



Vocational Skills Development in the Context of Violent Extremism

Experts Workshop 16-17 March 2016, IHEID Geneva

Opening speech by Roger Denzer, Head of Staff of the Directorate and Member of the Directorate of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), on the 16th of March, IHEID Geneva. The spoken word is valid.

Ladies and gentlemen, Dear Partners, Dear Colleagues

On behalf of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, SDC, it is a pleasure for me to welcome you to this Experts Workshop on Vocational Skills Development in the Context of Violent Extremism.

I am glad to see that so many people have followed our invitation. What a vast experience is gathered here!

I believe this experts exchange is crucial: the topic, vocational skills development and violent extremism, is not a straightforward one. We need to deepen our understanding, by taking into account relevant research and good practice. How to learn better than by sharing research findings, lessons learnt and good practices with other experts?

At the end of these 2 days, I expect that our understanding will have advanced. We will know more on the extent and on how vocational skills development can make a contribution to addressing the root causes of violent extremism.

I would like to encourage you to share experiences, to listen and discuss, in order to draw lessons for one of today's most challenging issues of internal and foreign policy: how to prevent violent extremism through education and skills development? What evidence do you have on the potential of vocational skills development to build resilience? Are there good practices – and how can these be transferred to other countries and contexts?

This is what this meeting is about: to develop a common understanding on how skills development and employment promotion can strengthen resilience to violent extremism.

Violent Extremism and VSD

As you know, violent extremism is a phenomenon that is not entirely new and not exclusive to any region, political belief or system.

Research has been conducted on the drivers of violent extremism. Push and pull factors have been identified. But, despite few areas of consensus, there is still need for further research.

Also, there is no evidence on the pathways towards individual radicalization. What we do know is that economic, social and political exclusion could be factors leading people to feel injustice and thus could be conducive factors in the radicalization process

Over the past few years, the prevention of violent extremism has become a much-debated topic in development cooperation:

- Violence undermines peace and security, human rights and sustainable development itself. Violent extremism threatens to reverse much of the development progress made in recent decades.
- Development cooperation might help addressing the root causes of violent extremism with more justice and inclusion, less poverty and more perspectives for our beneficiaries.

As SDC, we can build on our experiences from fragile and post-conflict contexts and from programs addressing youth violence and crime. We can also put forward our efforts to increase employment and income and to enhance youth employment in order to diminish inequalities and improve economic and social inclusion.

But, I will come back to SDC's work later – however, I find it relevant to recall that our experiences are in line with the call from the UN to support efforts to adopt longer-term solutions rooted in addressing the underlying causes of radicalization and violent extremism.

International Framework

Indeed, the issue of preventing violent extremism was elevated to the top of the international agenda during the White House Countering Violent Extremism Summit in February 2015. Switzerland was part of it and has committed to act.

Our Swiss Minister of Foreign Affairs considers the prevention of violent extremism one of the major foreign policy tasks of our generation.

At the end of 2015, the UN plan of action to prevent violent extremism was released. The UN calls for a comprehensive approach, comprising

- not only essential security-based counter terrorism measures
- but also systematic preventive steps to address the underlying conditions that drive individuals to radicalize and join violent extremist groups.

What do we retain from the UN action plan for our exchange during this workshop?

1. First - there is no single pathway to violent extremism. Extremism flourishes when
 - human rights are violated,

- political space is shrunk,
 - aspirations for inclusion are ignored,
 - and when too many people – especially young people – lack prospects and meaning in their lives.
2. Among the elements to prevent violent extremism named in the UN action plan, one is especially relevant for this meeting: quality education and decent jobs.
 3. The action plan suggests further that: education, skills development and employment facilitation can play an important role in providing access to gainful employment. Equipping people with the skills needed to meet local labor demands through relevant education opportunities is key to unleashing the full economic potential of youth.

There is no need to convince us on this, nor on the 3 instruments: Education, skills development and employment facilitation are within SDC's priorities for the coming years and our experience in skills development date back for several decades.

4. However, the provision of education and jobs is not enough. For success, other essential elements have to be granted. These are:
 - the rule of law and
 - good governance, mainly focusing on political participation, efficiency, transparency, accountability and non-discrimination.
5. In the same line, as mentioned in the UN action plan; Young people, who constitute the majority of the population of an increasing number of countries today, are an asset. They cannot be neglected, but should be empowered to make a constructive contribution to the political and economic development of their societies and nations.
6. In our work, we have to pay special attention to the following conditions, which are conducive for violent extremism. It is
 - The failure to generate high and sustainable levels of growth,
 - The failure to create decent jobs for young people,
 - High poverty and unemployment
 - and high inequalities.
7. Finally, the absence of alternative employment opportunities can make violent extremist organizations an attractive source of income. It is thus clearly our task to take action on this!

Ladies and gentlemen, we have one and a half day to discuss open questions and share experiences with regards to vocational skills development in the context of violent extremism.

What is the role of vocational skills development in contexts, where violent extremism has already materialized? How can we better orient aid – including vocational skills development – to make it more effective in prevention? These are some of the questions to be addressed.

