
Youth Perspectives on Community Cohesiveness

Actionaid Arab Regional Initiative
November 2017



This report is written by the Principle Investigator (PI) Andrew Mikhael, a Fellow at the Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security, and Justice at Queen's University Belfast. Drew has extensive experience in P/CVE debates at a European Union level along with leading ground based social-science research into the effects of radicalisation in the United Kingdom, Nigeria, Lebanon, Tunisia and Jordan.

Disclaimer

The contents of this document reflect the views of the researcher, who is solely responsible for the facts and accuracy of the data presented herein. The contents do not necessarily reflect the views or official policies of ActionAid Arab Regional Initiative.

Acknowledgment:

This is to acknowledge the support of Ruba Ahmad, Policy Officer at ActionAid, for her contribution in the process of data collection and analysis for this research. Special thanks for Abdelrahman Salem who supported facilitating focus groups and transcribing interviews.

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Executive Summary:

Radicalisation is not a linear process. Violent extremist groups have been adept at changing their message according to the local contexts and buttressing their approach by identifying vulnerable persons for face to face recruitment. The result of the marginalisation faced by young people in the MENA region significantly lessens the ability of their agency and reduces their resilience to daily stresses.

This study interviewed 102 young people divided into age groups of 13-19 and 20-30 and separated by gender in Mafraq, Madaba, Russifah and Zarqa. The goal was to obtain the perspectives of young people on their everyday lives to identify problematic areas allowing radicalization to occur. Participants' feedback indicated a number of triangulated issues in areas or 'ungoverned spaces' in which violent extremist groups could take advantage;

1. Female experience of marginalisation.

Female participants expressed they suffer from marginalisation because of their gender; this marginalisation was deeper and more harmful than the male experience as a result of increased constraints on their emotional, intellectual and physical growth in comparison to males.

2. Generational misunderstanding.

Nearly all young people expressed the fundamental lack of understanding of their parents regarding their daily experiences and difficulties they faced. This resulted in the need for support and help to develop their individual intellectual and emotional capabilities.



3. Physical and emotional barriers.

In the day to day lives of the participants there were variety of stresses they experienced that resulted from myriad marginalisation. These stresses were compounded by the inability to affect any change in the world they lived in and the lack of physical and emotional spaces in which they could gather to share experiences and express their ideas.

4. Structural inequalities.

Key structural inequalities exist in several layers of Jordanian society that affect young people's social mobility, most notably corruption and discrimination from state institutions.

5. Lack of leadership.

A lack of effective leadership existed starting from grassroots community leadership to the national levels.

Policy Implications:

It is clear that a response effort to tackling violent extremism should not be made through the prism of traditional Prevention \ Countering Violent Extremisms (P/CVE) policies. It is crucial to ensure that the approach to addressing the issues of radicalisation is to promote real development work in communities that are not P/CVE programs in disguise. Creating a vanguard against radicalisation must firstly be focused on preventative policies that are guided by a do no harm principle. Programs and policies should not be introduced without the specific hyper local context being considered. A context specific approach to the problem is required that understands that the purview for tackling a broad issue such as violent extremism will fall under the jurisdiction of several ministries that will institute different policy prescriptions according to their role. Rather than creating individual policies that may overlap or undermine each other, it is more viable to develop a comprehensive framework that different government institutions, from security services to social service providers, as well as NGOs can use to design context specific programs and policy interventions.

Implications for Programming:

Participants who took part in this research project appreciated the chance to challenge themselves in an environment that makes them feel valued and supported. Throughout this study in conversations with young people they would often point to the 'non skills' value of the programmes they took part in, such as getting to discuss key issues, develop their activism and work alongside different genders.

It is evident that young people are aware of the gaps that are not being catered for in the current educational structures and naturally look to fill this gap through other means. Retaining young people in youth work programmes is a fundamental question and a point in which a positive multiplier can be achieved through careful programming. It is vital to manage expectations of attendees who are made aware of the constraints of sustainable programming so they do not get frustrated by investing time into a community centre to only have funding run out and not return. Another key challenge is to structure outreach to ensure that young people from many diverse backgrounds are engaged.



Placing community centres in communities away from Amman is important to try and reach young people who have less advantage than urban youth. Establishing a permanent commitment to marginalized communities establishes roots with local residents that build trust and allows for work to be more effective.

Introduction:

ActionAid Arab Regional Initiative (ARI) programme seeks to contribute to reducing young people's vulnerability to violent extremism, through building alternatives and creating spaces for effective engagement of young men and women in Mafrqa, Madaba, Russifah and Zarqa in Jordan.

ActionAid's Youth Programme is anchored in our fundamental understanding that young people vulnerability to extremism in the unique context of Jordan is an overall accumulation of exclusion, inequality, marginalisation and power imbalances. This includes multi-dimensional challenges such as the experience of economic and social injustice, lack of faith in public institutions, and lack of engagement in mainstream political channels, as well as eroded social cohesion. Our programme focuses on identifying sources of local tension and reducing those tensions through a community-driven approach which provides opportunities and alternatives for young people.

ActionAid through this programme recognised the need for more evidence-led research that incorporates young people's views on their everyday stresses, frustrations, and insecurities. Consequently, ActionAid commissioned the "Youth Perspective on Community Cohesiveness" research to consider young people's perspectives on marginalisation and the ways in which social cohesion and their resilience to daily hardships are affected. This research aims to contribute to

available evidences related to young people's vulnerability to radicalisation, using the words/real life experiences of the young people participating, with the aim of better understanding their day-to-day lives and helping to identify key policy and programme responses needed to tackle radicalisation. Thus ActionAid hopes this report will contribute to:

- The development of a policy framework response to support the Jordanian government in its continued effort to establish a national strategy in Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism.
- Support in developing a framework for NGOs engaging in programmes tackling radicalisation.

Background:

The result of the marginalisation faced by young people significantly lessens their ability to make changes in their society and also deal with social tensions which negatively impact their daily lives. Young people suffer disproportionately more than any other demographic. Their position is especially tenuous due to their lack of connection¹, constrained role in households and inability to create change in their local contexts. Among young people exist subsets of demographics that are marginalised further such as women, Palestinian and Syrian refugees and in particular in Jordan, certain tribes that wield more political power than others². The acute and precarious position of young people has been highlighted in recent research such as Power2Youth³ which concluded

¹ Including in this context 'wasta'

² Antoun, Richard T. "Civil society, tribal process, and change in Jordan: an anthropological view." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 32.4 (2000): 441-463.

³ <http://www.power2youth.eu>

⁴ Jochen Tholen. (2015). Employment, Education and Social Inclusion in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Lebanon. SAHWA Background Paper BP01. SAHWA Project. SSH.2013.4.1-2 SSH 1 Number 613174. Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB), Barcelona

that young people are at the epicentre of structural, social and economic inequalities that affect Arab societies broadly⁴.

