

ARP 39

TOOLKIT

FOR GRASSROOT ORGANIZATIONS
WORKING ON DIGITAL PVE IN MALI



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Disclaimer: Please note that the views expressed throughout this toolkit do not necessarily reflect those of GCERF staff nor its grantees.

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GCERF is a global fund dedicated to the prevention of VE. The organization connects local communities to global resources and supports grassroots initiatives typically out of reach for international donors. A key aspect in their work is a program that prevents the spread of VE and its facilitation by way of the online world [1].

GCERF's work in Mali started in 2016 and as of 2024, it is currently working with three Malian grassroots organizations active in the field of PVE [2]. These grassroots organizations took part as the interviewees and provided feedback in an interactive process, enabling the development of this toolkit. The expertise, knowledge, and network of GCERF and its Mali grassroots grantees in the realm of PVE work have allowed the development of this toolkit and we thank them for their time and support throughout this process.

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[1] GCERF. 2023. About Us. Accessed June 4, 2024. <https://www.gcerf.org/about-us/>.

[2] GCERF. 2024. Mali. Geneva: GCERF.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This toolkit illustrates how violent extremism is intertwined with the online sphere in Mali and suggests effective program operations. Our literature review provides an overview of Mali's political situation and highlights the significant role of the online world in spreading violent extremism. Located in West Africa's Sahel region, Mali has seen a rise in violent extremism over the past decade. Extremist groups exploit local grievances such as youth unemployment, agrarian tensions exacerbated by climate change, governance issues, and resource inequality. Ethnic, regional, and religious tensions also contribute to the spread of extremist ideologies. Historically, Sahel governments have relied on military interventions, which often worsen the situation by ignoring root causes. Mali's expanding digital landscape plays a crucial role in extremism, with social media becoming a key platform for recruitment and radicalization. This necessitates P/CVE strategies that leverage online tools. Various actors influence Mali's VE dynamics. The military junta, which came to power through coups, has failed to bring stability. After years of deprivation, Tuareg rebels seek independence for northern Mali, clashing with government and jihadist groups to make their demands heard. External funders like the UN and France have withdrawn, replaced by actors like the Wagner Group and Turkey. Religious leaders also wield significant influence due to widespread distrust in the government. It is essential to consider the complex interplay of factors described above to address violent extremism.

This toolkit was constructed based on a decolonial approach we adapted and refined after talking with several professors and partitioners about this methodology. The toolkit prioritized local perspectives, engaged with stakeholders through interviews, and ensured cultural sensitivity. One of the practices to facilitate this is iterative feedback from the GCERF and grantees, which enabled the constant reflection on positionality and refinement of the toolkit. Multiple aspects such as language barriers, religious consciousness, and internet access were consistently considered in the process of the research. The toolkit consists of the four themes, Vulnerable population in Focus for PVE Online, Conscious Digital Usage, Digital Community Engagement, Digital Collaboration between organizations.

Women and youth play a significant role in preventing violent extremism (PVE) online in Mali, where understanding the local context is crucial. Women, as mothers and wives, hold substantial information and awareness within their communities, wielding influence in their families. Although they are often the first to suffer from violent extremism (VE), they also have the potential to become VE actors. Youth, who are high social media users and include young ex-combatants, significantly impact advocating for both PVE and radicalization offline and online. Creating effective PVE programs requires innovation to provide women and youth with spaces to become agents of change. Addressing the pervasive mistrust, frustration, and inequality within the community is essential, involving all stakeholders to ensure commitment and cooperation in the project.

The online world in Mali is a double-edged sword, offering both positive and negative effects on social cohesion. Internet usage is on the rise, particularly among the youth, who are highly vulnerable to radicalization. However, access to the digital world varies among different groups, with women often being excluded, highlighting the need for a clearer understanding of which communities are marginalized. To harness the benefits of the internet while mitigating its risks, it is crucial to focus on online awareness and education, empowering users with knowledge about digital privacy and safety.

Community Engagement is crucial for the success of PVE initiatives, as it ensures that the voices and needs of the targeted communities are heard and addressed. By involving communities throughout the process of PVE Initiatives, Grassroot Organizations can create more relevant and effective interventions. Furthermore, active engagement fosters trust and collaboration, leading to sustainable and impactful outcomes. In the digital space, this community approach offers avenues for future PVE work as digital access continues to raise across Mali.

Digital collaboration between organizations is an emerging field that is gaining significance, as it enhances the reach and impact of each organization's online development projects. By involving multiple actors, from local NGOs to governments, development initiatives can be effectively promoted and executed. This not only increases the digital skills of the local population but also helps to dissolve mistrust between the community and the government. However, such collaboration must be undertaken with careful consideration of information privacy to prevent potentially disastrous leaks of personal information.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI	Artificial Intelligence
CPA	Center for Preventive Action
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
GCERF	Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund
ISGS	Islamic State in the Greater Sahara
JNIM	Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin
MINUSMA	Mission Multidimensionnelle Intégrée des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation au Mali
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
P/CVE	Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNICRI	United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute
UN	United Nations
VE	Violent Extremism

GLOSSARY

Encryption System	A data protection method where information are locked or hidden by open public, only those with data authorization can access it with a unique secret code
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READERS GUIDE

This section briefly introduces the overall flow of this document. It consists of the following three parts:

1. **An explanation of the toolkit,**
2. **A literature review, and**
3. **The methodology.**

The first section introduces the purpose of the toolkit and provides guidance on how to use it effectively. The literature review offers an in-depth examination of the historical context of political power dynamics in Mali, key actors involved in violent extremism (VE), and the intricate relationship between VE and the digital landscape in Mali. This is followed by a discussion of the research methodology, which is framed through the lens of decoloniality. Our team acknowledges the influence of our own social and educational backgrounds on the research process and addresses this through explicit positionality statements included in the methodology section. By positioning this research as a decolonial project, we aim to counteract colonial, top-down approaches by heavily incorporating the voices of the grassroots organisations working on the ground through extensive interviews. This section ultimately guides readers to the central focus of the document: the toolkit.

The toolkit is structured around four key areas: vulnerable populations, conscious digital usage, digital community engagement, and digital collaboration between organizations. These areas are deliberately chosen and intricately connected. The first area addresses the intersectional perspective of preventing violent extremism (PVE) online, with a particular focus on vulnerable populations in Mali, namely women and youth. Through an intersectional approach, this section explores the varying levels of vulnerability and resilience of these groups to VE and online radicalization. The toolkit then transitions to the topic of conscious digital usage, underscoring the importance of digital education in Mali, where internet access is expanding, and VE actors are increasingly active online. By promoting individual digital awareness and providing resources to enhance digital participation, this section highlights the critical role of digital literacy.

The third area, digital community engagement, advocates for active online involvement to empower communities at the local level. Strengthening community support fosters a collective environment where the local population can assert their agency to drive change. Finally, the toolkit delves into the potential of collaborative digital spaces between organizations, aiming to expand the reach and impact of development projects while optimizing human and material resources.

Each of these four sections follows a consistent programming cycle comprising three stages: Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation and Sustainability. The Planning Stage outlines essential actions for grassroots organizations to consider prior to project implementation, enhancing the likelihood of success. The Implementation Stage provides guidelines to ensure smooth and effective project execution. Lastly, the Evaluation and Sustainability Stage emphasizes the importance of ongoing efforts to assess, improve, and sustain project outcomes.

WHAT IS A TOOLKIT?