The result of this expert meeting shall contribute – not only to your organizations and SDC's future work - but also to the discussions on this topic at the Geneva Conference on Preventing Violent Extremism – the Way Forward. This conference is organized by the UN, in partnership with Switzerland on April 7 and 8 :

At the Geneva conference, key issues related to the UN Action Plan on Preventing violent extremism will be discussed. 'Education, skills development and employment facilitation' is one of the seven priorities for National Plans on Preventing violent extremism Plans and takes an important place therein.

The SDC work in PVE

As we have heard before, the prevention of violent extremism has become one of the priorities of Swiss foreign policy.

SDC is therefore one of the channels to implement it : SDC's long term development programs strive to tackle the root causes of social and economic exclusion, reasons believed to lead to radicalization.

SDC's main contribution to Preventing violent extremism is to tackle fragility and insecurity issues, to address societal grievances and the perception of economic, social and political exclusion and injustice and thus contribute to remove the breeding grounds of violence.

In many SDC partner countries fragility appears to people as being exposed to violence and abuse, be it by state or non-state actors, to corruption, legal uncertainty, discrimination and social marginalization. The state loses legitimacy and reliable leaders who care for the rights and needs of the people are lacking. Radicalization and to join violent groups appear as an alternative to the existing system.

SDC's strategy for the work in fragile contexts is to contribute to reforms supported by the state and the society, to peacebuilding and to functioning institutions in the service of the people, to strengthen crisis resilience. In various contexts, the SDC contributes to the improvement of the local governance mechanisms and decentralization processes. Decisions can only be taken in a violence free manner, when local, public and private actors have according mechanisms available.

SDC contributes to curb global risks in cooperation with other donors. The reference for DAC, World Bank and the UN development programs is the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States, a document signed also by 20 fragile states.

On the topic of today's meeting - one means of addressing many of the drivers of violent extremism is to align development policies with the Sustainable Development Goals, including the relevant goals for our discussions, being:

- ending poverty in all its forms everywhere (Goal 1);
- ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all (Goal 4);
- and promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all (Goal 8)

SDC is aligning its policies to the SDG's. One of our important objectives is to contribute to the political, social and economic inclusion of young people.

The improvement of the professional prospects of young people represents a cornerstone of our engagement. Let me say some words about SDC's approach to vocational education:

In the partner countries, where SDC works in vocational skills development, its programs have a strong focus on providing access to relevant vocational training for young people, and with an attention to the vulnerable groups in society.

Equipped with better skills, the "employability" of graduates increases and access to gainful employment is eased. Thus vocational training can contribute - in the longer term - to more economic inclusion.

It is important to stress that we see the purpose of vocational training not only in providing occupational competence (i.e. the immediate technical skills to fulfill a job profile), but also in the personal development and increased self-esteem and in enhanced educational mobility, resulting in more social inclusion. We believe that the provision of social skills and life skills can make an important contribution to reduce violence and build resilience in our partner societies.

In a typical Swiss approach of vocational training, the private sector – and other societal actors - are closely involved: we believe that the private sector can play a crucial role in formulating the skills demand, offering vocational training and creating jobs. Work-based learning and apprenticeship schemes can contribute to young trainees increased self-esteem, responsibility and sense of inclusion. And with a better skilled work force, the private sector is equipped to create more added value and growth.

In West Africa, for example, SDC supports the valorization of traditional apprenticeship schemes and their introduction in the formal education framework in fragile contexts.

In the Western Balkans, our efforts are targeted toward youth employment. By providing relevant vocational training opportunities and matching the graduates with

the demand from the private sector, prospects for employment increase. With the introduction of apprenticeship schemes, the interaction with the private sector is further enhanced.

And in Honduras, for example, we work with young people growing up in areas of main cities where there is a high rate of violence. Training opportunities help to facilitate the integration of youth into the labour market, providing an alternative to the deceptive lure of youth gangs and organised crime. By means of a comprehensive training programme, young people are taught general life skills in addition to technical know-how, as part of an effort to promote social cohesion and prevent violence in a country that has one of the highest homicide rates in the world.

Vocational training can contribute to more employment and more income opportunities. However, this is just one instrument and field of action of Swiss development cooperation that contributes to addressing the root causes of radicalization. As mentioned before, SDC also focuses its work on the reduction of fragility, supporting transition processes, strengthening of good governance and the respect of human rights - approaches which are equally important.

Conclusion

We have seen that Vocational Training and access to employment is one element of a holistic approach that helps open prospects for young people in countries affected by violent extremism.

Switzerland is increasing its funding for programs in the field of basic education and vocational skills development on four continents in the coming years, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected regions and in countries susceptible to violent extremism. As SDC, we have thus a high interest in learning from your best practice and research. This experts exchange will help us to deepen our understanding of the key elements to take into account in our Vocational Skills activities in partner countries affected by the phenomenon. We are looking forward to a stimulating exchange.

It will now give the floor to our experts from academia and practice from all over the world and wish you a productive and enlightening workshop.

I hereby declare this meeting open and thank you for your attention.