Interfaith Dialogue on Violent Extremism (iDove)

Report

February 2017 – September 2018
Table of Contents

I. Introduction to iDove ........................................................................................................... 2

II. iDove Activities in 2017 ..................................................................................................... 4
   a. The Intercontinental Youth Forum (IYF) ......................................................................... 4
   b. Small-Scale Projects ........................................................................................................ 5
   c. iDove Training and Training of Trainers (ToT) workshop & training manual ........... 6
   d. iDove Representation at Conferences & Events .......................................................... 7

III. Good Practices and Lessons Learnt .................................................................................. 8

IV. Activities in 2018 and Beyond ........................................................................................ 9
   a. The second Intercontinental Youth Forum ................................................................. 9
   b. Community Trainings and ToT ..................................................................................... 9
   c. iDove Serious Game .....................................................................................................10
I. Introduction to iDove

Radicalisation and violent extremism are not rooted in one cause alone – whether ideological, political or religious – nor can these issues simply be tackled with security or military means. The spread of violent extremism is primarily a development challenge and the drivers of violent extremism are complex, manifold and context-dependent. Factors such as socio-economic inequality, (perceived or actual) grievances, repression, social injustice, political marginalisation, corruption and poor governance often create an enabling environment for radicalisation and violent extremism. The role of religion as a factor of radicalization and violent extremism is highly contested in policy and academic debates, with research evidence rendering little support to a causal correlation between the level of religiosity and radicalization.

Nevertheless, religion continues to be successfully utilized as a legitimizing factor and instrumentalised by violent extremist groups to justify their atrocities. Nevertheless, religion should not be understood as a potential contributing factor to radicalisation. On the contrary, religious groups and communities, i.e. faith based organizations (FBOs) and religious leaders, play a vital role in preventing violent extremism. Indeed, their global reach and credible support enable preventive measures and strengthen social cohesion. This is best demonstrated in their presence in remote areas and ungoverned spaces. FBOs and religious actors are, therefore, potential key partners in preventing violent extremism (PVE). Moreover, a large number of youth activists is already involved in community work to strengthen social cohesion and prevent violent extremism.

The Interfaith Dialogue on Violent Extremism (iDove) explicitly focuses on youth, as they are the largest group directly affected by violent extremism. Unemployment and economic grievances, the socio-cultural impact of violent conflict, poor education and the use of religious narratives play a role in the recruitment of youth for violent extremist organisations. Nevertheless, youth are a major resource for sustainable development, often acting as key agents for social change, economic growth and innovation. Their imagination, ideals, energy and visions are essential for future prosperity and stability. As pivotal agents of change, iDove aims to engage youth in promoting social cohesion and peacebuilding within their local communities.

In February 2017, the iDove pilot project was co-launched by the African Union Citizens and Diaspora Directorate (AUC-CIDO) and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, commissioned by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, to highlight the importance of the soft power of religion in PVE through innovative youth-led approaches. By building on existing initiatives and supporting young people’s engagement and ideas, iDove strives to develop non-violent approaches to problem solving that strengthen social cohesion and to create a forum for exchange and mutual learning.

Specifically, iDove aims to:

- initiate a strategic countermovement to prevent violent extremism,
- provide an innovative youth-led approach,
• draw on the soft power of religion,
• foster intra- and interfaith dialogue,
• promote mutual respect and understanding based on intra- and interfaith, interreligious and intercultural values as core principles,
• set up a platform of exchange and mutual learning for youth working on PVE and building social cohesion,
• use digital components to counter the recruitment of youth into violent extremist groups.

This report summarises the activities that took place under the umbrella of iDove in 2017 and those planned for 2018. In the following section (Section II), an overview over all activities will be provided, followed by a discussion of good practices and lessons learnt (Section III). The last section (Section IV) will provide an outlook on the iDove activities in 2018 and others planned further down the line.
II. iDove Activities in 2017

a. The Intercontinental Youth Forum (IYF)

The first phase of iDove began with the Intercontinental Youth Forum (IYF) held in Addis Ababa in February 2017. Forty young leaders engaged with PVE, comprising representatives of civil society organisations, policy-makers, scholars and creative arts experts, were selected from a pool of over 4,000 applicants from 24 African and 8 European countries.