Recent research on young people in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has also shown clearly that young people experience multiple marginalisation (political, economic and social) albeit differentially from other categories and intersected by variables such as economic situation, nationality, religion, sect, urban/rural location, region, sexual orientation, race and colour⁵. This multiple marginalisation is coupled with insecurity and the inability to change the world around them. This makes it more likely that young people will seek for solutions to address their insecurity. Considering the structural and social inequalities, solutions young people have available to them are limited and often negative; being co-opted into the system of inequality, migration from the state, reclusion (with that the possible development of mental health problems) and pulled by violent extremist groups⁶.

Since the onset of the Syrian civil war, the issue of the radicalisation of young people has sparked an overwhelming interest from academics, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and policy-makers. The emergence of Daesh and its marshaling of new media to amplify their message, has seemingly created a new extremist enterprise. This has been effective in recruiting members to fight while confounding governments on how to deal with the 'new' problem. Counter campaigns have so far sought to manage the problem but there is an

issue of prevention and the question of; what leads to radicalisation?

This question is especially prevalent in Jordan.

Jordan has the highest number of citizens fighting in Syria per capita, with an estimated number of 2,500-3,000 in total⁷. In a rush to answer the question of; 'what leads to radicalisation' there has been an abundance of misguided policy and programme interventions by national governments and NGOs that have often done more harm than good. There has been a lack of evidence-led research that requires an intersectional approach to tackling a multi-layered problem such as radicalisation. Moreover, a 'cottage industry' to prevent or counter violent extremism (P/CVE) has sprung up, with some NGOs that proffer solutions to a problem they only half understand.

The fact is that there has been a great amount of progress on understanding the causes of radicalisation that are not considered when new programs or research is commissioned. Cross-disciplinary research has shown that the processes of radicalisation have been mapped out⁸. Though Daesh's social media outreach strategy is new, but their approach to content creation is time-honored propaganda. It takes advantage of the hopes, aspirations as well the vulnerabilities of their target audience. The content they utilize takes the hyper-local, real-life contexts of the viewer and plays on their perceptions of social grievances and political disenfranchisement while creating the 'other' who is at fault for their marginalisation.

⁵ Calder, M. D., et al. "Marginalization, Young People in the South and East Mediterranean, and Policy: An Analysis of Young People's Experiences of Marginalization across Six SEM Countries, and Guidelines for Policy-makers." (2017).

⁶ Mikhael, D. "Reception and Perception of Radical Messages", Pilot Study, The Samir Kassir Foundation, (2016)

⁷ Milton-Edwards, Beverley (September 2017) "Securing the state: Jordan meets the challenge of Islamism", Brookings Institution Analysis Paper.

⁸ Radicalisation Awareness Network, RAN Issue Paper: "The Root Causes of Violent Extremism", (2016)

Methodology

The central objective of this study was to obtain the perspectives of young people on their everyday lives. The responses were then mapped and triangulated to illustrate the areas of intervention for policy and programme initiatives. To complete this task meant adopting a methodology that allowed for the collection of participants' perspectives with as little researcher influence as possible. As a result, a grounded theory approach was employed to the research design that involved a number of interrelated aspects:

- **Contextual analysis.** It was crucial to understand the current national context of radicalisation in Jordan and as well as the different contexts in Mafraq, Madaba, Russifah and Zarqa. Background research on the similarities and differences conducted before fieldwork was crucial in relating the information obtained from the participants to the real-world situation in their surroundings.

- **Discussion and interviews with key partners in Jordan.** Meetings with ActionAid staff as well as key Informant interviews with government staff from Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs (MoPPA), NGOs such as Mercy Corps and ACTED were crucial in the narrowing of the research agenda.

Meetings were also crucial in gauging partners' conceptual approach to dealing with radicalisation in Jordan that would assist in the creation of policy and programme recommendations.

- **Developing and testing a discussion guide.** After interviews and discussions with ActionAid staff, an agreement was reached on the following principle to develop the focus group discussion guide: To identify the problematic areas in young people's lives that may allow radicalisation to occur. The guide was then developed by the Principle Investigator (PI) and tested by facilitators with ActionAid

staff, who were then able to provide useful comments to ensure the most useful guide was developed. The guide was edited and then translated into Arabic. It is vital to note that the discussion guide contained specific gender-focused questions that were asked to both males and females to compare and contrast the differing constraints on their daily lives. In addition, the discussion guide also contained written activities to spark conversation around the key questions of the research project while providing unfiltered responses to be analysed. In addition, subsidiary close ended questions were placed inside the discussion guide to aid with the mapping of issues faced by young people. Participants were asked to write, draw or verbally express themselves to answer four closed ended questions, the results of which can be viewed in Appendix 1.

- **Recruit focus group participants, and facilitate focus groups.** ActionAid runs community centres in Mafraq, Madaba, Russifah and Zarqa and the staff employed at the locations were used to recruit young people for the focus groups from those who attend the community centres activities. The reason was that it is vital that participants felt comfortable to share and discuss sensitive topics in front of one another and ensure quality of information gathered.

Focus groups were broken down by gender and the age categorisations of 13-19 and 20-30 to ensure that young people's life experiences were as closely approximate to fellow participants. In addition, the recruiters were tasked with trying to obtain parity among participants regarding their national belonging to represent the over demographics of the country. Ensuring that the focus groups contained Syrian, Jordanian and Palestinians participants allowed for a further level of analysis observing the differences in life experience depending on nationality. After each focus group debrief with the principal investigator took place to complete field notes to later use for analysis.

In total 102 participants took part in the focus groups: 55 females and 47 males¹⁶.

• **Analysing the findings.** Focus groups were thematically transcribed and translated into

English by the facilitator for accuracy. Transcripts were then analysed by the principal investigator, noting difference in opinions between age groups, gender and location and ensuring the crosscutting opinions were triangulated¹⁷ in each focus group. Each case study was analysed individually so that learning lessons and policy recommends could be formulated taking into account the differing contexts. The results of the analysis have been grouped into different sub-sections in this report.

The discussion guide (Appendix 2) was developed using principles of interpretive qualitative design. As a result, the onus with the questions was not to usher the respondents into answers but to allow enough space for their own values and interpretations. A series of prompts were added to facilitate unpacking of the subject matter. A key point of the guide was not to direct questions about violent extremism or recruitment



¹⁶An additional interview was conducted with a life skills coach who was the mother of a participant in Russaifah with a deep understanding of the different issues regarding young people in the area. There were 112 responses to the written questions, a number of respondents did not write answers down due to inability to write and lack of willingness to do so. The collected responses were developed into a graph in Appendix 1.

¹⁷Data detailed in this report was based on the at least three participants detailing the same phenomena so that findings were not derived from the views based on a single viewpoint.

in their areas; this was done for a number of reasons. Direct questions on the subject can alienate respondents, fuelling suspicions, and creating loaded/artificial responses (as well as putting local researchers at risk). Furthermore, by structuring the data collection process properly, we can enable respondents to introduce subjects themselves when they see it as relevant and in contexts that are meaningful to them.

The four case study areas have differences in geographical location and socio-economic and political situation. The contextual analysis noting the key differences that would affect participant responses are noted in the findings.



