



Mapping and Characterising Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism Programmes in the Maldives

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1. INTRODUCTION

This study has two specific objectives:

1. Identify and characterise existing and planned P/CVE (Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism) programmes by the government and civil society groups in the Maldives.
2. Identifying funding and gaps in terms of implementing the National Action Plan on P/CVE.

This study is not an evaluation of the effectiveness of different P/CVE programmes in the country. Rather, the goal is to examine and analyse their types and characteristics as well as the resources for those programmes. Consequently, the objective of a study like this is not to undermine the genuine efforts by various actors to tackle violent extremism but can be a complementary work towards evidence-

based P/CVE programming.

A key finding of this study is that existing P/CVE programmes have so far been designed with limited research or limited evidence bases, limited theories of change informing them, and with no systematic monitoring and evaluation behind them. In other words, P/CVE programmes often lack adequate ***programme integrity***.

These existing programmes are also largely primary level, preventive programmes. Except for some ad hoc interventions, systematically designed secondary programmes in the pre-criminal space targeting those who are on the pathway of radicalisation, show signs of radicalisation, or are in the periphery of violent extremist groups, do not exist. Similarly, tertiary interventions such as disengagement and rehabilitation programmes targeted for

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

As a framework for collecting data and analysing data, this study builds on the searchable characteristics of CVE programmes in the IMPACT Europe database (see also Lauland et al. 2019). The IMPACT Europe (n.d.) framework focuses on six areas:

- 1) group of focus (e.g., radicalised individuals; at-risk individuals, prisoners, families, etc.)
- 2) unit of focus (e.g., individual; group; network, etc.)
- 3) whether the programme is focused on a particular ideology (e.g., religious/theological; political, etc.)
- 4) the goal of the programme's interventions (e.g., de-radicalisation, prevention, disengagement, etc.)
- 5) the primary type of activity engaged in by the programme (e.g., educational, awareness, counselling, employment, e.g.)

6) the programme's effectiveness level

However, this study's scope does not include evaluating the effectiveness of the programmes. Hence, the framework will use the first five attributes and further specifies the following areas

1. the underlying theories of change
2. risk factors being addressed
3. the scope, reach and geographical location
4. monitoring and evaluation framework
5. resources (funding and staff)

The study used a qualitative mixed methodological approach with Key Informant Interviews (KII) based on a semi-structured questionnaire and document analysis as data sources.

2. PREVENTING AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

GLOBAL CONTEXT AND CONCEPTS

There is no consensus on what concepts such as 'extremism' and 'radicalisation' mean (Neumann, 2013; Schmid, 2013; Sedwick, 2010). However, the definitions we use matter because they have implications for not just research but also for policymaking (Berger, 2018). Yet, there have been a number of different responses by both state and non-state actors to tackle violent extremism. The range of responses that go beyond coercive and kinetic measures to tackle violent extremism have become known as 'preventing and countering violent extremism' (P/CVE) (Schmid, 2013). P/CVE work as such is therefore about the non-coercive or non-securitized approaches to address the root causes and the push and pull factors that lead to violence and terrorism (see also United Nations Security Council, 2014; European Commission, 2017). In other words, these responses address the vulnerabilities and risk factors to radicalisation, aim to enhance resilience of individual and communities against radicalisation, and seek to 'bring back' those who are already attracted to violent extremist ideologies and causes.

Globally, these types of efforts under the rubric of P/CVE are mostly recent and have proliferated in the past decade. At

the international level, it was in 2014 that the United Nations recognised CVE as an important component of the efforts against terrorism under Resolution 2178. Consequently, there is a limited comparative knowledge base to guide the development, implementation and evaluation of P/CVE programmes. As a result, even globally P/CVE programmes often suffer from a lack of programme integrity (Cherney, Belton & Kohler, 2020).