During the forum, the young leaders and activists, called “iDovers” exchanged their ideas with and alongside scientists, religious actors as well as disengaged persons who were formerly associated with violent extremist groups. The forum approached the topic of violent extremism through an intercontinental lens as youth radicalization affects African and European societies alike. Therefore, the main objective of the IYF was to call attention to different types of extremist ideologies i.e. politically, identity-based and religiously motivated extremism. In doing so, participants examined the mindsets of individuals who join extremist groups and supplemented those perspectives with real life experiences of disengaged individuals. Perhaps the most important message that resonated was that PVE and building social cohesion globally requires a comprehensive ‘soft power’ approach that focuses on the root causes rather than on the symptoms of violent extremism. It was noted that sports, arts, cultural events and other activities offer effective means of dealing with differences within a community. Innovative approaches in these areas have shown to foster mutual understanding and to support co-operation between different social and religious groups. Similarly, participants emphasized that the process of disengagement and reintegration into society is always possible.

Discussions focused on two types of violent extremism – Islamic and right-wing. The key results were the following:

---

1 Data taken from findings of survey conducted among all iDovers in April 2018 with 21 respondents.
The rationale and patterns leading to joining violent extremist groups are similar in both types of violent extremism; With regard to effective PVE approaches, it is crucial to invest in understanding individual push and pull factors for joining violent extremist groups and conveying them in ways which the concerned individual can relate to; There is a difference between a radical/extremist mind and violent extremist behaviour; thus, different approaches are required.

The forum created a safe and rich space for dialogue, which led to the development of diverse and unique approaches to PVE. Albeit being a new initiative, the first IYF already exemplified the uniqueness of iDove:

Firstly, the participants quickly acquired a strong sense of ownership and common identity as ‘iDovers’. They formed relations to inform each other about projects, literature, trends etc. Thus, forming an emerging community of young professionals engaged in PVE and building social cohesion.

Secondly, to uphold the uniqueness of the iDove brand, all activities planned and executed under its umbrella to date have been led by the iDovers. This includes but is not limited to the:

i. Identification of areas of engagement via small scale projects, including the creation of a monitoring framework.

ii. Initiation of a comprehensive capacity building approach, including the development of a training manual and a first series of iDove trainings on youth preventing violent extremism in their communities.

b. Small-Scale Projects

The forum embarked on creating innovative frameworks for PVE, which formed the basis for the call for small-scale projects (SSPs). Four SSPs were selected out of 40 applications and given financial support. The projects cover communication, virtual and community initiatives, such as media training, capacity building, arts and sports. They are currently implemented in Mali, Kenya, Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Below is a brief summary of the four selected projects.

1. Enhancing Youth Initiatives for Peace (EYIP) – Cameroon: The project is planned and implemented by the Cameroonian NGO ‘Reach out Cameroon’. The period of implementation is still ongoing as the renewed upsurge of the crisis in the Anglophone region prevented timely implementation of the project. EYIP provides unemployed youth with skills enhancing their opportunities and promoting peaceful co-existence. Starting from the premise that unemployed youth with weak economic prospects are more vulnerable to radicalization, the project supports 40 young males and females of varying religious backgrounds in seeking non-violent roles in their communities. To this end, the young people are provided with a crash course on
software development, entrepreneurship and peaceful activism. Moreover, the participants engage in an innovation challenge developing innovative community projects in small and diverse groups. To guarantee knowledge transfer, participants are encouraged to run their own classes in their respective communities.

2. **Youth Bridge Project: Prevention of violent extremism through Arts Competition – Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC):** The objective of the project is to prevent conflict and enhance social cohesion within communities in Goma and the territory of Nyiragongo in the DRC through art and performance. Youth from different ethnic groups were empowered to use their talents to promote tolerance and mutual respect in their communities. The centerpiece of the undertaking was an arts competition featuring young people from different ethnic groups. Moreover, a social dialogue was organized with around 250 community members, giving the young performers the opportunity to sensitize their friends and relatives to the dangers of violent extremism and radicalization. Recognizing that art is an important component of any strategy aimed at youth potential, the Youth Bridge Project helped building partnerships that engage youth in social and economic change-efforts through short-term projects, while enabling them to acquire new skills and experiences to build the social fabric and foster social cohesion in their communities through art.