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Findings: Overview

Young people, when asked to rank their concerns and fears, most often did not consider violent extremism as a high priority in their day-to-day lives. While there was expression of concern in most areas about extremism it was most often connected to other issues in the communities in which they lived. In addition, the fears over extremism depended on location and were more prevalent in Russifah and Zarqa where there has been

more recruitment than in Madaba, while the majority of participants in Mafraq were Syrian refugees who highlighted more immediate concerns about the ability to live their lives on a daily basis.

Participant feedback did indicate a number of triangulated issues across all areas that contribute to weakened social cohesion. These are the areas or 'ungoverned spaces' in which violent extremist groups could take advantage. These areas as highlighted by participants were :

1. Women's experience of marginalisation
2. Generational misunderstanding
3. Physical and emotional barriers
4. Structural inequalities
5. Lack of leadership

These findings underline the precarious position that young people find themselves in and will be unpacked in the corresponding sections to understand the causal connections to their lived experiences and wider damage that can result in young people becoming more vulnerable to violent extremism.

When observing the findings from a macro perspective, the participants and the sum total of their constraints highlighted frustration and lack of belonging due to the inability to participate and create change in their world. Throughout the focus groups young people that participated expressed various levels of hope and hopelessness that depended on their nationality, location, gender and age. For example, Syrian refugees detailed how they felt their situation was hopeless due to the intensity of their marginalisation, which was undoubtedly greater than Jordanian counterparts. Palestinian refugees shared a similar experience to

Syrians but not to the same extent, expressing frustration and scepticism over the chances of positive changes being made in the country. Women respondents from all national backgrounds, locations and ages shared similar experiences of constraint in their physical movement and in the social environment, the driver of which was the cultural role expected of females. However, a number of focus group participants did express optimism and hope that they could change the circumstances of their environment.

Women's Experiences of Marginalisation

In all focus groups all female participants expressed they suffer from marginalisation because of their gender; this marginalisation was deeper and more harmful than the male experience. Being female was seen as an added level of marginalisation. As a female (13/19, Madaba) explained: she felt that any time she wanted to leave her home she needed their father's permission to do so. This example also highlights the intergenerational difference that can especially constrain the role of women. Another example is



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Younger focus group participants tended to be more positive in their outlook while older focus groups were more tempered and explained the difficulties they faced in trying to create positive influence.

One of the reasons for this optimism is that the participants were engaged through the ActionAid community centres civic and personal development activities which they indicated provided them with some sense of empowerment.

when gender intersects with nationality, as a Syrian female (20/30, Mafraq) detailed her position as a Syrian and a woman left her bereft of options: "I did not try to reach my goals and I won't be able to, I have no rights in Jordan."

Constraints on women are not just limited to those imposed in their own household. Beyond the personal space of the home a number of the male participants also stated that women had to maintain 'family honour' and respect in the way she appears publicly and in the types of the jobs she chooses. Most male participants

showed awareness and understanding of the constraints on the lives of women and went so far as to highlight this as a needed point of change in Jordanian culture. During these exchanges male participants expressed frustration with male/female relationships and complained at a lack of understanding and knowledge on how to engage with the opposite sex. The men claimed that working alongside women in the community centre helped them overcome this.

However, participants underlined the potential fractures that this can cause when challenging the social order. As a female (13/19, Madaba) explained: “We live in a community that if you work with males as females then you have no shame .” To navigate harassment female participants noted that they would purposefully avoid going to public spaces and generally limit their social interactions. As a female (13/19, Zarqa) explained, going out in public creates a great deal of stress because women have to be “concerned about all the possible situations and the possible outcomes for these

situations. The judgemental attitude of the society puts a type pressure that limits freedom to do anything or be anywhere.”

When asking the participants what was to blame for the constrained role of females, most often the term ‘culture’ was used. The understanding of culture varied between different participants. It often included religion and what was referred to as a more conservative parental generation. The most common answer was the ‘threat’ to traditional gender roles that empowered women could pose, as a life skills trainer and mother from Russifah said: “Women have their roles scoped out for them as they are responsible for giving birth/raising children and to wait until she becomes a grandmother, it is a system that exists to limit women.”

The patriarchal control of women’s honour places females in physical danger from men inside and outside the family home, as a female (20/30, Mafrq) detailed her leaving her husband after suffering physical abuse to return to her family only to be admonished by both



of her parents. Female participants in nearly all focus groups agreed that simply leaving the house to interact in the street was something they were careful about doing, and often times avoided it altogether. As a female (13/19, Russifah) explained: “If a female goes out on her own, it feels like she’s under arrest because everybody is watching what she does and keeping a close eye.” The problem of harassment was so significant that females in all focus groups had experienced it first-hand. Harassment included verbal and physical abuse.

It was clear that as a result of increased constraints on their emotional, intellectual and physical growth, female participants wanted to restructure their society much more meaningfully than males. Moreover, the constraints on women and the

awareness that their presence in society had to be carefully managed is a significant cause of their marginalisation. As a female (13/19, Zarqa) explained: “[society] does not allow them [women] to be a part of the change process.” This in turn results in growing hopelessness and lack of motivation to engage in civic life in Jordan. A number of NGOs and studies have sought to highlight the potentially positive role women can play in the countering violent extremism²⁰. However, as this research project highlights, there are barriers that women face on a daily basis before they are able to take an assertive position in public and private life. Furthermore, it has been difficult for women in Jordan to progress beyond tokenistic inclusion in civic or political life and the patriarchal framework remains intact.



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²⁰Chowdhury, Naureen, Barakat, Rafia, Shetret, Liat, “The Roles of Women in Terrorism, Conflict and Violent Extremism: Lessons for the United Nations and International Actors”, *Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation*, Policy brief, April 2013. UN Resolution 2242 (2015) outlined the UN’s proposal to use women to tackle root causes linked to violent extremism:

http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2242%282015%29,

It is clear that social norms still prevent opportunities for women's leadership and meaningful interactions. As a female (20/30, Madaba) explained: "Jordanian society limits females from interacting with different cultures."

What is vital is that the social norms that restrict the role of women are addressed, so that a naturally more open and plural society will emerge, in which women would then be able to play a leading role in countering violent extremism. Addressing gender inequality in and of itself will also provide a strong counter-point to violent extremism as public discussion and the much-needed growth of rights-based norms become commonly accepted ideas.

Generational power structures

A response from nearly all young people was the fundamental lack of understanding from their parents about their daily experiences and difficulties. Most often the participants would claim that their parents thought they were lazy and unaware of how 'easy' life is for them; as a female (13/19, Russifah) explained: "Everything comes to us and we do not have to go after it so older generations think of us badly because we did not need to work for certain things." The lack of understanding comes down to a lack of knowledge of the experiences of young people, as a female (13/19, Zarqa) explains: "our parents might understand us as individuals but they won't understand what we go through in our daily lives as youth" Participants explained that,

more than frustration, their parents' lack of understanding transferred into a lack of support for activities that can help develop their intellectual and emotional capabilities; as a female (20/30, Zarqa) stated: "young people cannot express their opinions, asking questions is not allowed even if it was for the simplest reasons such as wanting to understand something that isn't clear."



"This leads to an intense sense of frustration by young people regarding the control over their lives; a female (20/30, Madaba) described her relationship with her parents like tying "the donkey wherever his owner wish for it to be tied."