CVE AND P/CVE: PUBLIC HEALTH MODEL

In the literature, 'CVE' and 'P/CVE' are sometimes used interchangeably (see Stephens et al. 2021). There is a continuum between preventive and countering work. However, preventive work targets the 'vulnerabilities' to violent extremism that individuals, groups or communities may have. In concrete terms, such efforts aim at increasing community awareness, addressing grievances, and improving educational and socio-economic opportunities. As a recent literature review suggested, such work often aims at

increasing individual and community 'resilience' (Stephens et al. 2021).

On the other hand, countering work often targets the radicalisation and recruitment efforts by violent extremist groups and target individuals and groups who are at-risk or on the path of radicalisation or are already radicalised. Such work therefore may include counter-narratives, tackling online or offline violent extremist propaganda, as well as targeted interventions such as psycho-social and peer support, disengagement, de-radicalisation and reintegration programmes.

Given the continuum, a helpful way to understand different stages or types of interventions is the public health model. Under the public health model, P/CVE programmes can be grouped into three types (see Figure 1):

1. Primary P/CVE interventions
2. Secondary P/CVE interventions
3. Tertiary P/CVE interventions

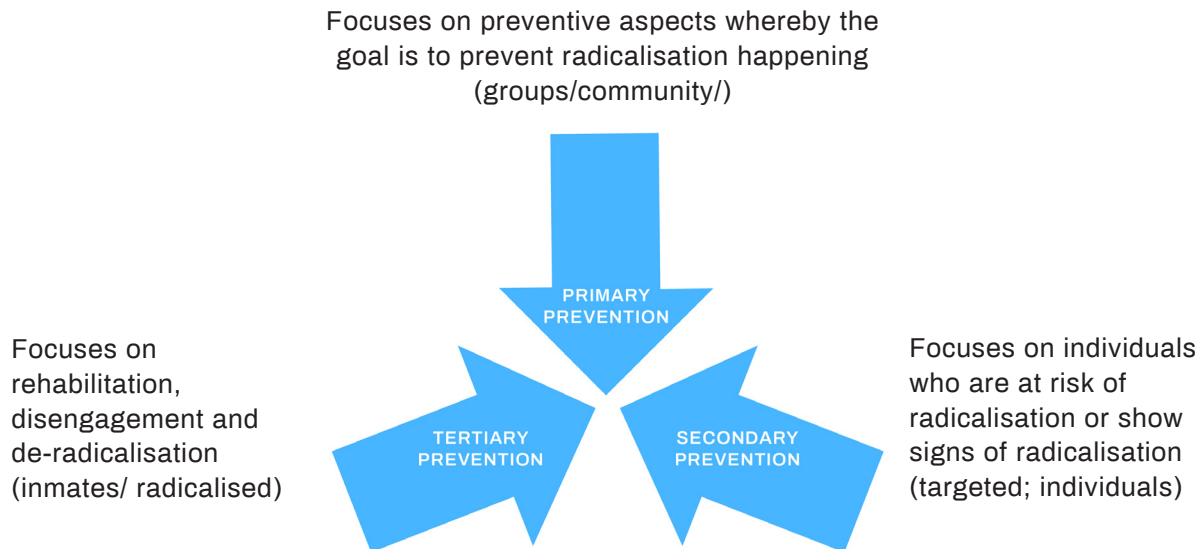


Figure 1: Public health model of P/CVE

Primary interventions focus on preventive aspects whereby the goal is to prevent radicalisation from happening. These interventions are often educational and informational in nature. Going beyond that, primary prevention programmes also focus on larger socio-economic issues, and as such overlap with what have increasingly been called ‘resilience building’ and ‘social cohesion’ programmes. These interventions are typically targeted for entire groups and communities.

Secondary interventions focus on individuals who are at risk of radicalisation or show signs of radicalisation. Such interventions aim to stop further radicalisation and bring individuals ‘back’ to mainstream society. These pre-criminal space interventions do share common ground with tertiary interventions, which target individuals who are already radicalised. Tertiary interventions focus on rehabilitation, disengagement or de-radicalisation of individuals or groups (see Harris-Hogan, Barrelle & Zammit, 2015).