3. **The Youth Against Violent Extremism (YAVE) – Kenya:** The project implemented by the Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics Trust sought to mobilize youth in Lamu to promote inter-faith and inter-ethnic tolerance through intra- and interfaith dialogue. In the context of a so-called sensitization forum, young religious leaders and youth in general discussed the use of scriptures to propagate violence and hate in their communities with the aim of learning to respect a variety of interpretations of religious texts and understanding and respecting each other's religious and ethnic background. In the aftermath, the young leaders selected villages to organize more forums thus further spreading sensitization for VE and fostering peaceful co-existence.

4. **The Accountability Lab Mali project** sets up so-called “Citizen Helpdesks” in the Segou and Mopti regions in Mali. The aim is to reduce the risk of youth engaging in religious extremism and mobilize young people for PVE. The helpdesk groups, composed of young volunteers, venture into different communities and gather information on community perceptions on extremism, security, community, coherence and trust; all of which play a crucial role in PVE. The information is then synthesized and shared with key decision makers at local and national levels to help inform decision-making. Closing the feedback loop, actions taken on the national and local levels will be discussed with community members in the framework of regular community meetings. Moreover, key summaries on decisions and concerns are shared with local anchors, who broadcast them in interactive radio shows and, thus, increase awareness and understanding of violent extremism.

c. **iDove Training and Training of Trainers (ToT) workshop & training manual**
During the IYF, a significant number of iDovers expressed the wish to strengthen their own capacities and train young change-makers in their communities by using the iDove approach. Responding to this need, the project developed a PVE training and a manual based on the iDove approach. A screening of existing PVE manuals and two consecutive workshops then led to the development of an iDove Training and Training of Trainers (ToT) manual.

Both workshops took place in the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa where a group of iDovers and a select group of PVE experts and practitioners discussed how to best deploy soft power approaches and interreligious dialogue in the context of PVE initiatives.

During the first workshop, iDovers as well as other PVE experts and practitioners decided on the basic content, form and methods of the training, while the second workshop served as a pilot for the iDove ToT and allowed for further tweaking and editing.

The iDove TOT comprises six core modules:
1. Encountering one’s own identity
2. Understanding conflicts
3. Developing knowledge on violent extremism
4. Understanding verbal and non-verbal communication
5. Utilizing intercultural and interreligious resources for PVE
6. Opportunities for young adults to actively promote PVE and social cohesion in their respective communities

The TOT employs trial-run tested interactive methods, while the choice of methodological framework is based on the assumption that experiences made in the context of role-plays, simulations and group exercises have a more sustained impact than purely theoretical considerations.

The iDove Training and ToT manual will be made available in English and French from October 2018 and in Arabic from December 2018 onwards and can be used by PVE activists in diverse contexts. A first series of iDove Trainings and a ToT are planned to be carried out by trained iDovers in the fall of 2018. For further details on the upcoming trainings, please consult Section IV b of this report.

d. iDove Representation at Conferences & Events

iDovers @ USA AU CVE week: The African Union Commission (AUC) and the United States Mission to the African Union (USAU) organized the first annual U.S. – AU Countering Violent Extremism Week from October 25th to 27th 2017. The week discussed ways in which the United States and the AU—as well as the Regional Economic Communities (RECs)—can deepen partnerships to prevent and counter the rise of violent extremism in Africa. Three iDovers, Haider Kassim, Chiedza Kambasha, and Daniel Wegner were invited as panellists. They spoke about the goals & lessons learned of iDove and provided real life examples of iDove bottom up community initiatives. The CVE week resulted in identifying shared good practices and les-
sons learned as well as key gaps and potential areas for collaboration. One of the recommendations was to supplement top-down approaches with bottom-up PVE initiatives, such as iDove.

**iDovers @ the GCOCP:** The German Congress on Crime Prevention – GCOCP (in German: Deutscher Präventionstag – DPT) is the world’s largest annual conference on the topic of crime prevention and related prevention areas. The GCOCP is a platform for information, knowledge transfer and offers an interdisciplinary dialogue between prevention practice, prevention research and prevention policies. On the 22nd June 2017 GCOCP took place in Hannover, where the iDover Annabella Stieren, presented the iDove project in one of the conference’s international forums.

**iDovers @ Joint BMZ – Ministry of Defence Conference Berlin:** Haidar Kassem represented iDove at the Joint BMZ – Ministry of Defense Conference in Berlin. As participants of a panel discussion, he spoke about his experiences stressing the importance of faith & religion in PVE.