A toolkit is a comprehensive set of recommendations designed to aid in the development or evaluation of policies based on research findings [3]. Several typologies have influenced the structure of toolkits, and in this document, we draw on the conceptual frameworks of "Good Practice" and "Simulation and Forecast" toolkits.

[3] Duvvury, Nata, Julia Radl, Esther K. Sarter, Susan Scherger, and Jeroen Spijker. "Policy Toolkits on Employment and Ageing: A Conceptual Framework." In *Extended Working Life Policies: International Gender and Health Perspectives*, edited by Áine Ní Léime, Jim Ogg, Martina Rašticová, Debra Street, Claire Krekula, Bédiová, and Ignacio Madero-Cabib, 69-84. Cham: Springer, 2020. **8**

- A toolkit based on the "**Good Practice**" typology serves as a powerful resource for guiding policy implementation and considering context-specific factors. Such toolkits are grounded in research, qualitative analysis, expert opinions, and/or public discourse. They typically highlight exemplary policies and practices that have produced positive results, analyzing the key elements responsible for their success so that others can replicate them. These toolkits often include specific case studies to model ideal practices.
- On the other hand, the "**Simulation and Forecast**" typology is valuable for political planning due to its emphasis on anticipating future scenarios. Toolkits of this type traditionally predict or speculate on the potential outcomes of specific policies or practices.

It is important to note that while this toolkit incorporates elements of these traditional frameworks, it does not fully conform to them. This toolkit is rooted in extensive research and expert opinions, reflecting the "Good Practice" approach. Additionally, the practical insights and relevance drawn from research and interviews are designed to assist grassroots organizations in the Malian context with the design, implementation, and evaluation of PVE online projects and programs. While this aspect touches on the "Simulation and Forecast" typology by considering how past changes might inform future actions, this toolkit does not attempt to predict or speculate on future outcomes.

WHO IS THIS TOOLKIT INTENDED FOR?

This toolkit is designed for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) engaged in the prevention of online violent extremism (VE) in Mali, as well as for those interested in developing programs to address this issue. It aims to support these organizations in identifying and adopting effective practices, tools, and strategies to combat the online dimensions of violent extremism, while also acknowledging and building on their existing efforts and strengths.

WHAT DOES THIS TOOLKIT HOPE TO ACHIEVE?

This toolkit aims to provide comprehensive and practical guidelines for addressing VE in Mali, drawing from theoretical frameworks in the existing literature and conducted interviews with VE experts. It is designed to enhance the understanding of online VE within the Malian context. While this toolkit is not an exhaustive study covering all aspects of Mali, nor the broader Sahel region, it serves as a foundational resource for grassroots organisations and introduces key concepts and strategies to help them plan and prepare for programs aimed at countering violent extremism online.

WHY MALI?

Mali was carefully selected as the target country for this study due to its unique conflict and insecurity patterns, particularly in the digital sphere. According to data on internet usage, secure internet servers, and fixed broadband subscriptions from the World Bank's OpenData, Mali ranks highest in these metrics compared to other Sahel countries like Burkina Faso and Niger. This heightened digital vulnerability in Mali captured our team's interest, prompting us to explore the interplay between the digital world and violent extremism within the country's distinct social and political landscape.

HOW IS THIS TOOLKIT STRUCTURED?

This toolkit is divided into four themes, offering ways for grassroots organizations to create initiatives or platforms on PVE for local grassroots communities. The themes are as follows:

1. **Vulnerable population in Focus for PVE Online**
2. **Conscious Digital Usage**
3. **Digital Community Engagement**
4. **Digital Collaboration Between Organizations**

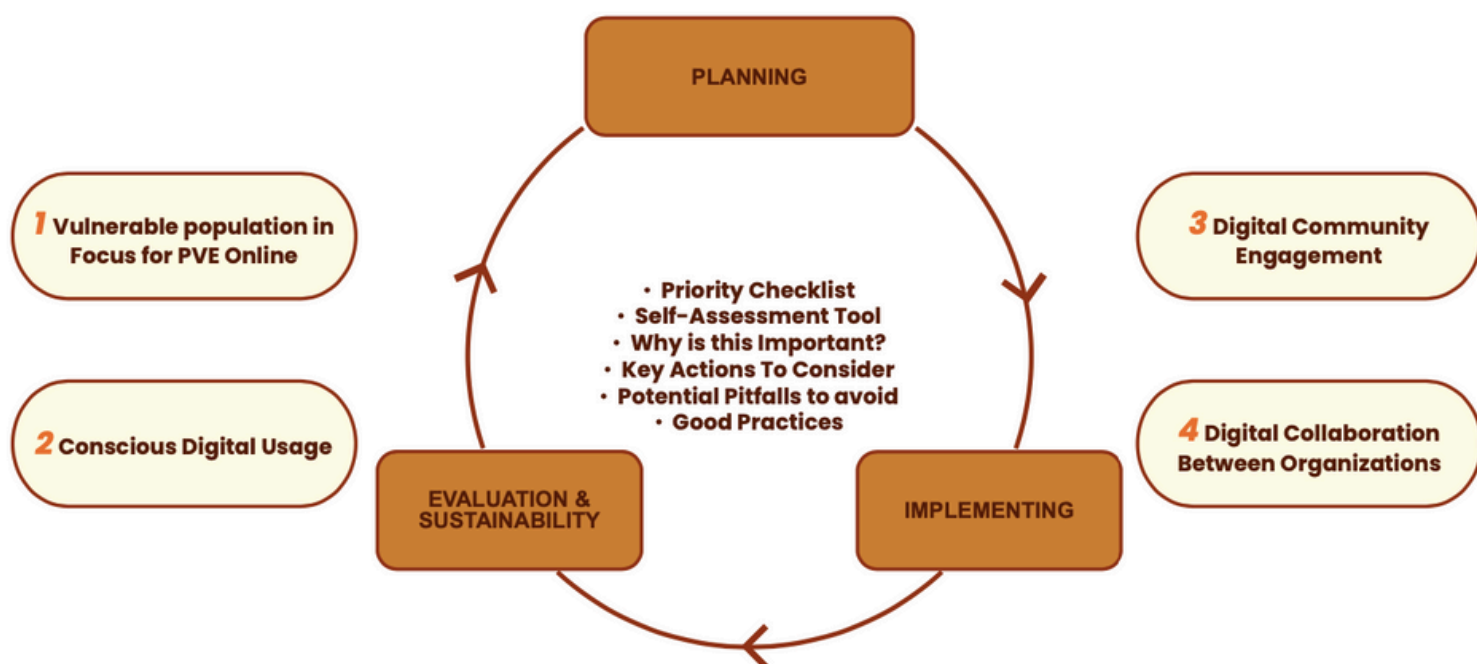
To ensure the practicality of the implementation on the ground, each of these themes is divided into three subsections that follow a project cycle arrangement:

1. **Planning**
2. **Implementation, and**
3. **Evaluation and Sustainability**

These subsections are further divided into the following components: "Self-Assessment Tool," "Why is this Important," "Key Actions to Consider," and "Potential Pitfalls to Avoid." Additionally, each section includes a "Priority Checklist," and a "Good Practice" or "Practical Tip/Tool."

These elements guide grassroots organizations in ensuring their programs are contextualized to the current situation in Mali, while also emphasizing empowerment, capacity building, and long-term sustainability. The sections and subsections contain guiding questions and recommendations to help organizations reflect on and integrate their strengths and expertise, applying them step-by-step in their PVE programs or platforms. Overall, the toolkit is designed to be flexible, allowing organizations to adapt it according to their missions, positions, and the local communities they serve.