When interviewing two mothers in Russifah, we asked why parents would seek to control their children. As one answered: "Older generations reject and don't take the new ideas new generations are coming up with (...) the well cultured and open to learning new things are the ones who are ready to accept and support younger generations."

Both parents we interviewed in Russifah were interested and supportive of their children's development. As the other mother stated: "I want to see what is the world they live in is like so I am treating them fairly and understanding and also so they feel like I understand what they go through." However, parents tighten expectations on what they presume from their children. This in turn pressures young people to conform to certain ideas, denying them the space to grow. As the mother and life skill trainer in Russifah explains, rather than putting pressure to fulfil a certain life pattern expected by a parent they have to "give them possibilities, give them spaces, give them freedom and they will unleash their creativity." Without giving this space could lead to a young person not accomplishing any of their set goals and destroys their confidence.

Participants noted that generational power structure is a method of exercising control over who they are to create 'good' youth that fit the norms



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and values that they believe should be held. As a male (20/30, Russifah) described: "they [parents] are the ones who create these circumstances that shapes youth the way they want them to be." Participants also expressed that when at home they often are not able to express their views if they run counter to their parents; their role in house was to be subordinate in the power structure of a dominant parent. As a male (13/19, Russifah) observes: "As a young person in my home, I am basically another piece of furniture." The result was that participants felt they lived double lives to make sure they didn't clash with their parents. Moreover rather than home being a place to relax, it was a place of tension. As another male (13/19, Russifah) explains: "Any place but home is a place where I feel most relaxed because being at home I have to be someone else in order to avoid trouble at all."

As a result, young people seek validation, support and freedom of expression elsewhere. As a female (13/19, Russifah) explains: "The only people who would listen to us are our friends from our age". The culture of parenting and the lack of understanding of their daily lives results in the creation of fear, anxiety and modulation of their behaviour in the home. Young people have to live double lives to get by and rather than the home being a safe space to be nurtured, is it an area to careful to navigate conflict. Parents try to control their children, limiting their life options and restricting their personal development as one male (13/19, Russifah) explained: "I can't travel outside of Jordan to get an education because they are worried about me losing my faith."



The impact of this control negatively affects well-being of young people as a female (20/30, Mafrag) explained that it is “draining and emotionally disturbing (..) which makes me feel like I am about to explode.”

Physical and Emotional Barriers

It is clear that in the day to day lives of the participants there was a variety of stresses that was resultant from myriad marginalisation. It can be encapsulated as: the frustration and inability to change the world around them. As a male (20/30, Mafrag) explained: “Youth do have responsibility in the change process because they are young and able to contribute more but for this generation of youth, they are ruled by traditions which limits their ability to move and contribute back. Families and traditions are the obstacles facing youth and stopping them from taking on their roles.” For young people this was summed up in the same focus group by another male (20/30, Mafrag): “What is not allowed is what is most wanted.” The young people who participated in this study outwardly expressed their desire to change their circumstances; as a female (20/30, Russifah)

explained, she felt most satisfaction when “volunteering” because in her current stage of life she should be engaged in making the world a better place. Often the participants would explain the results of young people not being able to express themselves; as a male (20/30, Zarqa) explained “the use of drugs come from the emptiness which is caused due to the lack of outlets for youth in the society.” Here prevalent mechanisms of exclusion by those who order and control society, the economy and the political framework restrict youth. When discussing the best way to tackle the issue of lack of outlets, one female (13/19, Russifah) explained how coming to the ActionAid centre helped her “learn more skills and new things” where it is a change for her and made her feel satisfaction. Females in general expressed greater need to change the world around them but also expressed that they face barriers and, as another female (13/19, Russifah) stated: “life feels limited because it does not match with the traditions of the area,” as noted above. Males also found barriers to derail their hopes of changing things and felt they could not express themselves freely;

as a male (13/19, Madaba) explained “Freedom of expression is not a freedom anymore if you are not able to deliver your perspective freely.”

Repeated in the focus groups was the lack of public or community-based spaces in which young people could gather to take part in leisure activities or in spaces where they could express their ideas.

Females as already mentioned have difficulty in accessing public spaces due to potential and actual harassment while men were also concerned for their physical safety. As described by a male (13/19, Mafraq) who said he goes to public spaces “when public spaces are organised and clean, has a sense of security and safety away from the gangsters and drugs then it is comfortable.” The characterisation of public spaces lost to ‘outlaws’, ‘drug-dealers’ was notably repeated across all locations, ages and genders. When young people feel

emotional and physical barriers, creating change can be as simple as being able to provide mobility that allows freer access to the public space and also to other parts of the country, connecting areas like Russifah to Amman as one mother in Russifah explained.

Across all locations, genders and age groups there was special criticism for the education system, both state and religious, which did not encourage critical thinking. Participants felt they needed to engage with ActionAid community centres to plug gaps in their capacities. One female (20/30, Mafraq) explained how the school does not encourage true development and plurality: “In schools you’ll find all of these drawings that encourages talking and open discussions and fighting violence ,yet once you have made a mistake, no one is listening to you and you face punishment with no sense of understanding whatsoever.”





Structural Inequality

Participants also highlighted key structural inequalities that exist in several layers of Jordanian society. The clearest example of which was ‘wasta’ (loosely translated as ‘connections’)²¹. Participants from all focus groups mentioned the negative effect of wasta, which causes scepticism and worry about the ability to find meaningful work. This perception was summed up effectively by a male (13/19, Russifah): “We can’t live without wasta.”

Alongside wasta corruption also permeates all sectors in society and was highlighted by participants as one of the foremost problems facing the Jordanian polity. They explained their perception that the political class was not interested in working on the behalf of young people. As a male (20/30, Russifah) explained: “Some other parliament members are very corrupt that they will try to buy young people’s votes.” The sense of frustration was expressed at the lack of accountability

and it undermined participants’ belief and trust in political structures and reflects the democracy deficit prevalent throughout the Jordanian political system.

Syrian and Palestinian participants explained that they suffered from discrimination in their day to day lives, most notably from the police. As one participant (gender and location excluded) explained: “Police always takes the side of a Jordanian over any other nationality.” There were a significant amount of comments regarding the police in Jordan, so much so that the presence of the police was a cause of anxiety, as one participant (gender and location excluded) stated: “The presence of police create a stressful environment because it puts fear in our minds because whenever police are present, that only means that there is something wrong or something not good has happened/about to happen.”

²¹ See: Alaref, J. ‘Wasta once again hampering Arab youth chances for a dignified life’, *Voices and Views: Middle East and North Africa*, World Bank, March 13, 2014.

Participants were able to articulate that divisions in society would directly relate to discrimination and favourable treatment. One male (13/19, Russifah) outlined the lines in which discriminatory practices were manifest: “Government’s regulations , economic status, family, religion, gender discrimination, tribalism and wasta are the obstacles standing in the way of these participants achieving their goals and ambitions.” One female (20/30, Russifah) gave an example of this division in practice: “Some people who run for parliament, we are forced to vote for them because they are from our tribe, not taking into consideration if they are going to help us or not.”