P/CVE IN THE MALDIVES: CONCEPTS, POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

CONCEPTS

The Maldivian law does not define terms including radicalisation or violent extremism. However, NAP (National Action Plan) P/CVE has provided such definitions.

RADICALISATION

According to NAP P/CVE, radicalisation is “the process in which individuals and groups come to support violence as a legitimate political tool to be used against those they see as members of the ‘out-group’”. It elaborates that radicalisation involves:

formation of in-group and out-group identities and the creation of a sense that the in-group is under threat and can only survive through the adoption of violence.

VIOLENT EXTREMISM/HARUKASHI FIKURU

In the NAP P/CVE, violent extremism is defined as ‘the actual use of violence’ presumably following radicalisation. This definition of violent extremism somewhat mirrors the definition by terrorism experts such as JM Berger (2018) but limits violent extremism to actual use of violence. Berger, however, defines violent extremism as:

the belief that an in-group’s success or survival can never be separated from the need for violent action against an out-group (as opposed to less harmful acts such as discrimination or shunning). (Berger, 2018).

While NAP P/CVE has a narrow definition, when asked how the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC) defines violent extremism, we were pointed to the definition of harukashi fikuru (literally ‘strict ideology’ but translated as ‘violent extremism’) that was announced in December 2019.

According to this definition, harukashi fikuru include Ideologies that radically and violently oppose and advocate against the spirit of the Maldivian Constitution, laws and regulations and social policies, in word and action. (National Counter Terrorism Centre, 2020, p. 4).

NCTC (2020, p. 4) further identifies ‘violent extremists’ as:

1. People who deem others that do not follow their religious ideologies as infidels and non-Muslims, and they believe that the property of such “non-Muslims” could be rightfully seized or damaged, and their lives could be rightfully taken.

2. People who claim that Maldives is a “sinful state” and reject the nation.

3. People who claim the Constitution as void, oppose the laws, regulations and policies of Maldives, reject the culture and traditions of the country, and attempt to disrupt the unity of the society.

Specific acts of violent extremism, according to NCTC (2020, p. 4) include:

1. Rejecting the national flag, symbol and anthem of Maldives.

2. Rejecting the national education curriculum and withholding their children from attending school.

3. Advocating for and spreading [violent extremist] ideologies.

4. Depriving children of international health standards and propagating destructive ideologies that could endanger future generations.

5. Oppressing women and children without regard for human rights; thus, sexually abusing children in the name of marriage.

This definition and descriptions of violent extremism by NCTC appear to be very broad. Some of the acts in themselves arguably do not involve violent extremism (e.g., rejecting national symbols such as national flag). However, violent extremist narratives do reject the existing state as taghut (idolatrous) and nationalism and the symbols of it as un-Islamic. The description also collapses violent extremism with the wider issue of extremism.

The description of violent extremists and their acts is also heavily focused on theological aspects. However, as some scholars (e.g., Hegghammer, 2014) have pointed out, such an approach without considering the socio-political objectives/ orientations of the actors and groups is analytically limited. In other words, different groups may have similar theological orientations and even similar beliefs but may differ in their socio-political orientations (e.g., some non-violent mainstream Salafi groups in the Maldives vs. violent extremists). Similarly, they may have different theological orientations but similar socio-political orientations.

While NCTC definition focuses on religious aspects, it omits the crucial issue of what violent extremists believe as ‘jihad’, which exists as an urgently actionable belief within violent extremist narratives. Similarly, violent extremists do not believe that all ordinary Maldivians are necessarily non-Muslims. Finally, even though ideology may play a role, the over-focus on ideology as such may be problematic too as ideology is not necessarily a proximate cause of violence (see Sageman, 2017; Horgan, 2008).

