



Lessons Learned from the Fostering Peaceful Communities in Morocco Project



October 2018

Executive Summary

The Fostering Peaceful Communities in Morocco (FPCM) project worked with Moroccan religious and community leaders to conduct community-level countering violent extremism activities. This report explores lessons learned from FPCM with the aim of contributing to the evidence base for countering violent extremism (CVE), and providing recommendations for other organizations working on CVE in Morocco and elsewhere. The primary lessons learned from FPCM are:

1. **Incorporating Religion and Religious Leaders in CVE Programs:** Incorporating religion and religious actors into CVE activities increased the resonance of messages, helped connect to new beneficiaries, and enhanced impact. However, there are legal restrictions and cultural and political sensitivities around religion in Morocco which required a careful and contextually-aware approach to this engagement.
2. **Contextualizing the Program:** The more contextualized activities were—i.e. relevant not just to Moroccan heritage but also to the cultural and practical realities of each target community—the more impactful and successful they were.
3. **Implementing a Multi-Stakeholder CVE Approach:** In bringing together religious and community leaders, interaction alone did not equal cooperation. Building active and positive partnerships between these different actors, as well as with other community stakeholders, required extensive trust- and relationship-building efforts by FPCM throughout the project period.
4. **Integrating Gender Strategies:** FPCM needed an explicit and comprehensive strategy for gender equality and women's engagement that addressed all levels of the project. Without a gender strategy and advocates for that strategy within the program, simply including female participants was not a guarantee that CVE activities would reach women and girls at the community level.
5. **CVE Capacity Building:** FPCM participants required not just technical understanding of extremism and CVE but also capacity and skills in communications, facilitation, project management, analysis and research, and monitoring and evaluation to effectively carry out CVE work.
6. **Collecting and Sharing Information:** While participants were able to monitor outputs from community activities, they needed additional support to capture information on outcomes and impact. Knowledge exchange among participants and between participants and other CVE stakeholders was most effective with a systematic approach that used a diverse set of methods for sharing information, including in-person and online exchanges.

FPCM was funded by the Department of State's Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations and implemented by Creative Associates International. The first phase of the project started in November 2016 and ended in May 2018, with a second phase from June 2018 to October 2018.

Contents

Executive Summary	i
Introduction.....	1
Methodology.....	2
Lessons Learned.....	3
Lessons 1: Incorporating Religion and Religious Leaders in CVE Programs	3
Lesson 2: Contextualizing the Program.....	6
Lesson 3: Implementing a Multi-Stakeholder CVE Approach.....	9
Lesson 4: Integrating Gender Strategies	11
Lesson 5: CVE Capacity Building.....	13
Lesson 6: Collecting and Sharing Information	15
Conclusion and Recommendations.....	18

Introduction

The Fostering Peaceful Communities in Morocco (FPCM) project was developed with the aim of exploring how best to engage religious leaders in countering violent extremism (CVE) efforts at the community level in partnership with local civil society, and to test whether their inclusion can enhance interventions. The central thesis of the project was that if religious and community leaders gain capacity in CVE and work together, their community activities will be more effective in addressing the drivers of extremism and increasing community rejection of radical discourse.

In support of this aim, FPCM—funded by the Department of State’s Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations and implemented by Creative Associates International (Creative)—worked with a group of religious and community leaders from Casablanca, Fès, Beni Mellal, and Salé. The project approach had three components: First, FPCM trained the participants in CVE principles and program design; second, participant teams implemented grant-funded projects that addressed local drivers of extremism identified in community assessments; and third, FPCM collected and shared lessons learned from the project with CVE practitioners in Morocco and internationally.

There were two phases of FPCM, one 19-month phase from November 2016 to May 2018, and a five-month phase from June to October 2018. During the second phase, FPCM conducted another round of training, community grants, and knowledge exchange activities while incorporating lessons learned from the initial phase.

The FPCM participant group was comprised of four community groups—one each from Casablanca, Fès, Beni Mellal, and Salé—made up of three or four individuals each, about evenly divided between religious leaders and community leaders. The group was around 70 percent men and 30 percent women.

The community leaders included representatives of civil society organizations as well as independent community activists. The religious leaders included trained junior *oulemas* (scholars), Islamic education teachers, members of Sufi brotherhoods, and one *morchida* (female religious guide). These religious and community leaders represented the core of FPCM and were central to all three components of the program.

For the first phase of CVE projects, each group developed programs to address local drivers of radicalization:

- In Beni Mellal, the participants worked with underprivileged youth to improve their sense of civic responsibility and citizenship, as well as to advocate for religious and ideological tolerance.
- In Casablanca, the group trained male and female students at the Hassan II Mosque School of Islamic Sciences in CVE and “soft skills,” such as facilitation and communications, that will equip the next generation of religious leaders to build resilience to radicalization.