The toolkit concludes with a budget table that complements the four parts, providing provisional and non-exhaustive resources that may be needed.



WHY WHERE THESE TOOLKIT THEMES CHOSEN?

With "prevention" as the central focus, this toolkit is initially structured to identify the key actors involved in preventing online VE in Mali. Based on the Grantee Interviews, women and youth are identified as particularly vulnerable to online VE and radicalization. However, these groups also play a crucial role in enhancing community resilience against VE. The first section of the toolkit, "Vulnerable Populations in Focus for PVE Online," thus introduces PVE activities and considerations for grassroots organizations that emphasise the intersectionality between the vulnerability and resilience of women and youth as agents of change.

The second section, "Conscious Digital Usage," builds on this understanding by guiding grassroots organizations on how to empower these key actors. It provides strategies for creating educational and awareness resources that address local communities' digital accessibility and identity, as promoting mindful digital usage is essential in mitigating factors that contribute to VE, particularly as internet and technology access expands in Mali.

To extend the impact of PVE efforts beyond merely identifying key actors and empowering them, the third and fourth sections of the toolkit focus on broader engagement strategies. The "Digital Community Engagement" section offers guidance on developing collaborative online platforms that facilitate dialogue between grassroots organizations and local communities. This approach aims to bridge the geographical and digital divides, thereby amplifying the voices and resilience of PVE actors.

The final section, "Digital Collaboration Between Organizations," addresses the need for connecting networks of PVE actors across different organizations, as strengthening these trans-organizational networks is vital for maximizing the effectiveness of PVE programs and achieving outcomes that extend beyond local engagement.

VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN THE MALIAN CONTEXT

Situated in the Sahel Region of West Africa, Mali has seen a growing in strength of VE in the past decade. Various violent extremist groups, such as Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) have exploited the multiple grievances and vulnerabilities in the Sahel to strengthen their position in the region [4]. Mali currently ranks 4th on the Global Terrorism Index, while its neighbors Burkina Faso and Niger rank 1st and 10th respectively. The three countries share the Liptako-Goruma Border Region and known as a hotspot for VE [5].

The main drivers of VE are related to the high youth unemployment, tensions between agrarian communities exorbitated by climate change, governance-related grievances, and inequality in resource accessibility [6][7]. Furthermore, grievances related to ethnicity, regional disparities, and religious tensions intersect with these factors, creating a fertile ground for extremist ideologies to take root [8]. Historically, national governments in the Sahel region have heavily relied on military interventions to address challenges posed by VE. However, these responses often exacerbate violence rather than preventing it and fail to address the underlying grievances [9][10]. In light of these limitations, recent efforts on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) have started to focus on community-centered and grassroots initiatives. Alongside these offline P/CVE responses, the evolving digital landscape in Mali has emerged as a significant factor in the spread of extremism.

In January 2023, Mali had 1.70 million social media users, representing 7.4% of the total population. The total active cellular mobile connections in early 2023 had reached 98% of the total population [11]. Simultaneously, data published by the ad planning tools of top social media platforms in 2023, implied there were 1.71 million users aged 18 and above using social media in Mali. This accounts for 16.2% of the total population aged 18 and above. Of these users, 24.5% are female, and 75.5% are male. Additionally, 21.5% of Mali's total internet user base (regardless of age) used at least one social media platform in January 2023 [12]. These numbers stand out compared to the rest of the Sahel countries especially juxtaposed with the poor security and make the digital space a ripe one when it comes to proliferating VE. Extremist groups have increasingly started to use online platforms for recruitment and radicalization, blurring the boundaries between the online and offline realms. Efforts to combat VE thus must adapt to these changing dynamics and leverage digital tools to effectively counter VE in Mali considering the varying usage patterns across the urban-rural divide, age, and gender [13][14].

ONLINE VE - WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

The digital world is complex and dynamic. The expansion of social media networks and online platforms has created an ecosystem enabling the proliferation of online extremism [15].

[4] 1 Center for Preventive Action (CPA), 'Violent Extremism in the Sahel'. February 14 2024

[5] Vision of Humanity, '2023 Global Terrorism Index'. 2023

[6] Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF), 'Factsheet Mali February 2024'. February 2024

[7] Sourced from GCERF Grantee Interviews

[8] United Nations Development Program (UNDP), 'Dynamics of Dynamics of Violent Extremism in Africa: Conflict Ecosystems, Political Ecology and the Spread of the Proto-State'. 2022

[9] Llardo, M., 'Violent Extremism in the Sahel Violent Extremism in the Sahel - Countering Vulnerability to racial narratives: towards a more pragmatic approach'. 2020

[10] UNDP, 'Journey to Extremism in Africa. Pathways to Recruitment and Disengagement'. 2023