The important point to note here though is that based on the review of the policy documents and KII interviews, authorities seem to have inconsistent understandings of the concept of ‘violent extremism’, or if consistent, the definitions provided have limitations and gaps.

PREVENTING AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Government documents do not explicitly define preventing and countering violent extremism. But NAP P/CVE states that it aims to:

address both the push and pull factors that have led people to violent extremism. It combines security approaches with those that address the social issues of identity, mental health, normalization of violence and exclusion that lies behind extremism. (NAP P/CVE, 2020)

Policy and institutional framework

The key policy and legislative documents relevant for P/CVE include:

1. Prevention of Terrorism Act (2015) with Amendments in 2016 and 2019.
2. Presidential Decree 2/2016 (establishing the National Counter Terrorism Centre)
3. State Policy on Terrorism and Violent Extremism (2016)
4. National Strategy on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (2017)
5. Strategic Action Plan of the Government (2019-2023)
6. National Action Plan on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (2020-2024)

NATIONAL COUNTER TERRORISM CENTRE

Article 19 of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (2015) authorises the President to establish a counter-terrorism body to tackle terrorism. The Presidential Decree No. 2/2016 (25 February 2016) established NCTC as the lead coordinating agency for both counterterrorism and P/CVE under the Ministry of Defence and National Security. The 21-point mandate for NCTC does not explicitly mention violent extremism, but

points 8 and 9 specifically concern P/CVE work:

1. Conduct research and analysis about the causes, underlying conditions and societal challenges that lead to radicalisation into extremist ideologies, and collaborate with social sector government ministries and agencies and non-governmental organizations in countering the spread of such extremist ideologies in the society.
2. Identify adherents of extremist ideologies and conduct rehabilitation programmes for them. This also includes inmates who have committed or aided and participated in the commission of terrorist activities.

The State Policy on Terrorism and Violent Extremism (issued on 8 June 2016) further clarifies that NCTC mandate is “to lead and coordinate the work of all State institutions relating to terrorism and violent extremism”.

While the Presidential Decree mandates NCTC to conduct rehabilitation programmes, the Prevention of Terrorism Act (under Article 60-21) as well as NAP P/CVE identify the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) as the responsible ministry.

NATIONAL STRATEGY ON PREVENTING AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM (2017)

The National Strategy (NS) on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism, informed by the State Policy on Terrorism and Violent Extremism, was issued by NCTC on 2 November 2017. The NS P/CVE states that the overall P/CVE approach would be based on a ‘whole-of-society’ and ‘whole-of-government’ approach with the aim “to promote inclusivity, reduce redundancy and duplication of effort”. In other words, the approach is about partnering with other state actors and non-state community actors, coordination among them, and division of labour. It identifies five domains with four strategic areas of focus for P/CVE

interventions. The five domains are:

1. Social domain
2. Religious domain
3. Education domain
4. Economic development domain
5. Law enforcement domain

The four strategic areas of focus include:

1. Expand P/CVE Diplomacy
2. Promote Community-based Law Enforcement
3. Engage Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)
4. Conduct Counter Messaging

The domains summarise, in very broad terms, the problems of radicalisation/violent extremism in the domains and summarise the types of interventions (activities/programmes) that should be taken to tackle the problems. Together they focus on both law enforcement and other P/CVE work. The strategic areas identify the priorities for interventions. P/CVE diplomacy concerns bilateral and multilateral collaborations for intelligence, counterterrorism, and P/CVE. Community-based law enforcement concerns preventive work by communities and increasing community reporting to law enforcement. Engaging with CSOs concerns partnering with and supporting CSOs in P/CVE work. Finally, counter messaging strategy targets extremist ideologies through strategic communication, religious awareness, and education.

While the economic domain implicitly assumes inequitable development, unemployment, and economic disparity contribute to grievances that lead to attraction of extremism, the strategic priority areas do not recognise this domain as a strategic priority for P/CVE. Overall, the strategic areas also stress ideological aspects of violent extremism and targets

interventions based on ideology and law enforcement (such as security services-community relations).