Lessons Learned from the Fostering Peaceful Communities in Morocco Project

- In Fès, the group addressed issues of youth marginalization, hate speech, and violence by teaching male and female high school students about nonviolence, tolerance, and human rights.
- In Salé, the participants built the capacity of mothers and young women to detect signs of radicalization and risky behaviors in their families and their communities, and to intervene to protect their at-risk loved ones from recruitment by violent extremist groups.

During the second phase, the four groups implemented short-term community projects aimed at building on previous efforts and lessons learned:

- In Beni Mellal, the group built the CVE capacity and confidence of 25 marginalized youth and trained them in designing and implementing community initiatives. They then worked with their beneficiaries to lead arts, athletics, and environmental projects aimed at fostering cohesion and offering positive opportunities for disaffected youth to participate in community life.
- In Casablanca, the participants engaged both students of the Hassan II Mosque School and vulnerable youth from the community in CVE, facilitation, and communication, and helped those beneficiaries produce a short video to raise awareness of and support for tolerance and peace.
- In Fès, the group promoted tolerance by engaging 30 youth in CVE, peer education, awareness-raising, and leadership, and worked with those beneficiaries to develop a short film to sensitize 1000 others in the values of nonviolence and inclusion.
- In Salé, the group empowered 120 adolescents at risk of radicalization, helping to channel their energies toward effecting positive change and away from extremism. They also built the capacity of 20 trainers in CVE, so as to establish a sustainable network of CVE leaders.

This report presents the lessons learned from FPCM related to including religious leaders in CVE efforts, contextualization of the approach, multi-sector CVE approaches, gender inclusion, capacity building, and knowledge sharing within the Moroccan context, and recommendations for other implementers and donors working in this field.

Methodology

To develop this report, the FPCM program team identified primary research questions, the answers to which would be useful for informing future iterations or adaptations of the program, and for contributing to the broader CVE community of practice's base of evidence. These questions included:

- Which interventions were effective, and which were not? Why?
- How can religious leaders be more effectively involved in CVE programming?
- What skills and knowledge do religious and community leaders require to be effective CVE practitioners?
- How can CVE programs foster cooperation and partnerships among different CVE stakeholders?
- How applicable are international CVE best practices to the Moroccan context?

Within this framework, the FPCM team reexamined the assumptions embedded in the program's design, reviewed project documents—such as grantee reports and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) data—and interviewed project staff and participants. The program also convened three workshops for FPCM participants over the course of project implementation to discuss their experiences and what they learned.

From this research, FPCM distilled six primary lessons. For each lesson, the report provides context on program activities, examines the lessons from those interventions, and provides recommendations for future programs.

The lessons learned from the FPCM program are specific to Morocco and to the four communities in which the program operated. For CVE programs in other countries and communities, the recommendations should be adapted to the local context.

Lessons Learned

Lessons 1: Incorporating Religion and Religious Leaders in CVE Programs Approach and Interventions

FPCM incorporated religion and religious leaders in the program in three ways:

- 1) The program engaged seven religious leaders as program participants, building their capacity and supporting their community CVE projects.
- 2) Community CVE projects integrated religious content into activities, such as by including passages from the Quran and the Sunnah in workshops and conducting trainings on religious and spiritual dimensions.
- 3) FPCM participants worked with religious actors and institutions as secondary beneficiaries, that is, as participants and partners in their community projects.

Lessons Learned

Religious leaders as participants

One of the fundamental assumptions of the FPCM program was that religious actors have the moral authority and the access to communities needed to be credible messengers for nonviolence, moderation, and community cohesion, such that they can effectively counter violent extremist organizations' radicalization and recruitment efforts.

FPCM found, however, that the situation in Morocco was more complex. While male and female religious leaders do generally possess legitimacy on matters of faith and have physical access to communities through Quranic schools and mosques, this wasn't enough. Individuals at the greatest risk of radicalization were usually disconnected or disaffected from mainstream religious and educational institutions, meaning that to reach this population, religious leaders needed communication, outreach, and facilitation skills that they did not already possess. Another factor was the generation gap: youth are usually at the greatest risk of radicalization, but religious leaders, often older adults, are not well-equipped to connect to young people.

Additionally, in Morocco the category of “religious leader” is a large and diverse group of people and positions, some of whom were better able to engage in CVE than others. Imams may possess the greatest authority in terms of position, but they do not have the time or (as employees of the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs) the autonomy to actively engage in an intensive CVE program organized by an international NGO. They are also less mobile than other religious leaders, as regulations require imams to remain in mosques.