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Lack of Leadership

Participants in all focus groups showed uniformity of opinion on what a leader is supposed to be, described by a female (20/30, Mafraq) as: “The leaders of the community are the ones who come up with new things that benefit the community, the ones that discover new things that also benefit the community.” Leaders were considered selfless in their pursuit of positively contributing to the community and in that respect the participants all agreed that there was a dearth of leadership, especially from those in traditional leadership positions. As a female (13/19, Mafraq) stated: “The leader has to set an example to the people you are leading, there are a lot of people who are considered leaders because of their positions but they are not leaders because they lack the ability to be a good example.” In only one case did participants point to a community centre organiser as an example of someone who (by their definition) is a good leader. Participants also pointed out that ‘negative’ leadership exists. As a male (13/19, Mafraq) describes : “community leaders affect the lives of young people in a way that feels like we are being controlled.” This causes significant damage as the participants explained that young people are directly affected by the choices made by local leaders as a male from (20/30, Madaba) explained: “When youth are in their early developing stages, they are heavily affected by the leaders of their community considering that these leaders have a place where they are listened to by older generations. ” As a result, young people are more likely to be disenfranchised and left out of local decision making processes because of the deference given to older generations. The disenfranchisement of young people is further compounded by the fact



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that participants had very little trust in those in their communities in leadership positions, as a female (13/19, Mafraq) describes: “Charity organisations which are mostly from religious backgrounds have taken religion for either profit or publicity and that leaves them in a place of rejection from society.”

The opportunity for young people to enter positions of leadership is limited. A number of participants had examples to highlight this point. A female (13/19, Mafraq) described a person she considers a leader but who is excluded by the community from playing such a role: “Our community always rejects the idea of a strong and independent woman that can do things on her own. They want her to be a certain way which creates obstacles that this girl who I think of as a leader.”

Net Effect on Violent Extremism

Participants in this study were not expressly asked about violent extremism in their day to day lives. Instead the research has shown that society is perceived as being as intolerant and extremist (especially in granting space to youth voices) as Daesh itself. As a male (20/30, Russifah) stated:

“Everyone thinks that they are only right and they need to take down everybody, just like Daesh”. This male had an interesting perspective, drawing a parallel between Jordanian society and Daesh, who both seek to limit expression while holding extremist views.

Participants in the focus groups, who have tried to create positive change in their communities have come into conflict with wider society. As a male (13/19, Russifah) explains: “Anything that is new is rejected by the community before it is understood. People think that any new idea means that it will turn out to be like Daesh”

Participants were very careful to make the point that economic prospects and opportunities were important. This is understandable given that the World Bank estimates that youth unemployment in Jordan stands at 28.8 percent²², more than double the national unemployment. Yet the young people in the focus groups made it clear that unless job opportunities are tied to support to youth that ‘makes them feel as a part of the society instead of excluding them’ then more jobs would have minimal impact on decreasing radicalisation.

This report underlines that the day-to-day and multiple marginalisations that limits the ability of young people to positively engage in their communities. The education system, by design is meant to foster the intellectual advancement of young people, in reality it does the opposite as young people feel devalued during their schooling as a female (13/19, Mafraq) explained that she is made to feel disrespected and it: “does leave an effect on how we behave when we are older, as simple as it could be.” Without giving young people

²² See: World Bank, Youth Unemployment Rates 1991-2016, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS>,



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the needed outlets to express themselves, explore their intellectual curiosities and most importantly, the ability to enact change in their communities, they will be much easier targets for radical groups who will take advantage and offer themselves as agents of change.

Framework for Response

When considering the stated outcome of the United Communities project and the results from the research, it is clear that a response effort to tackling violent extremism should not be made through the prism of traditional P/CVE policies. The problems that allow communities to become vulnerable to violent extremist causes and groups are far reaching and will not be solved by a single policy or programme. It is crucial to ensure that the approach to addressing the issue of radicalisation is to promote real development work in communities that are not P/CVE programmes in disguise. Solutions based on securitising communities and profiling categories of people – especially young people - will only further exacerbate the problem by exacerbating marginalisation.

Creating a vanguard against radicalisation must firstly be focused on preventative policies that are guided by a do no harm principle.

Programs and policies should not be introduced without the specific hyper-local context being considered. As this study highlighted, the needs for Madaba, Russifah, Zarqa and Mafraq will all be different depending on the assessed gaps. Efforts to create a national policy that will be applied wholesale will be met with failure as the needs of certain areas will not be met.

A context-specific approach to the problem is required that understands that the purview for tackling a broad issue such as violent extremism will fall under the jurisdiction of several ministries that will institute different policy prescriptions according to their role. Rather than creating individual policies that may overlap or undermine each other, it is more viable to develop a comprehensive framework that different government institutions, from security services to social service

providers, as well as NGOs can use to design context-specific programs and policy interventions.

Using a flexible framework approach will allow different government institutions and NGOs who have specialisms in their services to focus on what they are good at rather than re-orientate their modus operandi to fit the current P/CVE funding cycle. The added bonus is that a framework can be a guide for a wide range of different service providers, from policing to education and will be crucial in creating policy cohesion that is required to deal with deep root societal problem.



Implications for Programming

It is clear that the participants who took part in this research project appreciated the chance to challenge themselves in an environment that makes them feel valued and supported. Growing their skill sets that makes them more employable is certainly one aspect that participants appreciated, but programming should also focus on the inclusion dimension of young peoples' lives in Jordan. Throughout this study in conversations with young people they would often point to the 'non-skills' value of the programmes they took part in, such as getting to discuss key issues, develop their activism and work alongside different genders.

This was underpinned by several participants in different focus groups expressing their enjoyment in taking part in discussions because they got to discuss key issues they felt were important. Hence

a major implication is inclusion rather than exclusion.

Would empowering young people create harm by making them more aware of the inequalities in their lives? Young people indicated throughout this study that they were already aware of the structural inequalities in their society. As a female (20/30, Madaba) explained: "We are in a community that is supposed to be democratic yet is not." While there were various degrees of hope and frustration on whether or not they could change those circumstances, participants expressed that without engaging and empowering young people, there would be no hope to addressing the issues in communities. As a female from (20/30, Mafraq) stated that her generational on whole was ill-equipped and not provided with tools to enact



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change in their communities: “We are an illiterate generation, how can we make our lives any better?” Therefore, it is crucial that programmes seek to give young people agency so they can empower themselves to positively engage with the world around them.

Throughout the focus groups a reoccurring theme was complaints about the rote educational systems and government programmes that disregard the development of critical thinking skills of young people. A female (13/19, Mafraq) explained the lack of government programming means that traditional roles within society go unchallenged, creating negative consequences: “society pressures male youth to act in a certain way and adopt a certain behaviour due to the lack of programs from the government, and that leads them to head in a direction of where it doesn’t benefit them or society but affects everyone negatively.” It is evident that young people are aware of the gaps that are not being catered for in

the current educational structures and naturally look to fill this gap through other means. By providing development and just as importantly, an outlet of expression can help young people better engage with their communities.