[11] Simon Kemp. 'Digital Mali: 2023'. 2023

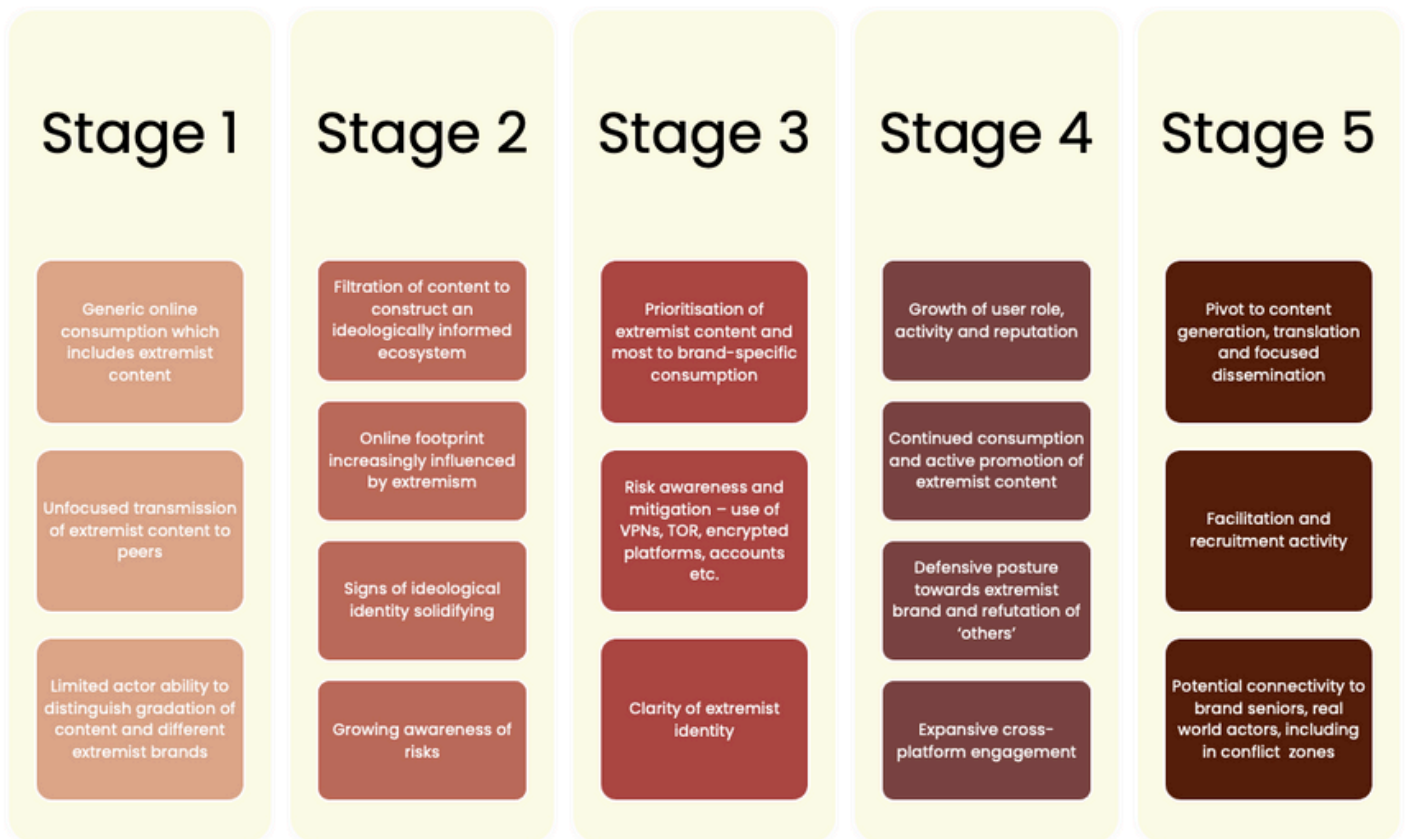
[12] ibid

[13] Boutellis T. & Mahmoud, Y. 'Investing in Peace to prevent violent extremism in the Sahel-Sahara Region'. 2017

[14] United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), 'Voices of Resilience. A Gender Needs Analysis on Preventing Violent Extremism in the Sahel'. 2023

[15] H.J Williams et al. 'The Online Extremist Ecosystem: Its Evolution and a Framework for Separating Extreme from Mainstream'.2021

This became evident after the pandemic, as there has been a rise of ‘conspiracy narratives’ online with very real offline offshoots. Ideas have centered around mismanagement and manipulation of information by elites, the distrust of democracy and a rise in right-wing narratives among others [16]. The Five-Stage Engagement Model, depicted in the Figure below [17], is a particularly useful tool to demonstrate how an online user becomes an active campaigner of online extremism.



WHICH ACTORS SHOULD WE CONSIDER?

When discussing the PVE dynamics in Mali, there is a range of actors that need to be considered.

The military junta running the country came to power through two successive coups in 2020 and 2021 [18]. They promised to bring security and stability to Mali, but it has not been realized with the persisting violence. It was estimated that there was a 38% increase in violence in Mali in 2023 [19], the deteriorating conditions have alienated many locals.

Secondly, Tuareg rebels, driven by long-standing historical grievances, demand autonomy for northern Mali, a region that has long been marginalized by the central government. The slow and inconsistent implementation of the 2015 Algiers Accord has further exacerbated tensions. In 2023, major Tuareg groups suspended their participation in the peace process, citing military tensions with the government [20]. The Tuareg-led National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), while initially spearheading the rebellion in 2012, has seen its political ambitions complicated by shifting alliances with jihadist groups like Ansar Dine, leading to territorial losses and fragmentation within the movement [21]. These alliances, although tactical, often broke down due to diverging objectives, with jihadist groups taking control of territories once held by Tuareg forces. Despite several peace agreements, northern Mali remains disconnected from the central government, fueling continued demands for autonomy and contributing to a destabilized rebel economy [22].

[16] Alexandra Korn et al. 'The Online Dimension of Extremism and Improving Online P/CVE Efforts'. 2022

[17] H.J Williams et al. 'The Online Extremist Ecosystem: Its Evolution and a Framework for Separating Extreme from Mainstream'. 2021

[18] United Nations Press. 'Situation in Mali Remains Volatile amid Escalating Clashes between Armed Groups, Official Tells Security Council, Calling for Sustained International Engagement'. 2023

[19] *ibid.*

[20] Mamadou Tapily & Philip Kleinfeld (2023) . Briefing: Why Mali's peace deal with northern rebels is on the brink.

[21] Boubacar Haidara. *The Spread of Jihadism in the Sahel* (2023). *Zeitschrift for Austin und Sicherheitspolitik*. p. 367

[22] Adib Bencherif (2024), *Political Nomadisms and the Jihadist "Safe Haven" in northern Mali*. *Journal of Modern African Studies*, pp. 473-479

Thirdly, terrorist outfits such as Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) play a significant role in exacerbating violence in the region. JNIM, an Al-Qaeda affiliate, focuses on embedding itself within local communities, exploiting historical grievances, particularly among the Fulani pastoralists, and presenting itself as a protector of local interests [23]. This "rooting" strategy contrasts with ISGS's approach, which is known for "brutal predation" and often targets civilians who resist their demands. The rivalry between JNIM and ISGS escalated into open conflict in 2019, adding another layer of complexity to the conflict, as both groups vie for territorial control and influence over local populations [24]. In the tri-border region of Liptako-Gourma, where resources and smuggling routes are contested, these groups have significantly contributed to the escalation of violence [25]. Furthermore, fighters do not always come from Northern Mali but also from other Sahelian countries. However, the blood ties and business ties between fighters from Northern Mali and the counterpart from Sahelian countries deconstruct the binary understanding of "foreign" and "local" soldiers.

Fourthly, amid the increasing political and economic insecurity, key external funders that have traditionally maintaining security and peace in the region, such as the United Nations and France, have withdrawn forces from Mali [26]. However, new aid-sources such as the Wagner Group, backed by Russia, and Turkey are emerging [27].

Fifthly, local religious leaders play a key role in the Malian ecosystem. They "are active on political issues and.... their most effective forms of engagement often come from their independence from the authorities"[28]. In a situation of heightened anger and distrust at a government that undemocratically came to power, the sway of religious leaders cannot be underestimated. With approximately half of Mali's population under 18 years old [29], the youth could have contributed significantly to positive development, but the ongoing violence has severely curtailed their opportunities. As an example, it is estimated that 400,000 children have been affected by the closure of schools [30]. In such a situation, they become vulnerable targets for militias, terrorist groups and rebels to radicalize.

Lastly, women face severe insecurity in Mali, with limited access to essential services like healthcare—reflected in mortality rate of 440 women per 100,000 live births, one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world[31]. They are often displaced from their homes and livelihoods, left to the whims of the Government or local landowners [32]. At the same time, they have lost family members due to the conflict, leading to widespread anger and frustration over the inability of the government to create a secure environment.

In conclusion, Mali at present is severely lacking state authority and administrative services, including a functioning judiciary. The ongoing violence is combined with "global food shortages, the effects of climate change, andregional economic sanctions stemming from the political crisis"[33] creating a ripe atmosphere for radicalization. With this context in mind, analyzing new forms of emerging extremism, or possible transitions, such as online extremism, becomes imperative to shifting from a reactive to a proactive approach in tackling violent extremism.