FPCM engaged other types of religious leaders, such as junior *oulemas* (expert scholars of Islam), teachers of religious instruction in high schools, members of Sufi brotherhoods, and *morchidate* (female religious guides).¹ These actors did not hold the spiritual authority of an imam within their communities, but they had more liberty to engage in the program and partner with civil society and other actors, and they brought a variety of different skill sets and approaches that enhanced the project. The latest reforms in Morocco expanded the role of *oulemas* as liaisons with civil society and the community, which made them especially well-suited to participating in the program.

In many cases, the religious leaders’ role on their project was to show that the projects’ values and principles values were in line with Islam, and that religion rejects violence, as well as to advise on the use of religious content. One civil society leader from Fès described how the religious leader took on the role of leading trainings on CVE because of his ability to integrate Quranic text and interpretation, noting “the impact of the session he facilitated was even greater than if an expert in VE did it.”

Religious messages as content

In FPCM’s community CVE activities, religious content—such as trainings on faith and spirituality and passages from the Quran or hadith about tolerance and peace—resonated with the targeted beneficiaries and was a useful addition to the programs. For example, many activities began with a recitation from the Quran. In Fès, a girl from an ultra-conservative family led one of these recitations, which made a statement about the role of women in Islam for the whole group of beneficiaries while helping that girl build her confidence and foster her integration with her age group and her community. The Casablanca team also selected a female student to make a Quranic recitation, and in the context of the School for Islamic Sciences this decision sent a particularly strong message about women’s role in the religious establishment.

FPCM’s original project design envisioned a counter-messaging component, where religious leaders would advocate for nonviolence and tolerance and speak out against extremism, but this type of activity was not possible due to restrictions in Moroccan regulations, and to a lesser extent because of problems with capacity and coordination.

Moroccan law stipulates that civil society groups may not work on religious issues—outside universities, the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs and the Rabita Mohammadia des Oulemas are the only bodies with the right to discuss religion in the public sphere. Because FPCM’s community projects were implemented by civil society organizations working in

¹ *Morchidate* are responsible for answering religious questions, supporting literacy programs, providing legal guidance on topics such as the recently-reformed family law, and other community engagement work.

partnership with participating religious leaders, without a formal partnership with the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, they needed to be careful about addressing religion directly. The level of sensitivity varied from community to community: in Fès, the group barely incorporated religion at all out of concern for these regulations, but in Salé they were able to conduct a training on moderation and tolerance in Islam in the presence of a visiting member of the Council of Oulemas.

Where the participants found opportunities to incorporate religious messages within the bounds of the law, they still sometimes struggled with implementation due to issues of capacity and coordination. Neither the religious leaders nor the community leaders had conducted a project like this before and were unfamiliar with how to marry the two disciplines.

Additionally, because civil society organizations were officially the implementers of those projects, if there was uncertainty about roles or disputes over leadership it was the traditional, non-religious civil society approach that prevailed. So, for example, in Beni Mellal the team planned a mural activity, where the original idea was for the participating youth to paint Islam-inspired messages of peace and tolerance. However, disagreements within the Beni Mellal team disrupted communications while planning this activity, and ultimately no religious messages were incorporated into the murals.

Religious actors as beneficiaries and partners

The Casablanca team's project trained students at the Hassan II Mosque School for Islamic Sciences in CVE fundamentals, the legal framework around CVE, and the "soft skills" needed to carry out CVE work, such as communications and facilitation. As students in a prestigious school, these students tended to be sheltered and somewhat isolated; as one Casablanca participant remarked, "We prepare our religious students for everything except reality—through these workshops, we can now do so." One impactful activity in the Casablanca project, therefore, was a trip to Salé to attend their project's closing ceremony, which broadened the religious students' horizons and introduced them to CVE programming on the ground.

Another challenge in Casablanca was the project's high level of sensitivity. The Hassan II Mosque, which houses the school, is one of the most important mosques in Morocco, and there is a higher level of political sensitivity around working there than there would be in a secular institution. The Casablanca team found themselves weighing every word in every training and event they conducted, careful not to push the envelope too far. The success of the project is in large part due to the knowledge of the Casablanca team—which included the president of the Alumni Association—about the institution and their respect for the sensitivities of working there.

Working with the Hassan II Mosque School for Islamic Science also supported one of FPCM's primary assumptions: that the moral authority of religious leaders made them particularly effective advocates for peace and tolerance. The Casablanca team witnessed this dynamic at their roundtable on gender and CVE, where the school director's remarks on the importance of women's rights carried a great deal of weight with the audience of students and religious actors.

In FPCM's second phase, the Beni Mellal team found that engaging the Azilal local Council of Oulemas in their community activities yielded positive outcomes. A representative of the

Council participated in the summer camp program for marginalized youth, facilitating sessions on VE and CVE, and speaking with youth about their lives, religion, and other topics. Another representative of the Council later trained the beneficiaries and conducted a focus group; these young men and women said they really appreciated her contributions and her support.