However, there were equal amounts of frustration expressed by participants regarding the programming when they felt they were not being challenged through skills development. This led to participants questioning why they should continue to attend the community centres. Retaining young people in youth work programmes is a fundamental question and a point in which a positive multiplier can be achieved through careful programming.

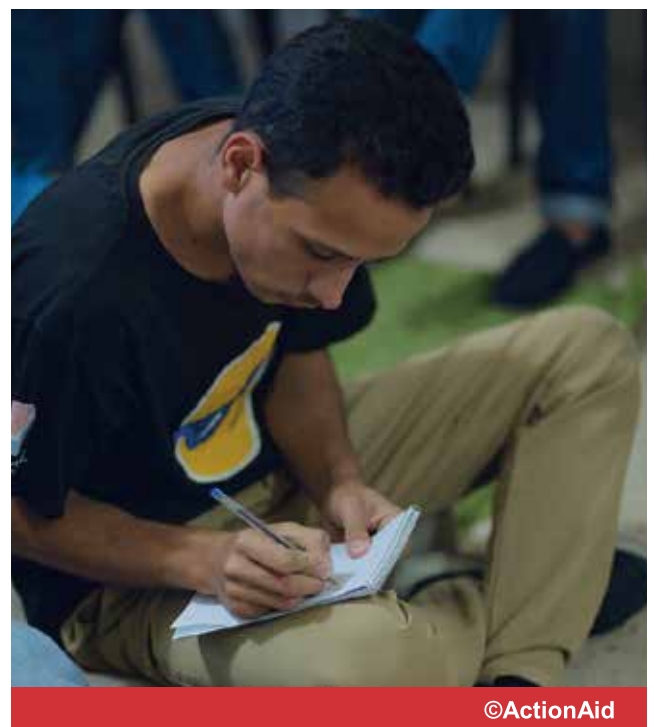
The community centres must be mindful of the needs of their attendees and respond accordingly. For Syrian refugees for example, a majority of attendees in Mafraq felt that basic literacy skills and psychosocial support were more relevant than in Madaba where the young people are less likely to have left school.

In addition, it is vital to manage expectations of attendees who are made aware of the constraints of sustainable programming so they do not get frustrated by investing time into a community centre to only have funding run out and not return. Many participants complained as they were not made aware of the situation when programmes were cancelled and kept returning in the hopes programmes would return.

Another key challenge is to structure outreach to ensure that young people from many diverse backgrounds are engaged. Placing community centres in communities away from Amman is important to try and reach young people who have less advantages than urban youth but it is one small part of the equation. To conduct effective outreach requires deep knowledge of the communities themselves and the effective use of local interlocutors through schools, social workers and religious institutions to obtain as wide a pool as possible. While radicalisation can happen to socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged alike, the worse off the young person is the less likely they will have support structures available to help them overcome the marginalisation in their community.

Establishing a permanent commitment to marginalised communities establishes roots with local residents that build trust and allows for work to be more effective. Providing a presence that works in partnership with the community to identify the needs and deliver them is crucial to effective long-term intervention and prevention of radicalisation.

Furthermore, creating and implementing a standard programme that will be applied to youth in Jordan is a critical error and will significantly limit the effectiveness of any programme interventions. This study has shown that young people in Jordan suffer from similar experiences of marginalisation, but those experiences vary in priority and intensity depending on where the young person lives, their socio-economic status, what nationality and what gender they are. For NGOs who seek to establish community centres in locations, such as ActionAid, programmes in local communities must reflect the needs of the young people that attend the centres. This requires the NGO to identify the needs of the young people in the hyper-local contexts and to develop programmes that address the community-specific needs. Employing a hyper-local understanding will result in more effective programming which allow young people to develop their own agency and create greater social cohesion in their communities.



The following list is a framework for ensure programming is as effective as possible:

1. Use resources that reflect the expertise and capacity of the organisation. Programming should be context-specific and catered for the attendees intellectual and emotional needs. Ensure that long-term programmes are well explained so young people are aware of the upcoming schedule of trainings / work shops. Manage expectations of attendees to centres so that they do not become frustrated with their involvement.

2. Enhance gendered focused work to ensure attitudes towards the traditional role of women are challenged and unpacked.

3. Establish working partnerships with the local community rather than viewing them as 'participants in programming'. Creating a wide network within the community in which they are brought in as partners creates bonds that overcome trust issues that undermine foreign NGOs when working in marginalised communities. Work with local established partners in the community to perform outreach activities covering as wide a population as possible.

4. Do not adopt traditional P/CVE programmes that change the core ideals of the organisation. One-shot P/CVE programmes will not be effective and are likely to place pressure on the community as 'people to watch' doing more harm than good.

5. Establish methods to use young people who have received training in the centre in the formal activities and work in centre. The use of 'mentors' is effective in displaying to young attendees the level they can achieve while also creating stakeholders in the trained young people. It is vital that certain well trained young people do not become 'favourites' and there is equitable opportunities²³ for all young people. This includes ensuring that youth-targeted capacity-building programs, reach into rural areas, poorer urban areas, and mono-lingual communities.

6. Establish strong transparency in mechanisms to ensure that trust is maintained between the organization and local community. Honest efforts can be completely destroyed on misunderstandings or perceptions of corruption and it is vital to establish strong monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure that beneficiaries are aware that the organisations stated goals match reality.



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²³ Hence avoiding *wasta* or corrupt practices



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Implications for Policy

There is no single policy panacea to solve the issue of radicalisation of young people as youth is not a homogeneous category and what will improve life for one young person, will not always be relevant to another. Moreover, addressing the problem of radicalisation with traditional P/CVE policies is simply inadequate as the vulnerabilities that allow recruitment to violent extremist groups to take hold are deep-rooted and multidimensional. No single policy enacted in the midst of a crisis can have a meaningful impact for the majority of young people without also addressing larger problems associated with authoritarian security structures, corruption and the absence of the rule of law, poor standard of education and the reliance

on a weak under-performing private sector for job creation.

There are several areas which this research has highlighted that could potentially cause more harm to young people that are based on well-meaning attempts at policy answers. This research project has shown that there is a generational disconnect that negatively affects the lives and growth potential of young people. Instituting policies that are 'youth orientated' will only further drive a wedge between different generations and further undermine young people, ring fencing their involvement to limited and most likely superficial policy areas, halting them from making a real change in their communities.

In addition, the problems that affect young people are not problems unique to their age categorisation, but deep rooted and intersected across government policy, culture, generations, conflict in the region and the failure of economic systems to create equal opportunities. So rather than creating a youth ministry or youth orientated policies, focusing on the already existent service provisions that do not provide the society at large with the tools to make changes is the most important policy that can be implemented. Policies can be as simple as ensuring that isolated and rural locations can access reliable public transport so that capital centres with economic opportunities like Amman are available to the entire country.

There are a number of errors within the traditional

P/CVE policy world that need to be addressed, primarily the assumption that market based solutions will reduce radicalisation. There is growing evidence that suggests that poor economic situations may be a contributing factor, but do not directly lead to radicalisation. If socio-economic policies are to be introduced then they have to be accompanied with fairness of opportunity between the different social strata such as tribes, towns, gender and nationality.