[23] Boubacar Haidara. *The Spread of Jihadism in the Sahel* (2023). *Zeitschrift für Aussen- und Sicherheitspolitik*. p. 373

[24] *Ibid.* p. 371

[25] *Ibid.* p. 368

[26] Andrew Lebovich. *The Local Face of Jihadism in Northern Mali*. 2013

[27] Pauline Le Roux. *Exploiting Borders in the Sahel: The Islamic State in the Greater Sahara*. 2019

[28] *Washington Post*. 'Mali's government will probe Tuareg rebel leaders as crucial 2015 peace deal appears to crumble'. 2023

[29] Chris Ewokor. 'Mali Crisis: Fierce Fighting Erupts After Tuareg Rebels Kill More than 80 Soldiers'. 2023

[30] Andrew Lebovich. *Sacred struggles: How Islam shapes politics in Mali*. 2019

[31] UNICEF. *Children in Mali: Mali's Greatest Resource is its Children*. 2023

[32] Catholic Relief Services. *Sahel Crisis: Facts and How to Help*. 2023

[33] *Relief Web*. 'Mali Conflict Carries Heavy Toll for Pregnant Women Amidst Rising Insecurity'. 2024

[34] Ousmane Drabo. *Land to live on: the struggle of displaced women in Mali*. Retrieved from *Norwegian Refugee Council* 2024

POTENTIAL TIPPING POINTS AND CONSUMER AGENCY IN ONLINE VE – WHAT COULD MAKE A PASSIVE CONSUMER AN ACTIVE USER IN MALI?

The tipping point refers to a transformative trigger that induces a disturbance in one's belief and knowledge system, compelling individuals to join violent extremist groups. Many individuals involved in violent extremism have been propelled to join the extremist groups after experiencing trigger events initiated by the government, such as the killing and arrest of family or friends and fueled grievances from abusive state security operations that is frequently mobilized by violent extremists. When these state operations leave, militant groups inevitably take over the state and work as community protectors to consolidate their control.

The Internet has the power to change and amplify one's idea, attitude, and corresponding behavior. Saifudeen introduces three triggers to shift internet users [34]. The first entails a case of "loss of credibility" in the ideas proposed by the current worldview one ascribed to. The online platform allows people to rethink their ideas because it stores multitudes of ideas destabilizing one's worldview. Not only cognition, but also emotion is easily and strongly stimulated by the multitude of visual sources provoking emotion. The second trigger is referred to as "resonant loss", attitudinal shifts which occur when social ties diminish or sour in one's real-world or online environment, leading individuals to seek alternative forms of online socialization and explore countercultures with preferred norms and values. The resonance loss is perpetuated by the third trigger, "social anchors" like family, lifestyle, or career, which solidify an individual's connection to their current worldview, becoming noticeably weaker or delicate.

However, involvement in violent extremism occur from a myriad of complex interplay of personal, societal, and political factors due to identity crises that prompt individuals to join violent extremist groups. Considering radicalization as "an interactive process between theological and socio-psychological journeys"[35] allows us to unfold the continuation process of radicalization without overlooking complexities and multitudes of factors and experiences.

[35] Human Rights Watch. 'Mali Events of 2022'. 2023

[36] Saifudeen, Omer Ali. "The Cyber Extremism Orbital Pathways Model." RSIS Working Paper no. 283, 2014. <https://dr.ntu.edu.sg/bitstream/10356/82410/1/WP283.pdf>.

METHODOLOGY

Central for this Toolkit is the Research Question:

“What practices, tools, and strategies must Grassroot/Civil Society Organizations (CSO) actors working on the prevention of VE adopt in order to ensure their work acknowledges and specifically tackles the online dimensions of VE?”

In addition, we explored the following four research questions, primarily through our literature review at the project's outset, to enrich our understanding and guide our project outcomes:

- 1. Who are the key stakeholders facilitating VE through online channels?**
- 2. What are the tipping points at which passive consumers of online VE content become active VE actors? How does the agency of online VE content consumers amplify under certain conditions?**
- 3. What existing efforts are being made to prevent VE online, and are they effective? If not, what are the reasons for their ineffectiveness?**
- 4. Are there discernible trends that can inform future efforts in preventing VE online?**

We started our research with a thorough literature review including the above research questions. Simultaneously, we engaged in discussions with our partner organization, the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF), to delineate the optimal approach to our central research question. GCERF is a global fund dedicated to the prevention of VE. The organization connects local communities to global resources and supports grassroots initiatives typically out of reach for international donors. A key aspect in their work is a program that prevents the spread of VE and its facilitation by way of the online world.

Recognizing the role of contextual- and country-specific factors in shaping our project's outcomes, we collaborated with GCERF to decide on a regional focus for our research. Through their input and their identification of the Sahel Region as a current hotspot for VE, we agreed to focus on said region. But to ensure specificity and practical relevance, we agreed to narrow our focus even more to a single country within the Sahel. After considering GCERF's active involvement and the escalating VE trends, we identified three potential countries: Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali. Given Mali's comparatively higher internet usage rates, important given our inquiry's online dimension, we ultimately selected Mali.

PROJECT PROCESS

At the very outset of our research, we recognized the history of Mali as a former French colony and adopted a decolonial methodology to prioritize, privilege and engage the voice of local Malians. In this endeavor, we adopted a working definition of decolonization as follows: “(...) a process that involves reflecting, recognizing and understanding for decolonization” [36].

The aim of the process was three-fold:

- To gain, acknowledge, and value knowledge and perspectives from everyday experiences
- To innovate new ways for social change that challenges the historical and current impact of colonialism
- To be inclusive, non-discriminatory, building community relationships, and values for everyone's contributions to transform the colonial structure in the current knowledge system.

[36] Swiss Academy of National Sciences. "What Does It Mean? Exploring Terms and Methodologies." May 5, 2023. Accessed November 19, 2023. https://kfpe.scnat.ch/en/decolonizing/what_does_it_mean_.

To achieve this end, we took the following steps;

- We created a **positionality statement** at the beginning of our research project, and shared it with our Grantee interviewees, to ensure transparency surrounding potential biases, cultural sensitivity, and source inclusivity and mitigate them. We also found this important as none of us are from the Sahel region, and we wanted to ensure that we approached the project with a collaborative, learning- focused approach, as opposed to an authoritarian tone. Avoiding stigmatization and stereotyping, we acknowledge the diversity of encounters and engagement in this project.
- **While conducting working groups and interviews**, we were careful to choose interviewees with a tie to the region and engage with grantees who would be directly impacted by the outcome of this project. We conducted the interviews in **French**, their language of preference, and created a detailed **consent** form to protect our interviewees from any potential harm and maintain research integrity and ethics. We also fostered a **collaborative environment** by sending materials in advance, opening the floor for questions and feedback at each stage, and conducting interviews in a format preferred by the VE experts and Grantees, especially during the working groups. For instance, one organization wished to have a brief overview of the toolkit while others wanted to move through them page by page.
- In the **development of the toolkit**, we focused on ensuring our writing was decolonial and privileged the experiences of stakeholders as opposed to our voices. By taking feedback at every stage, we followed a **process of inductive iteration**, where we took our research-based hypothesis to practitioners and accordingly refined our research orientation.

PROJECT OUTPUT DECISION

To ensure practical utility for the grassroots organizations, we deliberated on the format of our project output in our team and with GCERF. Opting for a more hands-on approach, we decided to develop a Toolkit tailored specifically for Grassroot organizations operating in Mali within the field of (online) PVE. The decision to develop a Toolkit as the project's output was guided by several key considerations:

1. **Practical Utility:** Recognizing the need for actionable resources that Grassroot organizations can readily implement, we opted for a Toolkit format. Unlike more traditional outputs such as reports or policy briefs, which often remain theoretical or abstract, a Toolkit provides tangible tools and strategies that organizations can directly apply in their PVE efforts.
2. **Contextual Relevance:** Given the diverse contexts in which Grassroot organizations operate, particularly in regions susceptible to VE like Mali, a Toolkit allows for customization and adaptation to specific local circumstances. By tailoring resources to the Malian context, we wanted to highlight their relevance and effectiveness in addressing local challenges. Furthermore, our literature research had shown that much of PVE research presented a strong disconnect between theory and practice, which we tried to bridge through the development of the toolkit.
3. **Empowerment and Capacity Building:** By equipping Grassroot organizations with practical tools and strategies, the Toolkit serves as a mechanism for capacity building and empowerment. Rather than relying solely on external interventions and actors, organizations are empowered to take ownership of their PVE initiatives and adapt strategies to suit their unique needs and capabilities.
4. **Long-Term Sustainability:** Unlike one-off reports or interventions, a Toolkit has the potential for long-term impact and sustainability. By providing organizations with tools and strategies they can continually use and adapt, the Toolkit fosters ongoing capacity building and resilience in the face of evolving VE challenges.