Recommendations

- Look beyond “official” religious actors like imams; other types of religious leaders can be more effective and engaged CVE practitioners.
- Build religious leaders’ skills in areas like communications, facilitation, and personal development as well as their technical knowledge of CVE.
- Incorporate religious content in a context-sensitive manner, understanding that it may not be feasible or appropriate to address religion directly.
- Formally partner with the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs or the Rabita Mohammadia des Oulemas to secure permission to incorporate religious content into activities.
- Establish a clear structure for leadership of community activities with defined roles and responsibilities for religious leaders as well as community leaders.
- Incorporate field work for students of Islamic sciences to see community engagement work firsthand.
- Develop a highly sensitive approach to working in religious institutions.

Lesson 2: Contextualizing the Program

Approach and Interventions

From the beginning, FPCM worked to ensure the program was tailored to the Moroccan context. One key method for contextualizing the program was for the Moroccan staff on the ground to lead implementation of activities, from selection of participants to oversight of community projects. Similarly, for the training materials used in the program, Creative and the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy engaged Moroccan staff and consultants to refine and localize the facilitators’ guide and contracted Moroccan experts to lead the trainings.

Participants conducted assessments of the drivers of extremism in their communities, and designed projects based on the findings of those assessments, so as to ensure the interventions were responsive to community needs and owned by the participants. FPCM also engaged Moroccan government institutions in the selection of participants, specifically the Rabita Mohammadia des Oulemas, a religious training and research institution.

Lessons Learned

That contextualization was important to the success of the program goes without saying— it's a well-known and often repeated maxim in the field of international development. But for FPCM, there were a few specific experiences with contextualization that are worth highlighting.

Engagement with the Rabita Mohammadia des Oulemas (the Rabita) was essential. In addition to needing official permission to operate in Morocco, as would be the case for any program, FPCM would not have been able to work with religious leaders without the Rabita's authorization. The Rabita nominated most of the religious leaders who participated in the program, and since those individuals were members of the Rabita, they needed the organization's permission to participate. To secure the Rabita's cooperation in participant selection and authorization, FPCM staff met with their leadership several times to introduce the program, shared training materials for review, and provided periodic updates on activities.

Activities that reflected and integrated Moroccan heritage were more impactful than those that didn't, resulting in more focused discussions, stronger cohesion within the participant group, and improved learning outcomes. Moroccan heritage might, for example, be represented by a participant-led Sufi song performance during a training, communal Moroccan-style lunches, and the use of traditional poetry and music alongside modern hip hop at events. Another means of integrating heritage was in the choice of training and



FPCM participants and staff at a workshop in Ouirgane, Morocco

workshop locations: participants had the most positive feedback for the workshop held in Ouirgane, in the High Atlas Mountains than for trainings in larger cities such as Casablanca and Rabat. Being in a remote, rural area, they better understood the implementation challenges faced by their peers in the Beni Mellal region, and they felt more connected to their work.

As alluded to above, the sensitivities around CVE in Morocco vary from community to community. In Fès the participants were particularly careful because violent extremist groups are widespread in the neighborhoods where they worked, Sidi Boujida and Jnane El Ward, and authorities dismantled a terrorist cell just a few blocks from the civil society organization's headquarters. Talking openly about CVE could have put the organization and its beneficiaries at risk of retaliation from local extremist groups, and so they focused on the less-sensitive topics of tolerance and nonviolence.

The Beni Mellal team faced additional challenges specific to their region, a rural, mountainous, and sparsely populated area. Months of snowy and rainy weather during the project period delayed several activities. The three members of the Beni Mellal team were based in different towns in that region that were an hour or two apart from each other, which made it difficult for them to meet regularly. The team decided to conduct activities in several towns and villages throughout the region, including Khenifra, Ait Ishaq, and Mrirt in addition to the town of Beni Mellal because the town of Beni Mellal was already covered by a European Union-funded CVE project. This approach allowed the project to reach a larger number of individuals, but it ultimately diluted its impact—rather than a series of activities that raised awareness or capacity over time, this project was comprised of a number of one-off events.

In their phase two project, the Beni Mellal team adjusted their geographic targeting to reduce the logistical challenges and increase their impact. Instead of spreading activities around the region, they brought beneficiaries from several neighborhoods together at one location for their summer camp activity, and then worked with those beneficiaries to conduct activities that engaged their respective neighborhoods. The Beni Mellal team engaged the same set of beneficiaries throughout their project to maximize impact, but in selecting these beneficiaries still preserved some of the geographic diversity that they had in their first project.

