

### BACKGROUND

DAI's Center for Secure and Stable States (CS3) actively promotes learning and adaptation across its portfolio of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE), stabilization, and political transition programs. In May 2020, CS3 launched an initiative to ensure cross-program learning around challenges and opportunities related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This document summarizes key points from the first two sessions focused on: 1) sharing field-based experiences of implementing activities during the pandemic including about what worked, what didn't, and why; and 2) engaging with DAI's Center for Digital Acceleration (CDA) to connect CS3 programs with innovative, user-centered virtual tools and resources. Here, we share some recommendations and next steps for development practitioners and donors.

### ADAPTATION AND LEARNING DURING COVID-19

**Grant-making adaptation.** CS3 implements several large grants-under-contract programs with most project activities implemented by local grantees. The Burma CSP and Pakistan CRA programs acted quickly to modify existing grants by splitting milestones to allow payment processing for completed activities; restructuring deliverables so that desk-based and research activities could continue; and working closely with grantees to determine which activities could safely continue while adhering to COVID-19 guidelines. Several projects frontloaded new grants with research or curriculum development to accommodate remote work, while others reprioritized media and strategic communication activity development to reach audiences despite restrictions on gatherings.

#### Key Learning:

1. Modify existing grants to ensure program continuity and reinforce partnerships.
2. Design new grants to account for the new normal utilizing non-traditional tools and resources.

**Programming adaptation:** Pakistan CRA and Malaysia MARI, with the support of USAID, were both able to respond directly to issues created by the pandemic. In Pakistan, the early outbreak of COVID-19 was blamed on Shia pilgrims returning from Iran and although this rumor dissipated once it became clear that no one was immune from contracting the virus, local aid response soon became politicized with minority Muslim, Hindu, and Christian communities missing out on vital resources. CRA worked with existing grantees to design activities that targeted sectarian tensions resulting from the pandemic, addressing misinformation, and working with local media and religious leaders to promote a more inclusive COVID-19 response. In Malaysia, early response efforts demonstrated racial and religious biases, with minority groups left out from vital support aimed at countering economic hardship brought on by the pandemic and associated lockdown. MARI worked with local civil society partners to

#### Pakistan Community Resilience Activity (CRA)

**Funding:** \$41.9 million

**Contract:** June 2017–December 2020

**Objective:** CRA seeks to increase resilience in targeted communities vulnerable to violent extremism by increasing broad-based citizen engagement in community decision-making and enhancing tolerance within and across communities.

#### Kenya Niwajibu Wetu (NIWETU)

**Funding:** \$19 million

**Contract:** August 2016–August 2020

**Objective:** NIWETU seeks to improve the government's and community's abilities to identify and respond to violent extremist threats.

#### Central Asia Support for Stable Societies (CASSS)

**Funding:** \$8.9 million

**Contract:** September 2018 – March 2021

**Objective:** CASSS applies a public health lens to research, design, pilot and evaluate CVE programming across digital and real-world environments. This research-into-action is implemented in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan.

#### Burma Community Strengthening Project (CSP)

**Funding:** \$46.4 million

**Contract:** August 2018 – August 2023

**Objective:** CSP assists communities in conflict-affected areas to improve access to essential services, recover from conflict, improve resilience to future shocks, and empower them to more fully participate in Burma's democratic transition and national reconciliation processes.

#### Malaysia Reform Initiative (MARI)

**Funding:** \$24.8 million

**Contract:** February 2019 – January 2022

**Objective:** To empower reformers within the Malaysian government to advance institutional, democratic change; and to increase activities of non-governmental actors in expanded political space.

#### Mozambique Tuko Pamoja

**Funding:** \$19.8 million

**Contract:** October 2019 – January 2022

**Objective:** OTI's Mozambique Program will focus on better understanding and addressing this violent extremist threat and other challenges in northern Mozambique.