NGOs should understand that youth-targeted interventions work best when they enable young people to define for themselves how to develop their social capital. Top-down government-led initiatives and interventions are often beset by the problems, as well as being subject to lack of trust





from young people. Young people are aware of the constraints placed on them, as a male (20/30, Madaba) explained: “Governments are afraid of youth because if they let youth have what they need and pursue what they want, then youth will revolt for change”. NGO policy should be focused on helping young people become the authors of their own futures by developing their capacities and giving them a space to discuss the most important issues to them.

NGOs have to ensure that they maintain good working relationships with governing authorities—without being co-opted into supporting policy agendas that do not match with the organisational philosophy. Simultaneously, as participants

explained during the focus groups, NGOs are key stakeholders in the communities and as such they have to represent the needs of the people in those areas, even if it is not politically expedient. Undermining the core values of youth empowerment can destroy the foundations of trust with local communities.

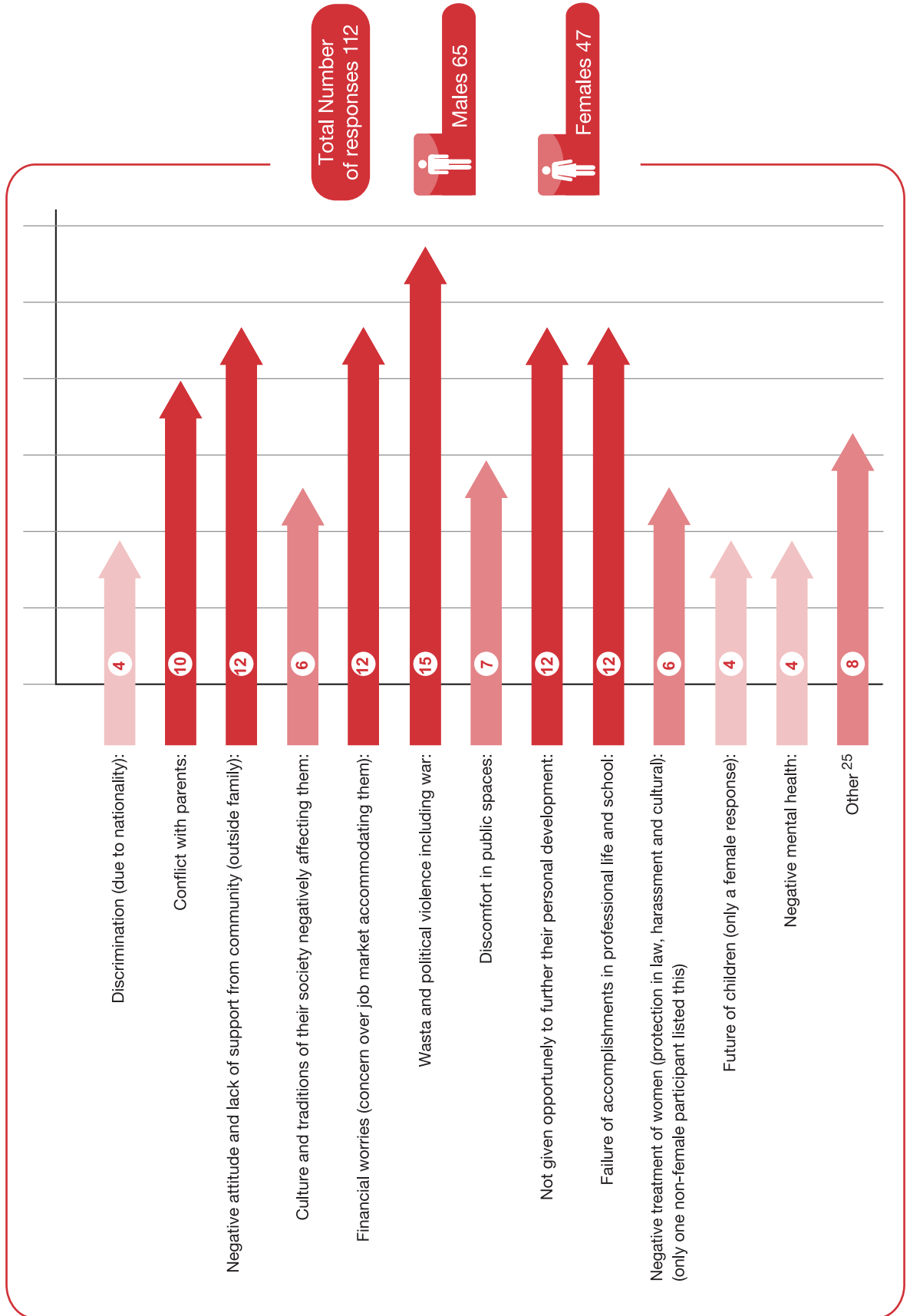
Providing and cultivating genuinely enabling environments in which young people can safely participate in the political lives of their country and have an impact on their own futures is one of the most important features of developing community level work, as a male (20/30, Madaba) explained: “For me as a person, when I come to places such as ActionAid centre, I feel like can say everything on my mind freely.”

NGOs currently engaged in P/CVE programs should commit to the following principles to improve their service delivery to participants while also addressing the key issues that plague current traditional P/CVE centered responses.

1. Do not support in principle classic P/CVE strategies that are often disenfranchising for young people and often endorse securitised measures²⁴. Advocacy against such policies should be key as focus should be not on repression and surveillance but development of young people.
2. Advocate and challenge the normative acceptance of violence and constraints against women in everyday life.
3. Assess and (if necessary) re-negotiate donor-led funding that does not follow the principles of the organisation in theory or application.
4. Seek to ensure that young people have safe access to public spaces where young people (especially women) can engage in civic discourse.
5. Policy interventions should recognise the role played by insecurity, both emotional and physical, that impedes young people's development. Advocate for the promotion of safe physical and virtual spaces in which young people can meet, deliberate, network and exchange knowledge and skills.

²⁴Milton-Edwards, Beverley (September 2017) "Securing the state: Jordan meets the challenge of Islamism", Brookings Institution Analysis Paper.

Appendix 1 Young People's Response on Reasons of daily stresses and Concerns at community level



²⁵ - all single responses not coded into above categories (Transport , Smoking , Person close to them getting sick , Safety at home , Forced migration (through lack of documentation and lack of opportunity to work)² , Lack of freedom of expression , death)

Appendix 2

Focus Group Discussion Guide English & Arabic

Run time	Topic
00'00 - 04'59	Introduction
05'00 - 24'59	Well-being preparation activity
25'00 - 54'59	Youth experiences
55'00 - 1:14'59	Security and insecurity
1:05'00 - 1:34'59	Communities
1:25'00 - 1:40'00	Conclusion

Part 1: Introduction

- Welcome, introduce the facilitator, note-taker and ensure sign in by all.
- Who we are, what we want to do.
- What will be done with the information.
 - All written responses can be submitted anonymously.
 - If relevant, recordings are for the researcher's use only.
 - What about: Transcripts/recordings will be formatted electronically, emailed encrypted for access in the UK, and not taken through airport security.
- Why we asked you to participate
- The format of the focus group, what we are covering and how long it will take.