Another contextual challenge related to timing. FPCM's second phase took place over the summer, when most community centers, schools, and government offices are closed, and many individuals engaged in the project were on vacation. This meant that grantees could not simply continue their activities from the first phase, they had to significantly re-design their approach to find or create new venues for convening beneficiaries.

Ultimately, all four grantees organized variations of summer camps or summer schools, where they brought beneficiaries together over several days for education and skill-building activities. The grantees had to expend additional effort to secure the participation of female beneficiaries in their camps and reassure families that their daughters and sisters would be safe and well cared-for while away from home. The camps were more expensive than the shorter trainings conducted in the first phase of the program, but they did prove to be an effective approach to engaging youth during the summer months.

Recommendations

- Root program design in a thorough understanding of the context, down to the community level, and engage local stakeholders, such as staff and participants, in design whenever possible.
- Engage with relevant government institutions that oversee religious affairs or religious actors to secure their buy-in and cooperation.
- Recognize the potential for cultural heritage to resonate with participants and enhance their engagement in the program.
- If conducting activities in summer months, consider summer schools or camps as a means for engaging youth.

Lesson 3: Implementing a Multi-Stakeholder CVE Approach Approach and Interventions

Experts often recommend “whole of community” approaches to CVE, and while FPCM did not have the scope or resources for a truly holistic approach, the program sought to build new partnerships between different groups of stakeholders. In terms of primary beneficiaries, FPCM brought together religious leaders and community leaders from the four target communities and put them in community teams to implement CVE activities. At the community level, FPCM provided a framework and a space within which community teams engaged other actors in their work, such as local government officials, schools, religious institutions, parents’ associations, and other civil society groups. FPCM also engaged the International University of Rabat in phase two of the project, as part of knowledge exchange activities.

Lessons Learned

One of the most important lessons from FPCM was that interaction does not equal cooperation. In Morocco, religious actors and civil society have little experience with collaboration, and indeed there has historically been a level of distrust between these sectors, due to political and ideological differences. The participating religious and community leaders each had their own distinct views of the world and approaches to problem-solving, and while they may have had a shared desire to reduce violent extremism, their interests and goals were not always compatible.

Personal, face-to-face engagement between participants was essential to building trust, and so workshops and trainings served a dual purpose: fostering positive working relationships as well as building capacity. In between these meetings, the FPCM team continually worked to maintain the participant network and mediate conflicts as they arose, by phone, email, and in person. Social media, such as Facebook and WhatsApp, were very helpful in maintaining relations over the course of the program. Yet some participants decided not to continue engagement with FPCM for the second phase, at least in part because of conflicts with others in their teams.



A training exercise with religious and community leaders.

There were also challenges engaging multiple stakeholders at the secondary beneficiary level. Some schools, for example, initially refused to participate in the Fès team’s activity. The Fès team secured the schools’ participation after reaching out to the parents’ association—but even then, one school principal would not allow his students to attend the project’s arts exhibition. Participants were unable to engage with the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, as it rarely partners with new organizations and has its own programs. Some groups were able to

reach out to local government officials, but weren't always successful in establishing a partnership; participants recommended that Creative lead outreach with local government at the start of the project, to pave the way for engagement with grantees.

Despite these challenges, FPCM found that multi-stakeholder approaches generally yielded positive results, opening up new opportunities and lending credibility to the project. The Fès team's engagement of the parents' association was an excellent example, as this organization had the leverage and influence to convince the school to allow their children to participate in the program.

In Beni Mellal, the team engaged several other civil society groups in the region, which helped them access different towns in what is a sparsely populated rural area and brought in additional capacities and technical skills. They also engaged with the Council of Oulemas during phase two of the project, as described above, and established an informal partnership with the Ministry of Youth and Sport, which gave them access to youth centers and other Ministry facilities.

In Salé, the team held a roundtable with the mayor's office, the Islamic Local Council, the Islamic Affairs Ministry's regional delegation, the Education Ministry's regional delegation, and the Municipality, and then worked with these groups to develop and disseminate recommendations for CVE planning. During the second phase of the project, the Salé team cooperated with the Ministry of Youth and Sport to implement their summer camp, which allowed them to greatly increase the number of beneficiaries they reached, provided institutional support, and gave them access to the broader organization.

FPCM was also able to engage community stakeholders in novel ways. In Casablanca, FPCM's partner was the Alumni Association of the Hassan II Mosque School; this organization was an unusual partner in that it had little experience in program management or CVE, much less than a traditional civil society organization. But because of the Alumni Association's relationship with the Hassan II Mosque School, it was able to secure a partnership with the school to train students there—the first time that the Hassan II Mosque School has agreed to participate in a program of this type.