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN OF THE GOVERNMENT (2019-2023)

The Strategic Action Plan (SAP) of the Government (2019-2023) approved in late 2019 is based on the election Manifesto of the ruling coalition led by the Maldivian Democratic Party. Under its policy to “Create a safe, secure and inclusive society by reducing the threat of terrorism and violent extremism” it has three key strategies relating to P/CVE area:

1. Strengthen policy, institutional and legal framework to reduce the threat of terrorism and violent extremism
2. Develop and implement an effective rehabilitation and deradicalisation programme with a key focus on re-integration
3. Design and implement a community-driven prevention mechanism to build a more resilient, connected and less vulnerable society

Within these key strategies, the document identifies 16 different actions to be implemented between the period of 2019 to 2023.

The Government’s SAP is ambiguous on the status of NCTC. It does not identify NCTC as the lead agency for P/CVE coordination. Action 2.1b under strategy 1 above in fact suggests possible institutional changes to NCTC:

Establish a centrally coordinated inter-agency mechanism to address threat of terrorism and violent extremism and demarcate roles for counter radicalisation and operational arms of counter terrorism agencies in preventing and countering violent extremism

NATIONAL ACTION PLAN ON PREVENTING AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM (2020)

By far the most comprehensive document for P/CVE is the NAP P/CVE that was approved in July 2020.¹ It identifies the NCTC as the lead agency to coordinate the implementation of NAP P/CVE. It establishes five outcomes for P/CVE with 66 outputs within a period of 1 to 5 years through 48 key actions by a range of government actors and NGOs. The five outcomes include:

1. Strengthen national P/CVE framework through enhanced coordination and cooperation
2. Enhance public safety and community resilience through stronger systems and strengthened legislative framework
3. Create a more resilient, connected, and less vulnerable Maldivian youth population
4. Foster resilience to violent extremism through awareness, counter narrative, digital literacy and critical thinking
5. Strengthen evidence-based policy making for effective P/CVE efforts

The specific actions are wide-ranging and include preventive and countering activities/programmes related to improvements to the legal framework, social and community awareness, education, training and employment, drugs and gangs, and rehabilitation and reintegration. Notably, the NAP P/CVE therefore also substantively focuses on economic and social issues.

To summarise, NCTC is the lead coordinating agency in formulating strategies and actions for P/CVE and coordinating and overseeing the effective implementation of those policies and actions. However, there is considerable ambiguity on its exact role as an implementing agency and its future status. In this regard, there are tensions between the Prevention of Terrorism Act (2015) and different policy documents

on one hand, especially with regard to responsibilities of different agencies, and between different policy documents themselves, on the other hand

SUMMARY FINDINGS

- There are only a limited number of long-term programmes related to P/CVE conducted by the government.
- All these programmes are largely primary **prevention** programmes. They are therefore informational and educational in approach, designed mainly as awareness campaigns for entire groups. In fact, some of them also fall within general social cohesion and religious awareness work that go beyond P/CVE.

There is a heavy emphasis on religious ideology or theological aspects in most of these programmes. This emphasis in P/CVE interventions seems to have partly stemmed from the emphasis given to religious ideology in the understanding of violent extremism.

- Some of these ongoing programmes are better designed than others with greater programme integrity (e.g., with activities linked to specific outputs to achieve programme outcomes based on an underlying theory of change).

However, as these programmes lack robust monitoring and evaluation data, it is not possible to know if these programmes are effective. These programmes mostly do non-systematic qualitative evaluations based on verbal feedback from participants and, to some extent, based on feedback forms.