### III. Good Practices and Lessons Learnt

**The importance of building resilient communities:** The exchange of experiences on violent extremism in the framework of iDove made apparent that violent extremism spreads particularly well in ungoverned spaces characterized by socio-economic and/or political grievances. Radical groupings provide disillusioned youth with a simplified social and economic model through which they are promised to be able to escape their grievances. Thus, to circumvent the spread of radicalism and violent extremism, communities have to become resilient. This is best achieved by nurturing positive social identities and social cohesion targeting youth, influential community members and vulnerable individuals in particular. It is equally important to tackle the socio-economic and political root causes that can trigger radicalization.

**The significance of knowledge sharing in a global network:** In April 2018, a survey was conducted on the experiences of the iDovers and envisioned future developments of the programme. Amongst the aspects that stood out was the level of knowledge sharing and exchange of experiences that the programme enables as well as the intercontinental character of the iDove network. Of the iDovers questioned, about 50% indicated that their key takeaway was learning from other participants and their experiences with PVE in their respective local contexts. Even more iDovers indicated that they were able to translate these learnings into action in the framework of their local projects and various professional activities.

In evaluating the iDove network, the main feature identified by the iDovers as unique was the interreligious/soft power approach, the second distinguishing element was the young PVE practitioners from all over Africa and Europe exchanging ideas and collaborating.

Future recommendations of almost all iDovers (about 90%) indicated that they wish for sustained engagement and continuous sharing of knowledge and skills. Of those, 28% stressed the importance of physical meetings in the form of iDove events, trainings or mutual field visits.
Taking gender into account: In discussions during the first IYF, the role of gender in PVE emerged as a central topic. It was noted repeatedly that gender often fails to be taken into account and that women are largely absent from PVE initiatives. In future iDove activities it will, thus, be important to highlight even more the role gender plays in the process of youth radicalization and to elaborate how these insights can inform PVE initiatives.

Creating a glossary of terms: Due to the sensitivity of the topic and the ambiguity of concepts related to violent extremism, it is important to create a glossary of terms – in English, Arabic and French – for educational purposes and to ensure the consistency of messages.

Being informed on trends: iDove has gained traction on the African continent due to the large network built by the iDovers, the importance of the topic itself and the large number of followers iDove has gained since its launch. Thus, the iDove community has been able to stay on top of the trends of violent extremism on the African continent. Chief among these is the rise and spread of gangs in West Africa, particularly in Sierra Leone and Liberia, and the rise of the Quraniyoon – a group in the Sahel that abides only by the literal written words of the Quran.

IV. Activities in 2018 and Beyond

a. The second Intercontinental Youth Forum

The 2nd intercontinental Youth Forum will take place October 3-5, 2018 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Likewise, it will focus on the occurrence of violent extremism among youth in Africa and Europe. This time, however, special attention will be paid to ungoverned spaces, such as border regions and marginalized areas, where youth are particularly vulnerable to recruitment by extremist groups. The Sahel Sahara Border Region, the Lake Chad Basin and the Horn of Africa are prime examples of border regions that have experienced marginalization and significant neglect due to the absence of effective state control, which led to the spread of violent extremist networks. Moreover, when considering the geographical distribution of racial sentiments and right-wing extremism on the European continent, it can be observed that these are frequently concentrated in rural and marginalized areas. Therefore, understanding the interplay between political and economic grievances, social and geographical exclusion and how these factors evoke youth extremism will be the prime objective of this year’s Youth Forum.

Just as in last year’s conference, participants will be composed of a pool of academics, community workers and creatives. In addition to the iDovers already selected in the run-up of the first Youth Forum, however, a new call for applications is particularly targeting youth activists working in border regions and marginalized areas. Next to the iDovers, experts and policy makers on PVE in border regions as well as religious leaders will be invited to speak at the forum, share their research and ideas and discuss possible approaches to PVE. Finally, former members of violent extremist groups will be invited to share their viewpoints and experiences on the process of radicalization and disengagement.

b. Community Trainings and ToT
For further information, please contact:
idove@africa-union.org or ReligionMatters@giz.de

Please follow us:

https://www.facebook.com/iDove00/
idove0
@iDove00