Recommendations

- Allocate considerable time and resources to building partnerships and strengthening trust between different stakeholders throughout the lifetime of the project.
- Consider non-traditional partners and novel roles for organizations and individuals in the program, such as municipalities and local elected officials, alumni and parents' associations, and others.

Lesson 4: Integrating Gender Strategies

Approach and Interventions

FPCM's gender strategy focused primarily on women and girls' inclusion, with some awareness-raising of gender issues. The program worked toward gender parity when selecting participants;² a Moroccan expert presented on gender and CVE at one of the trainings; and the program encouraged participants to engage women as well as men in their community projects.

The Chief of Party for the FPCM program is herself an expert in gender equality and women's empowerment, and Creative engaged program staff in a company-wide gender working group. FPCM also convened an International Women's Day event with female participants to discuss the challenges they face as women CVE practitioners in a field dominated by male experts, as well as the opportunities for strengthening gender mainstreaming in countering and preventing violent extremism.

Participants had a great deal of autonomy in how they designed their projects, so the level of gender sensitivity in those projects varied: the Salé project specifically focused on women and girls; the Casablanca and Fès teams both worked with students and engaged equal numbers of men and women; and the Beni Mellal team was initially resistant to including women in their activities at all, due to the misconception that women were not primary targets of violent extremist organizations. In the second phase of the project, all four groups made a concerted effort to include female beneficiaries in their activities and improve their approach to gender sensitivity.

Lessons Learned

FPCM found that its gender approach was insufficient, and that the program should have incorporated a more explicit and concrete gender strategy that covered every level of the program. An approach to gender that covered staffing, participant selection, capacity building, grants management, and monitoring and evaluation would have more effectively ensured that activities addressed the needs of women and girls as well as men and boys.

Another finding from the program was that the participants themselves served as the best advocates for a gender strategy. The Salé team advanced a nuanced, progressive understanding of the role of women and girls in CVE, setting up "mothers' schools" that equipped mothers to take on roles as agents of peace and stability in their families and communities, and to help young women protect themselves against recruitment and radicalization. In future programs, the Salé team expressed an interest in engaging men in the program as well.

When the Beni Mellal team expressed their belief that women were not relevant to CVE, other participants from Salé, Fès, and Casablanca spoke out to convince them that women were indeed essential to their work. They were more convincing advocates than the FPCM staff would have

² The original list of candidates for the project was balanced between men and women, but several of the female candidates dropped out before the start of training because they weren't able to travel as frequently as the program demanded. Two other female participants dropped out later because of personal and professional conflicts, leading to a majority-male participant group.

been. The Beni Mellal team later organized an activity intended to target women in Mrirt, though men were also included—female beneficiaries brought family members with them, and other people from the community also showed up. In phase two, the Beni Mellal team committed to including girls in their summer camp, which required additional effort to convince beneficiaries’ families to allow them to attend.

Participants’ sensitivity to gender issues did not always correlate with their own gender: some of the male participants were vocal advocates of including women and girls, and not all of the female participants were interested in integrating gender into their projects.

In terms of measuring and monitoring the impact of activities on women and girls, FPCM found that disaggregation of indicator data was insufficient. Qualitative M&E tools were more useful at capturing this information. For example, FPCM conducted a Most Significant Change session with the program participants, and through this activity learned that the program had had a transformative impact on the women: several of the female participants reported that the trainings had helped build their confidence and encouraged them to take a more active leadership role in FPCM and in their work outside the program.

“I had very limited knowledge, and confidence before this project. I couldn’t express my opinion nor interact in legal and administrative matters. After the start of the training courses I was able to: start positive and critical thinking, adapt a few communication tools, express an opinion. I am now able to work with a different range of people. I had the opportunity to change lives and impact others...these training courses meant the rebirth of me a new person.”

Excerpt from a female participant’s Most Significant Change story

Recommendations

- Develop a comprehensive and flexible gender strategy that addresses every level of implementation.
- Identify champions for gender equality among participants and support them as advocates for women’s inclusion in CVE.
- Incorporate gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation approaches, as well as qualitative measurement tools, to capture the role of gender at the level of the project and for participants’ work in their communities.

Lesson 5: CVE Capacity Building

Approach and Interventions

FPCM conducted two CVE trainings for participants: one on CVE fundamentals and one on CVE program design. Within those trainings, there were modules on conducting assessments of violent extremism (VE) drivers, program management, gender, and basic monitoring and evaluation. FPCM worked with the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy to develop the curriculum for these CVE trainings. In response to requests from participants, FPCM worked with the Fès team to organize a training on facilitation. The goal of this training was to equip participants to serve as trainers and facilitators of activities in their community CVE projects. During the second phase of the project, FPCM also organized a training on M&E to further build participants' capacity to gather outcome- and impact-level data, and produced a handbook on facilitation for use by participants.