Part 2: Well-being Preparation Activity

- Q: If you could make one change in your life now, what would it be?

● سؤال: إذا بتقدرو تغيرووا إشي بحياتك هلا، شو ممكن يكون؟

- Are you hopeful that changes will happen?

○ عندكم أمل إنو هاد التغيير رح يصير؟

- Q: Over the past two weeks, which activity or interaction has given you the most satisfaction?

● خلال الأسبوعين الماضيين، شو في إشي عملتو أو تفاعل أعطاكم شعور بالرضا؟

- Q: What words best represent your current stage of life?

● شو الكلمات اللي ممكن توصف حياتكم هلا؟

- How are you going to try and achieve your goals?

● كيف رح تحاولو توصلو لأهدافكم بالحياة؟

Part 3a: Youth Experiences: Family and Social Interactions

● Q: As young people, what kind of experiences have you had?

● كأشخاص يافعين، كيف بتوصفو هاي الفترة بحياتكم؟

.....

○ Do you have the freedom to express yourselves?

○ بتحسو إنو عندكم حرية التعبير عن رأيكم؟

.....

● Q: How do your parents' and grandparents' generations talk about "youth" these days?

● كيف ممكن تحكو إنو آباءنا وأجدادنا بوصفو جيل الشباب/اليافعين الأيام هاي؟

.....

○ Do you feel they understand your everyday circumstances?

○ بتحسو إنو بتفهمو الظروف اليومية اللي بنمر فيها كشباب؟

.....

● Q: How does being young affect the way you are treated at home?

● كشباب، كيف بتحسو إنو عمرنا بأثر على كيف بنتعامل في البيت؟

.....

○ Does being young afford you any advantages or disadvantages at home?

○ هلا بتحسو إنو عمرنا كشباب بأثر علينا سلبياً ولا إيجابياً بالبيت؟

.....

● Q: How are you treated outside the home (among work, school, social circles)?

● كيف بنتعاملو برا البيت (في الشغل، مدرسة، جامعة، الحياة الإجتماعية... مثل)؟

.....

○ Are there any advantages or disadvantages?

○ في سلبيات أو إيجابيات لهاد الموضوع؟

.....

Written/Verbal/Draw activity 1: Write down the biggest anxieties you face at home or outside.

Part 3b: Youth Experiences: Official Interactions and Participation

- Q: What ways do your leaders (national, municipal, educational: SELF DEFINED)

affect the lives of young people?

- كيف يتحسوا إنو قادة المجتمع بأثروا على حياة الشباب/اليافعين (على مستوى إقليمي، مجتمعي، تعليمي.. يحدد من قبل المشاركين؟

- What makes an affective leader?

- كيف بتكون القادة فعالة؟

- Q: What do you think are the responsibilities of young people to effect change in your community?

- برأيكم، شو مسؤولية الشباب/اليافعين في تغيير مجتمعاتنا؟

- What are the barriers stopping you from your participation?

- شو الحواجز اللي بتبعدكم عن المشاركة بعملية التغيير؟

- Q: Who are the stakeholders in your community?

- برأيكم، مين المؤثرين وأصحاب النفوذ في مجتمعكم؟

- Q: Consider your interactions with the stakeholders in your community (educational systems, municipal authorities, police, I/NGOs, religious institutions) What were/are they like?

- فكرو بتفاعلكم مع المؤثرين وأصحاب النفوذ بمجتمعكم (أنظمة تعليمية، سلطات محلية، الشرطة، منظمات محلية ودولية، معاهد ومؤسسات دينية) كيف أو كيف كان إنطابعكم عن هاي التفاعلات؟

- In what ways can these stakeholders create better opportunities for change in partnership with young people?

- بأي وسائل ممكن المؤثرين وأصحاب النفوذ يصنعوا/يخلقوا فرص أحسن للتغيير بالتعاون مع الشباب واليافعين؟

Written/Verbal/Draw activity 2 :What 1 issue should the stakeholders to address to improve the quality of your life?

Part 4: Security and Insecurity

● Q: What are your life goals or ambitions.

● شو أهدافكم وطموحاتكم؟

.....

● Q: What obstacles (family, government, conflict in area, religion/culture) are there to achieving these ambitions?

● شو العوائق (عائلية، حكومية، صراع في منطقة معينة، دينية/ثقافية) الموجودة بطريق إنو هاي الأهداف والطموحات تتحقق؟

.....

○ Gender/National belonging/Tribe/race/class.

○ (النوع المجتمعي، الجنسية، العشائرية، العرق، الفئة المجتمعية)

.....

● Q: What are the three biggest sources of stress and anxiety in your life?

● شو أكثر 3 أشياء تسبب التوتر وضغط نفسي في حياتكم؟

.....

○ NOTE: Conversations about violence

○ ملاحظة: حكي عن العنف ممكن يبيلش

.....

● Q: Do you make any changes in your life to increase your feeling of security? (against anxieties defined above)

● شو التغييرات اللي بتعملوها بحياتكم عشان تزيدوا الشعور بالأمان والراحة النفسية؟ (ردود على أسباب الضغوطات النفسية والتوتر الموضحة بناءً على السؤال السابق)

.....

○ How could community leaders enhance your security?

○ كيف ممكن قادة المجتمع يحسنوا الشعور بالأمان والراحة النفسية؟

.....

Written/Verbal/Draw activity 3 : List 3 thing that you fear in your life for your future?

Part 5: Communities

Think about your neighbourhoods, your regular activities, and your regular journeys

- Q: What makes a public space comfortable or uncomfortable?

● شو اللي ممكن يخلي الأماكن العامة مريحة للتواجد فيها أو غير مريحة؟

.....

- Is there something you feel threatened by in your community?

● في إشي يخليكم تحسو بالتهديد أو عدم الأمان في مجتمعاتكم؟

.....

- What are the activities that relax you?

● شو النشاطات اللي ممكن تريحكم وتخليكم مرتاحين؟

.....

- Where are the spaces in which you are most relaxed?

● شو هية الأماكن اللي بتخليكم تحسو إنو إنتو مرتاحين؟

.....

- Open discussion: Is it harder for women to access certain spaces than for men?

● نقاش مفتوح: هلا ممكن يكون أصعب للنساء/البنات/الصبايا يروحو لأماكن معينة أكثر من الرجال/الشباب؟

.....

- Written activity 4: List three changes you would make to your neighbourhood.

.....

.....

.....

Conclusion

- Q: Any programmes, initiatives or funding that have affected your lives both negatively and positively.

● ممكن تذكروا نشاطات ، برامج، مبادرات أو دعم اللي أثرت على حياتكم بطريقة سلبية أو إيجابية؟

.....

.....

.....

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Jabal Al Weibdeh - Paris Circle,
Building no.3 - Second Floor



Regional Office for the Arab Region "ActionAid"



P.O Box 9886 Jordan, Amman 11191

Phone : + 962 6 4616656 Mobile : + 962 77 8450 750

www.actionaid.org