Additionally, the conceptualization of our toolkit was guided by the following questions;

- Who are we trying to convince?
- How involved are they in the issue?
- What do they already know about the issue?
- What is our message?
- What key elements do we want them to remember?
- Which stage(s) in the policy-making process are we trying to influence?

Keeping in mind our methodological approach grounded in decoloniality and the wish to bridge theory and practice, we remained in constant contact with GCERF through bi-weekly meetings to refine our research and build our toolkit. We also collaborated closely with the organization's Grantees actively engaged in PVE efforts in Mali. This collaboration included conducting six French speaking Grantee Interviews across three organizations (ICD, FEDE, and Think Peace) and additional interviews with three experts with both practical and/or academic expertise in the Malian PVE context. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured nature to facilitate the exploration of current vulnerabilities, challenges faced by the grassroots organizations (with a digital focus), potential future digital initiatives, and implementation pitfalls to keep in mind.

Based on the insights gained from the interviews, our team developed a prototype Toolkit structured around the programming cycle, featuring four distinct (online) PVE initiative categories:

1. **Vulnerable Population in Focus for PVE online**
2. **Conscious Digital Usage**
3. **Digital Community Engagement**
4. **Digital Collaboration Between Organizations**

Subsequently, we organized two collaborative working group sessions where the three Grassroot organizations provided feedback, identified potential gaps, and offered suggestions for improvement for the Toolkit. This collaborative approach aimed to refine the Toolkit based on collective insights and ensure its practical relevance and effectiveness in the Malian context. The interview transcriptions are stored in the shared OneDrive folder provided by GCERF. By the end of the project, they shall be disposed from the folders and technological devices.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTION STRATEGIES

Privacy: Mali is a country currently facing political instability and insecurity. Keeping this in mind, it was of urgent importance that we take the utmost care when dealing with documents, interviews and information pertaining to the region. We underwent a GCERF security training in 2023 to understand imperative privacy measures, such as avoiding any kind of generative AI (like spell-check). Thereafter, to protect the grantees and their information, GCERF created an authenticated Microsoft OneDrive folder for us to store and process documents. Furthermore, an email for us and providing the details to one point-person within the team who had the responsibility to engage with the grantees and share all information through a secure server. To balance the burden this placed on our teammate, we divided other tasks (such as administrative work, initial toolkit prototyping etc.) amongst the remaining members to ensure an equitable balance. Furthermore, throughout this project all unclarity and breaches regarding data privacy risks refer to the relevant agreement's documents between student researchers, GCERF, the Geneva Graduate Institute, the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and the Geneva Graduate Institute Research Ethic Guidelines.

Language Barriers: While choosing the country, it was understood that the working language would be English. However, the grantees were more comfortable in French, so we had to switch our mode of communication. There were only two French speakers in the group, only one of them being a native speaker. This posed problems while conducting interviews, as two team members could not effectively understand and contribute. To balance this, the bulk of the preparatory work was done by them for an equitable distribution.

Transcription: Interviews had to be transcribed in French and then translated to English. Initially we manually transcribed everything, as we could not use generative AI. However, GCERF was extremely cooperative in this regard, and translated the interviews from French to English with DeepL to make our work easier. To balance work amongst teammates, the analysis of the transcriptions and research work was distributed keeping the language barriers and transcription work in mind.

Religious Consciousness: The majority religion in Mali is Islam and this posed unforeseen logistical hurdles during Ramadan as we were not fully aware of practices. As our first working group was scheduled right after the Ramadan holidays, we were while scheduling meetings to avoid disrupting any prayer times. Additionally, as Europe was working, we were unsure as to why we were not receiving responses before GCERF colleagues clarified that at the end of Ramadan five days would be considered holiday on their calendar. This pushed our timeline slightly, but we were able to readjust and move forward once we had the requisite knowledge.

Internet Access: Interviewees were often working in remote areas of Mali, with poor internet connectivity. This posed problems during the interview, with interviews getting disconnected midway and needing to be restarted. It also caused problems with the transcription due to audibility issues. One working group meeting had to be rescheduled for a week due to poor network access. In such instances, we took notes alongside so we could cross-compare the audio with the notes and bridge gaps. Additionally, we adjusted our timeline and list of tasks to be more efficient with our outputs.

1 VULNERABLE POPULATIONS IN FOCUS FOR PVE ONLINE

In strengthening local community resilience against online VE activities beyond individual awareness in navigating digital spaces and taking ownership of their digital identities. It is crucial to consider the inclusion of vulnerable population, as identified from our interview with Grantees. Vulnerability is defined by specific characteristics that increase risk [37]. This section emphasizes the need for an intersectional perspective in the conversation of PVE at the local level, recognizing the variances of vulnerability and resilience within the population [38]. In current Mali, the women and youth population play a significant role in PVE resilience in their community. At the same time, they pose a higher likelihood of risk to vulnerability on targeted contact with violent extremists. However, their voices are often underrepresented in the local community's PVE responses. This section of the toolkit suggests strategies for grassroots organizations to empower women and youth as an agent of change in recognizing and responding to VE activities in their communities and extending to online VE.

Priority Checklist

- Assessing the role and current realities of vulnerable population as an agent of change in PVE online
- Adapting PVE online solutions by contextual understanding and identified needs
- Ensuring an innovative space to be an agent of change and building sustainable partnerships based on trust

PLANNING

IMPLEMENTING

EVALUATION & SUSTAINABILITY

1. Assessing the role and current realities of vulnerable population as an agent of change in PVE online



Self-assessment questions

**Note: This self-assessment is recommended to be divided into two assessments, from the "community" and "individual/micro" level, the aim of this division is to give flexibility for grassroots organizations to adapt their PVE activities plan according to the vulnerable population situation and circumstances.*

- What role(s) does this vulnerable population hold at the community/micro level?
- How does this vulnerable population's role(s) in the community/micro hold significance in recognizing and responding to online VE activities?
- What potential vulnerabilities or challenges hinder this vulnerable population from recognizing and responding to online VE activities at the community/micro level?
- What are the important community/micro level values of this vulnerable population hold that can be related to recognize and respond to online VE activities?
- What unique effort does this vulnerable population made contributing to the community/micro level in recognizing and responding to online VE activities?

Why is this important?

In planning programs that recognize variances of vulnerability and resilience of vulnerable population in PVE efforts, it is important to understand their position and current reality from the micro to the community level. For example, in our interview mentioned that women took a role as mother and wives. Both hold an important role within the family and community function. Furthermore, women hold abundance of information and awareness about their community. While youth are one of the dominating users of online digital platform in Mali. At the same time, reasons such as the difficult socio-economic situation they are in or misinterpretation of religious text, can increase the youth toward radicalization and joining violent extremist groups. Lastly, by identifying the selected vulnerable population's position from micro to community level, also understanding on their current reality and proximity to VE actors; allows perspectives how they can be an agent of change to recognize and respond to online VE effectively in the community.