Most of the community projects also included elements of capacity building, in addition to awareness-raising, arts and sports activities, and roundtables. In the first phase, the Fès team conducted six trainings on nonviolent communication, human rights, and peaceful conflict resolution; the Salé team conducted 12 workshops on a variety of topics related to CVE, such as social media, the legal framework, and the religious and spiritual dimension; the Casablanca team did eight training on CVE, life skills, communications, and nonviolence; and the Beni Mellal team conducted a workshop on citizenship. In the second phase, all four groups trained youth in summer camps, and the Salé grantee also did a training-of-trainers for their staff working in the local branch as well as in other branches of the organization.

Lessons Learned

Participant Capacity Building Activities

One assumption of the original program design was that training in CVE—what it is and how to do it—would be sufficient to equip participants to carry out CVE programs. However, FPCM found that there were other “hidden capacities” needed for effective CVE work, particularly in the areas of assessment, program management, facilitation, grants management, and M&E.

FPCM called on the participating religious and community leaders to lead all stages of their CVE activities: assessing drivers of extremism, designing projects, managing grants, leading workshops, and monitoring and evaluating results. This approach meant strong local ownership of community CVE activities, and participants remarked about the value of designing their own interventions versus being asked to implement someone else's idea.

However, participants sometimes struggled to carry out work for which they were not fully prepared. Some of the civil society partners were small, nascent organizations who needed significant support from FPCM to apply for funding as well as to conduct activities. During the first phase of the project, M&E for community projects tended to be basic and focused on outputs, because it was a new field for the participants. The demands of the project were particularly difficult for religious leaders, as they had much less experience in organizing events, leading trainings, and other tasks than the community leaders.

One major gap in capacity related to the community assessments. The participants, working in teams, designed and carried out these assessments of VE drivers, but none of them had a background in social science research. The assessments they produced, therefore, have methodological issues related to sampling and survey instrument design. While they capture some information on perceptions of VE—and they did help to build participant ownership of the process and the community projects—they are not reliable sources of information on drivers of extremism or citizen attitudes around radical ideologies. FPCM trained participants on how to conduct and design assessments, but a few days of study were not sufficient.

Participants were aware of their gaps in capacity, and requested additional trainings—the facilitation and M&E trainings came out of one of these requests, and they were among the most impactful activities of the program. FPCM did not, however, have the time or resources to build capacity in every area the participants identified, and at the end of the second phase of the project they said there were still areas they needed additional capacity building, particularly in M&E and data collection approaches.

“The training program made me a person capable of training beneficiaries.”

*A religious leader from
Casablanca*

Community Project Capacity Building Activities

FPCM relied on participatory training methodologies in its trainings, and in their community projects participants adopted the same interactive style to great effect. More commonly in Morocco, learning is trainer-centered, so using a novel, participant-centered approach increased beneficiaries’ enthusiasm and motivation throughout the activities. Training approaches that incorporated arts activities were also particularly useful when working with youth; one weakness with the Casablanca project was that it did not incorporate art.

Recommendations

- CVE programs, particularly ones involving religious leaders, should include robust capacity building activities that cover a variety of topics, such program management, M&E, assessments, communications, facilitation, and grants management, in addition to trainings focused on CVE principles and approaches.
- For work that requires technical expertise, such as community assessments or M&E, provide additional technical assistance to supplement participant training.
- Capacity building programs should be flexible enough to respond to participant requests, if they identify an area where additional capacity building is needed.

Lesson 6: Collecting and Sharing Information

Approach and Interventions

Knowledge-sharing was a core component of FPCM, with the aim of contributing to the evidence base for the global CVE community of practice and encouraging the multiplication of quality local CVE efforts. Throughout the project period, FPCM conducted monitoring and evaluation (M&E) activities to measure outcomes and impact, such as surveys, focus groups, interviews, and Most Significant Change sessions. During phase one of the project, M&E focused on participant-level outcomes, and in the second phase FPCM shifted to a focus on beneficiaries of community grants.

Efforts to share knowledge on project outcomes and lessons learned were two pronged: exchange among the core group of FPCM participants, and exchange with other CVE practitioners in Morocco and elsewhere in the world. For the former, FPCM facilitated information-sharing in person, through regular meetings, site-visits, and workshops, and virtually, using social media tools like WhatsApp, Yammer, and Facebook. For the latter, the program used social media, conducted presentations and meetings with other CVE stakeholders in Morocco, organized a visit to Washington, DC for a group of participants to present their work to US-based stakeholders, and held a symposium in Rabat on the role of community actors in CVE.

