM AND COUNTER TERRORISM - NAIF ARAB UNIVERSITY FOR SECURITY SCIENCES

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: **ORGANIZATIONS:**

47

Prosecutor General's Office

Attorney General's Office

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Ministry of Islamic Affairs

Ministry of Education

Ministry of Youth, Sports and Community Development

Maldives Police Service

Maldives National Defence Force

Islamic University of Maldives

Independent Researchers (NGO)

Vilijoali (NGO)

WEAM (NGO)

Advocating for the Rights of Children (NGO)

Transparency Maldives (NGO)

Journey (NGO)