Key Actions to Consider

- Identify the roles that vulnerable populations hold within community/micro level.
- Examine the significance of these roles contribute in PVE online program.
- Identify potential vulnerabilities or challenges that hinder effective PVE online program within this population.
- Identify community/micro level values and past efforts that can be leveraged in PVE online efforts.



Potential Pitfalls to Avoid

- Omitting the vulnerable populations and undervaluing their contribution to the decision-making processes in program planning
- Inadequately examining and understanding the significance of the roles held by the vulnerable population
- Overlooking the significance of community values in PVE programs

PLANNING

IMPLEMENTING

EVALUATION &
SUSTAINABILITY



2. Adapting PVE online solutions by contextual understanding and identified needs



Self-assessment questions

***Note:** This self-assessment is recommended to be divided into two assessments, from the "community" and "individual/micro" level, the aim of this division is to give flexibility for grassroots organizations to adapt their PVE activities plan according to the vulnerable population situation and circumstances.

- What unique effort has this vulnerable population contributed at the community/micro level in recognizing and responding to online VE?
- What are specific needs of the local community to help advance in recognizing and responding to VE online at a community/micro level?
- What socio-cultural factors related to this vulnerable population at the community/micro level are important to consider when implementing a PVE online program?
- What geographical factors related to this vulnerable population in the community/micro level are important to consider when implementing a PVE online program?

-  What security factors related to this vulnerable population at the community/micro level are important to consider when implementing a PVE online program?
-  How can your organization's past experiences help to incorporate the community's values, needs, present challenges to advance/bridge the gap this vulnerable population in recognizing and responding to online VE?

Why is this important?

In implementing a program that adopts a decolonial approach and acknowledges an intersectional perspective, it is important to ensure solutions are tailored to the vulnerable population's characteristics, needs, and perspectives. The program implementation should address both the vulnerabilities and resilience of the vulnerable population to VE, interconnecting both offline and online realm. According to our Grantee interviews, it is important to have a good understanding of the context where the program is operated to effectively fight for VE in the community. Moreover, they underlined that in implementing programs to a local community, it is important to take priority on community needs. Especially with the fact that Mali is a multi-ethnic society with each regions have their own traditions, cultures, and belief. Also, the differences in socio-economic and security situations, as well as urban and rural access to the internet. This contextual understanding helps to identify the vulnerable population's needs and empowers them to become agents of change.



Key Actions to Consider

- Engage communities as central players in finding collaborative solutions for PVE online program.
- Link socio-cultural, socio-economic, geographical and security grievances with the PVE online program.
- Ensure that the differences in digital division and internet access are considered, as they influence communities' efforts in PVE online program.



Potential Pitfalls to Avoid

- Disregarding the diversity of multi-ethnic Mali.
- Excluding the community input and dictating solutions.
- Overlooking the anticipated acceleration in internet speed, digital utilization, and emerging AI in the coming years.
- Assuming the literacy rate is spread out evenly across the region and implementing a PVE online program that disregards the differences in literacy rate.

3. Ensuring an innovative space to be an agent of change and building sustainable partnerships based on trust



Self-assessment questions

- How can grassroots organizations ensure that their programs provide adequate opportunities and support for individuals to become agents of change in PVE online?
- How can grassroots organizations ensure their programs provide ongoing support for individuals to develop as agents of change after the programs end?
- How inclusive are the processes in decision-making and implementation of the programs?
- How well are the participants equipped to manage and sustain the programs' objectives and goals independently after the grassroots organization involvement ends?
- How do the programs demonstrate respect for the cultural, social, and values of the vulnerable population as individuals and community?
- What steps in program planning and implementation ensure grassroots organizations build and maintain respect and trust with the selected vulnerable population collaborating with?
- How do grassroots organizations ensure that respect and trust are upheld with the selected vulnerable population after their involvement ends?

Why is this important?

To ensure the impact and sustainability of the PVE online program, it is crucial for programs built on trust and respect as well as incorporating innovative spaces that provide opportunities, support, inclusivity, and empowering resources. From the Grantee Interviews, it was mentioned that the innovation to give women/youth space to become agents of change are significant. They underlined that, if the program aim is to work locally and achieve results locally, then it is essential to get all players (the community) involved in the project, on board with the mission, and committed to it. By participating in the process, they can manage their community independently without needing external intervention once the program ends. Furthermore, to sustain a program with long-term impacts, it is important to create programs based on respect and trust between grassroots organizations within the local community, as well as within local communities. From the interviews, mistrust can exist within the community, therefore it is essential to build cooperative links with the locals. For example, through collaborating with the representative actors of the community.



Key Actions to Consider

- Partner with local key actors or community members in PVE online programme to build trust and monitor long-term changes in the community.
- Encourage PVE online programme participants to feel the sense of ownership and are responsible for making a difference in their communities.
- Offer guidance, connections, and tools to help individuals make positive changes in their communities.
- Create online/offline groups or communities where participants can share ideas, work together, and get help from grassroots organizations.
- Grassroot organizations should keep the promises and commitments made during the program and be there to help when needed.



Potential Pitfalls to Avoid

- Implementing programs that perpetuates for continuing dependency to the external aid.
- Overlooking the varying degrees of vulnerability within vulnerable populations creates more social divisions and inequality.
- Choosing local key actors that do not represent the community or favoring a particular group to another.
- Contrasting programs' objectives, vision, and mission that do not resonate with the needs, hopes, values, and future vision of the local community.

[37] Kuran, Christian Henrik Alexander, Claudia Morsut, Bjørn Ivar Kruke, Marco Krüger, Lisa Segnestam, Kati Orru, Tor Olav Nævestad, Merja Airola, Jaana Keränen, Friedrich Gabel, Sten Hansson, and Sten Torpan. "Vulnerability and Vulnerable Groups from an Intersectionality Perspective." *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* 50 (2020): 101826. ISSN 2212-4209. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdr.2020.101826>.

[38] *ibid*, 1

2 CONSCIOUS DIGITAL USAGE

With technology and internet access deepening in Mali, and with it noting high usage of the internet amongst Sahel countries, it is necessary to consider what kind of resources local communities should have to understand the digital world better. Even a preliminary understanding of accessibility and what it means to have a digital identity can have a significant impact on the safety of new users [39]. Additionally, a deeper understanding of how the online world can be misused to incite offline violence can help prevent offline violence in multiple ways. For instance, it can promote more conscious and mindful use of digital platforms among vulnerable communities, reducing the risk of their exploitation by extremists seeking to incite violence.

Priority Checklist

- Accessibility of digital spaces
- Evaluating online information for accuracy and trustworthiness
- Being able to navigate the digital world and participate online
- Taking ownership of their privacy and digital presence

PLANNING

IMPLEMENTING

EVALUATION &
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1. Accessibility of digital spaces



Self-assessment questions

- Is there a rural-urban divide in the access to the online world?
- Is there a gender divide in the access to the online world?
- Is there an age-gap in who is accessing the online world (only the young as opposed to the elderly leaders as well?)
- What is the level of exposure that minors and children have to the online world?
- What are the barriers to digital access?
- Are these barriers likely to change in the coming years?
- Can anything be done to address these barriers right now?

Why is this important?