- These existing P/CVE programmes have so far not been reviewed to see how they may potentially be aligned with NAP P/CVE. As this report shows, these programmes could potentially be aligned with NAP P/CVE with appropriate changes.
- A major gap in the P/CVE space is the

lack of systematically designed pre-criminal stage, secondary intervention programmes targeting individuals who are on the pathway to radicalisation or are being radicalised into violent extremism. There have been ad hoc interventions targeting individuals showing signs of radicalisation. Some key stakeholders do acknowledge this remains a major area requiring focus, especially as the current preventive programmes do not systematically directly target such individuals. Based on anecdotal evidence, some key stakeholders suggest there are “hot-spot” or “high risk” communities with radicalised groups or cells who would need targeted interventions.

- Another major gap is the lack of a rehabilitation, disengagement, or de-radicalisation programme for radicalised individuals even though there have been convicts since at least 2007. MoHA is currently leading the work in developing a comprehensive rehabilitation and integration programme for family members of Maldivian foreign fighter cohort in Syria to be repatriated and placed at National Reintegration Centre (NRC) (late 2021 or early 2022).

However, such a programme tailored for prison setting and for individuals under monitoring-and-control orders under Prevention of Terrorism Act is yet to be developed. Prison-based disengagement/de-radicalisation programmes are a particularly urgent area given prison radicalisation appears to be a major concern in the Maldives. Currently, for example, there are an estimated 40 inmates believed to be radicalized according to MCS.

- Workplans and/or systematically designed, programmatic interventions aligned with NAP P/CVE’s actions-results-outcomes framework

are yet to be developed by respective lead agencies. Covid-19 pandemic seems to have challenged this work. Often, therefore, interventions that are being carried out are done on an ad hoc manner with no programme integrity or theory of change. However, there are some efforts underway in this direction currently. NCTC has started to seek regular updates from lead agencies on their work under NAP P/CVE as part of NCTC’s coordination efforts.

- Consequently, and because existing programmes have not been reviewed to assess how they align/fit within NAP P/CVE and because NAP P/CVE has not been costed, it is unclear what the estimated cost may be to implement NAP P/CVE over its 5-year period.

- There are funds shortfalls to continue some of the existing and planned programmes. P/CVE programmes are funded through external donor grants and government budget. However, both the PO and MoFT have stated that implementing P/CVE programmes is a key priority of the government, and PO staff stated that funds for planned programmes (as opposed to ad hoc requests) under NAP P/CVE would not be an issue.

- As CSOs are identified as key partners in NAP P/CVE, NCTC has been reaching out to some CSOs, including religious organizations. These engagements especially include capacity building of CSOs through training workshops. However, CSOs are yet to be meaningfully involved as agents in the government effort at implementing NAP P/CVE.

While government may be keen to involve CSOs in this space, there are also no set funds available under NAP P/CVE for CSOs. CSOs and development agencies like the

¹ While stakeholder consultations took place to formulate it, it is not publicly available, and nor has it been shared in full with key institutions and NGOs.

UNDP usually mobilize external donor funds to implement P/CVE projects.

- One of the leading NGOs involved in the P/CVE area currently is Transparency Maldives (TM). Since 2020, TM has been implementing a wide-ranging multi-year P/CVE programme funded by the USAID, involving both research and P/CVE interventions with the broader goal of increasing community and individual resilience against radicalisation into violent extremism.

Some other CSOs are involved as partners in this programme. TM has also been collaborating with relevant government actors, including NCTC, in implementing this programme. There are no ongoing P/CVE programmes by CSOs we interviewed, although some are keen to work in the space.

NCTC is the lead coordinating agency in formulating strategies and actions for P/CVE and lead agency for overseeing the effective implementation of those policies and actions. However, there is some ambiguity in the policy framework on its exact role as an implementing agency and its future status.

- There is also considerable inconsistency in how authorities understand concepts such as violent extremism. The definition in NAP P/CVE is in fact somewhat different from NCTC's earlier definition of harukashi fikuru/violent extremism. The description of actors and acts of harukashi fikuru is very broad and emphasizes theological aspects (while also omitting key aspects such as what violent extremists believe as 'jihad'.)