Lessons Learned

Knowledge Collection

At the participant level, FPCM gathered useful information on religious and community leaders' changes in knowledge and perception. Conducting several rounds of surveys—one at the beginning of the program, one after the training, one during community project implementation, and one at the end of the program—helped the project team understand how the FPCM had impacted participants' and their work over the course of implementation. The Most Significant Change session was particularly useful at capturing qualitative information on outcomes.

At community level, FPCM found it more difficult to capture data on impact and adapted the M&E approach in phase two to address those challenges. In phase one, participants collected information on outputs, such as number of beneficiaries, but struggled to report outcomes or change in their beneficiaries' attitudes or behavior. In part this was due to low capacity in M&E, as noted above; the participants didn't always understand what kind of information to collect, or how to collect it.



The FPCM delegation in Washington, DC

There was also reportedly a cultural tendency to focus on the number of activities and beneficiaries, rather than looking at outcomes and impact. The Most Significant Change session with participants helped address this issue, as it demonstrated a simple approach to understanding how their projects changed their beneficiaries—three of the four participant groups organized their own Most Significant Change activities as part of their community projects. To capture more robust quantitative data on impact, participants would have benefitted from more training and technical assistance from FPCM.

During phase two, in addition to conducting a training on M&E for participants so they could improve their grants' approaches to data collection, FPCM also brought on board an M&E expert to provide additional support. This M&E expert developed survey instruments to measure beneficiary knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to VE, conducted community assessments at the beginning and end of grant activities, and mentored participants as they conducted their own M&E activities. Having a dedicated M&E expert working on FPCM during phase two greatly improved the quantity and quality of data collected.

Knowledge Exchange

Though not initially a part of the program design, FPCM benefitted greatly from peer-to-peer mentoring. The participants brought with them a variety of different skills and levels of capacity, and they freely volunteered to help others who needed support.

For example, the Salé team shared training materials and workshop plans with the Casablanca team, and the Fès team mentored the Beni Mellal team via a WhatsApp group. Representatives of the Casablanca, Fès, and Salé teams also convinced the Beni Mellal team to include female beneficiaries, making a strong case for the relevance of women and girls to CVE programs despite the Beni Mellal team's initial skepticism. In another instance, the Casablanca team brought a group of students from the Hassan II School of Islamic Sciences to the Salé team's closing ceremony; the Casablanca beneficiaries reported that the experience of meeting the women and girls participating in the Salé program expanded their horizons and helped them understand the reality of CVE programming. This exchange among participants helped to strengthen the network of participants as well as contribute to the impact of the community CVE activities.

In terms of which methods of information-sharing were the most effective, in-person exchange usually was the most impactful method. The visit to Washington, DC, for example, provided an opportunity not just for FPCM to disseminate information on project outcomes, but also included exchanges where participants were able to engage in dialogue with and learn from faith leaders, civil society actors, and development professionals. The religious and community leaders who took part in the visit then brought what they learned back to their communities. Similarly, the symposium in Rabat allowed for participants to engage directly with academics, international organizations, and other Moroccan stakeholders working on CVE, to share their knowledge and experience with the broader community of practice.

In terms of social media interaction, participants preferred WhatsApp and Facebook over Yammer because the former allowed them to share videos and videos as well as text.

Recommendations

- Provide M&E capacity building and support for participants, to enhance their ability to capture information on impact at the community level.
- Bring on dedicated, expert M&E support to conduct project M&E activities and supplement participant M&E.
- Develop a systematic approach to knowledge exchange activities among participants as well as between participants and other CVE practitioners.
- Set up opportunities and mechanisms for peer mentoring within the participant group.
- Mix in-person and online mechanisms for knowledge sharing.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on lessons learned from FPCM's capacity building, community CVE projects, and knowledge exchange activities, FPCM has several overall recommendations for other implementers and donors:

- Ground interventions with religious leaders or religious messages in a thorough understanding of the context around the types of individuals and institutions in the field, the legal regulations, and the sensitivities around religion.
- Engage local stakeholders, such as staff and participants, in program design to ensure that activities are relevant and appropriate to the context in Morocco and the target communities.
- Dedicate time and resources to relationship- and trust-building activities between religious and community leaders throughout the program period, including in-person and online interaction, as well as between participants and other community stakeholders.
- Develop a gender strategy at the start of the program that covers all levels of implementation, from the organization level to the community beneficiaries, that leverages participants as advocates for women's inclusion.
- Incorporate training and technical assistance on communications, facilitation, project management, analysis and research, and monitoring and evaluation into capacity building.
- Develop a systematic knowledge exchange approach that builds in opportunities for information-sharing throughout the program and emphasizes collaboration, learning, and adaptation.

These recommendations are rooted in the Moroccan context, and in the specificities of working in Beni Mellal, Casablanca, Fès, and Salé, and so other implementers and donors working in CVE should adapt them as appropriate.