#### Pakistan Strengthening Leadership Within Union Councils (LUC)

**Funding:** \$1.2 million (DoS)

**Contract:** September 2019 – October 2021

**Objective:** To improve the capacity and service delivery quality of Union Councils in Sindh and Punjab.

issue in-kind grants for the distribution of nonperishable food and household items to nearly 4000 minority families suffering from loss of income, thereby filling a gap in support of a diverse Malaysia.

Key Learning:

3. Program to counter the exploitation of the pandemic by opportunistic nefarious actors.
4. Develop COVID-19 related activities that align with and advance the existing program goals and objectives.

**Monitoring, Learning and Evaluation (MEL) adaptation:** Kenya NIWETU was conducting its end line project assessment when Kenya imposed a lockdown. Phase two of the assessment was to be fieldwork to conduct key informant interviews, no longer possible given the restrictions. NIWETU researchers rather carried out the interviews by phone, a process made possible due to pre-existing strong community networks. This pivot presented challenge: because organizations and government officials were preoccupied with responding to the pandemic, multiple attempts often had to be made to reach respondents; the interview process took longer than originally anticipated; interviews were at times cut short and the researchers would have to call back at a later date to finish the interview; and the depth of the information was likely more limited than if the interviews had been in-person. To adapt, the team revised the research guides to focus questions on what they didn't already know about NIWETU, making questions more targeted and structured, and using previous research and reports to answer other questions.

Key Learning:

5. Invest in community networks and relationship throughout the life of your program.
6. Adapt format, questions and language as needed if pivoting MEL techniques.

## OPPORTUNITIES AMID THE COVID-19 THREAT

1. **Program response to pandemics and natural disasters:** Pandemics and natural disasters, as well as the speed and quality of the humanitarian response, have enormous potential to create or exacerbate conflict: misinformation can be used as a weapon; humanitarian aid can be misappropriated to support one group over another, or to directly fund armed groups; and power grabbers can take advantage of a void in government assistance. In Mozambique, the OTI team noted that insurgents were taking advantage of the pandemic by providing services to affected communities thereby further eroding the trust in local government and exacerbating marginalization. Built-in adaptive management principles and project flexibility, a key feature of all CS3 projects, allowed for existing funds to be re-programmed in response to these emerging dynamics, utilizing existing partners, grantees, and networks, with the support of USAID. While the bulk of additional funding mobilized during pandemics and natural disasters should be directed towards humanitarian response or to support government systems, CS3 recommends that in conflict-affected countries a portion be made available so that existing CVE or stabilization projects can quickly respond to the secondary effect of new violence.
2. **Digital solutions and virtual programming:** Many of the activities implemented by CS3 projects involve bringing people together in groups, something that was no longer possible during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the majority of activities were postponed or cancelled due to: a lack of internet accessibility of intended participants; an impression that virtual activities are less credible than in-person events; a lack of expertise to transform in-person activities into engaging, meaningful online interactions; and a lack of expertise in virtual facilitation. In partnership with DAI's Center for Digital Acceleration (CDA), CS3 projects learned to first assess which activities can be taken online and which cannot, and to then optimize the activities for an online forum. CDA and CS3 recommend: simplifying meeting agendas and keeping it short; spread the event over multiple days of two to three hours each, rather than two days of six to eight hours; plan for more facilitators than usually required, such as a lead facilitator, multiple breakout facilitators, and a facilitator dedicated to beneficiary tech troubleshooting; encourage the use of tools to keep people engaged, such as polls and chat boxes; and utilize pre and post surveys to ensure learning.

## NEXT STEPS AND RESOURCES

Do you have a programmatic challenge that CS3 could address at the next COP Cross-Program Learning Session? Do you have something to add for our next newsletter? Please contact [Catherine\\_Good@dai.com](mailto:Catherine_Good@dai.com) or [Matt\\_Brummond@dai.com](mailto:Matt_Brummond@dai.com).

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