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Review existing P/CVE related programmes conducted by government and other relevant actors to see how they may align with NAP P/CVE, and to see if appropriate adjustments may be brought to align with the NAP P/CVE's actions-results-outcomes framework. → NCTC and Lead Agencies under NAP P/CVE
2. Review P/CVE programmes to improve their programme integrity, including their evidence base and/or theories of change so that programme activities are designed and linked to specific outputs to achieve specific outcomes or goals. Existing programmes and the planned programmes should incorporate more robust M&E tools to evaluate their effectiveness. Instead of continuing or starting ad hoc interventions with no evidence base, even a fewer but better designed interventions with robust programme integrity may be more impactful → Lead Agencies under NAP P/CVE and other P/CVE practitioners
3. Develop and use a P/CVE Programme Integrity Toolkit (which includes specific set of principles, methods, and approaches to guide the development and implementation of P/CVE programmes). Such a toolkit could help towards ensuring the set outcomes are achieved and minimizing waste of limited funds and resources. → NCTC, CSOs, and other P/CVE practitioners
4. Given that radicalisation and recruitment into violent extremism continue to be major concerns, a P/CVE programme with special secondary interventions targeted for those at risk of radicalisation or are showing signs of radicalisation should be made available as a matter of urgency. → MoHA, Ministry of Gender, Family & Social Services (MoGFSS), Maldives Police Service (MPS), NCTC, Councils, and CSOs
5. As prison radicalisation is believed to be a major concern and there are already several radicalised inmates, development and implementation of a prison rehabilitation programme should be prioritized → MoHA, MoGFSS, MPS, NCTC, and CSOs
6. There should be extensive and wide-spread online campaigns, including alternative and counter narratives programmes as antidotes to violent extremist narratives. Badhahi campaign is the only systematically designed and deployed P/CVE programme in the online space. → P/CVE practitioners
7. Ensure that NAP P/CVE remains the key guiding document in P/CVE programme development by the government by ensuring that key stakeholders share the ownership of the document and share its framework. In this respect, NCTC should consider sharing the full NAP P/CVE document with the key institutional partners. → NCTC
8. Given NAP P/CVE is the key guiding document, new P/CVE programmes should ensure they align with the outcomes of the NAP P/CVE. In this regard, explore ways to provide more technical assistance and expertise to lead agencies to ensure their programming aligns with NAP P/CVE → NCTC
9. When designing new programme, different actors should increase coordination and collaboration; share research data; and, pool technical, financial resources → Lead Agencies and other P/CVE practitioners.
10. Develop detailed, systematic workplans/ action plans under NAP P/CVE to achieve the required outputs within the given timelines. → Lead Agencies and NCTC.

11. Conduct a cost analysis for implementing NAP P/CVE within the given timeframes → NCTC

12. CSOs are identified as key partners in P/CVE work in all stages. There should be meaningful mechanisms for CSOs to be agents and partners in P/CVE efforts. These include, but are not limited, establishing meaningful communications and consultation mechanisms and allocating special funds for CSOs. NCTC should also ensure CSOs are fully briefed on NAP P/CVE and have access to it. → NCTC

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National Action Plan on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (2020-2024)
Regulations on Rehabilitation and Reintegration (2021)

ANNEX: LIST OF INTERVIEWS

Ministry of Youth, Sports & Community Empowerment
Human Rights Commission of the Maldives
Maldives Police Service - Counter Terrorism Department
Ministry of Home Affairs
National Counter Terrorism Centre
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP Maldives)
People's Majlis (241 committee)
President's Office
Ministry of Education
Ministry of Higher Education
Ministry of Gender, Family & Social Services
Ministry of Finance and Treasury
Maldives Correctional Services
Advocating the Rights of Children
Equal Rights Initiative
Hope for Women
Transparency Maldives