The digital world has globally become even more important in a post-Covid society. Many essential services were digitized, in addition to jobs and communication. In Mali as well, Grantee interviews revealed that digital penetration is deepening and expanding, spreading to communities that initially did not have access to it. These interviews also revealed that there is a diverging understanding of who has access to the digital space in Mali. Some mentioned that there is an urban-rural divide, with urban sections having more access, while others stated that this was not the case, with both urban and rural milieus having roughly the same degree of access. Therefore, depending on the particular area of focus in Mali, the access to digital technology might be different. Understanding this level of digital access during programme development could help protect vulnerable populations from future recruitment and radicalization through a more nuanced programme which incorporates digital aspects based on the on-ground reality.

Additionally, access to digital spaces can be emancipatory and lessen the spread of online hate and violence. For example, during Grantee interviews, it was highlighted that it can lessen conflicts between pastoral and sedentary communities by encouraging information sharing on where livestock might be at particular points of time. To ensure that everyone can access this emancipatory space, it is important to look at who can access it in the present and why

GOOD PRACTICE

"Digital Citizenship" [40]

Understanding how other organizations define digital citizenship could provide a useful comparison that can be adapted to the Malian context. It is interesting that the concept of digital usage is correlated to citizenship, implying a system where users have rules they should follow, and agency in being responsible about their usage. This is particularly important when discussing online violence extremism as the online world is often thought to be 'passive' and fake as compared to the real world. Digital citizenship helps highlight the link between the online and offline world. These are just a few ways in which digital citizenship might be a helpful way to navigate online activity and help new users understand it better, but it is not exhaustive, nor does it by itself ensure the prevention of online violent extremism.

Cybercitizenship.org in their digital citizenship guide introduces the concept of digital citizenship, defining it as:

"Digital citizenship refers to the responsible and ethical use of technology, particularly in the online sphere. It encompasses a range of behaviors, from respecting others privacy to safeguarding personal information."

It recommends the following;

1. Defining Digital Citizenship: Navigating the Online World Responsibly

Digital citizenship.....encapsulates the principles of respect, integrity, and responsibility in our digital lives. Just as we strive to be good citizens in our physical communities, digital citizenship urges us to be active, engaged, and accountable members of the online world. To navigate the digital landscape responsibly, we must embody these principles. Respect involves treating others with kindness, empathy, and tolerance, both in our words and actions online. Integrity calls us to be honest, transparent, and authentic in our digital interactions. Responsibility compels us to protect our personal information, contribute positively to online discussions, and report any harmful or inappropriate content we come across.

2. From Online Behavior to Digital Citizenship

Our online behavior contributes to our digital citizenship. Every post, comment, like, or share has the power to shape the digital landscape. By being mindful of our actions and adhering to the principles of digital citizenship, we can cultivate a positive online presence that fosters respect, empathy, and understanding.

3. Benefits of Being a Good Digital Citizen

As good digital citizens, we also gain access to a wealth of knowledge and resources. The internet offers a vast repository of information that can empower us in various aspects of life. By leveraging the power of digital citizenship, we can tap into this wealth of knowledge and contribute to it, expanding the collective wisdom of humanity. Moreover, practicing digital citizenship helps us develop critical thinking skills. We learn to navigate the vast sea of information, distinguish between credible and unreliable sources, and become more discerning consumers of digital content. This ability to think critically and evaluate information is invaluable in our increasingly digital and information-driven world."



Key Actions to Consider

- Gear community activities to be as digitally inclusive as possible
- Consider the needs and possible desires of previously excluded communities from the digital world, for instance, what digital applications would be more appealing to them?
- Gear community activities to encourage Government support towards furthering digital access.



Potential Pitfalls to Avoid

- Disregarding that organizational activities for or with communities can encourage the entrenchment of barriers to accessing digital spaces
- Disregarding whether digital education is taking place alongside the expansion of digital access.

PLANNING

IMPLEMENTING

EVALUATION & SUSTAINABILITY

2. Evaluating online information for accuracy and trustworthiness



Self-assessment questions

**Note: Local communities here refers to programme beneficiaries. Local communities may not be homogenous which may require a more nuanced approach while posing these questions.*

- Do local communities know that it is easy to manipulate content online?
- Do local communities know how content might be manipulated online?
- Do local communities know why people/ communities/ organizations might want to share false or inaccurate information?
- Do local communities have any information on how to assess the accuracy of information online?

Why is this important?

Not all content online is accurate and some of it has been designed to spread hatred and ignite passionate responses from Malians. For instance, Grantee interviews mentioned that WhatsApp messages can sometimes ignite arguments between pastoral and sedentary communities. The internet offers tremendous opportunities for enhanced communication between conflicting parties, yet it can also serve as a platform for disseminating deceptive news and material. When false information is circulated, it can perpetuate and yield significant repercussions. It may provoke health-related fears, unfounded allegations, and potentially harmful narratives. Stakeholders mentioned that there are multiple sources of tension in Mali, such the conflicts between pastoral and sedentary communities, which could be exploited by mischievous elements to spread inaccurate, hateful, information. Learning the difference between trustworthy and inaccurate information online, may empower locals and thereby stop a conflict from emerging or growing. For instance, if sedentary communities saw a video of pastoral communities burning fields, they may be able to point out that it an inaccurate or untrustworthy video, and therefore, stop a harsh reaction before it emerges.



Key Actions to Consider

- Develop an understanding of how locals share and exchange information, including what channels and platforms they utilize for this purpose
- Understand if locals are familiar with terms such as ‘misinformation’, ‘disinformation’, and ‘fake news’ and whether they demonstrate awareness of these concepts in their online interactions
- Develop an understanding of what actionable strategies can be implemented to incentivize locals to verify the accuracy of information before disseminating it online
- Consider behaviors and incentives that would encourage locals to adopt fact-checking habits as a routine part of their online behavior
- Consider whether the propagation of fake news played a significant role in inciting hatred within society, the patterns of this and how might similar circumstances can be avoided in the future
- Consider proactive measures which can be taken to mitigate the spread of hateful misinformation.

GOOD PRACTICE

“SHARE Checklist” [41]

The World Health Organization developed the ‘SHARE’ Checklist to combat the spread of misinformation and disinformation. They recommend that:

“Before you like, comment or share content online, use the SHARE checklist to make sure you’re not contributing to the spread of harmful content.”

Source: Rely on official sources for information.

Headline: Headlines don’t always tell the full story. Always read to the end before you share articles

Analyse: Analyse the facts. If something sounds unbelievable, it very well might be.

Retouched: Watch out for misleading pictures and videos in stories. They might be edited, or show an unrelated place or event. Check to see who else is using the photo.

Error: Look out for mistakes. Typos and other errors might mean the information is false.”



Potential Pitfalls to Avoid

- Disregarding that people can be resistant to the idea of fake information online as it may counter views they believe to be true
- Disregarding that people might consider checking the trustworthiness of each piece of information encountered online a big task that discourages people from doing it at all

3. Being able to navigate the digital world and participate online



Self-assessment questions

- Does everyone who is using the digital space know the different applications available?
- How can the digital world be used to help local communities?
- How can the digital world be used to manipulate local communities?
- Presently, who is teaching people about the digital world?
- Do locals have an idea of what certain actions online, on different applications, mean (for example, liking a post on Facebook often means supporting a particular ideology etc.)?

Why is this important?

Often times, understanding of digital spaces may be limited in local communities. It was often mentioned by stakeholders that digital usage in Mali is growing, but there is not enough knowledge of how to deal with the digital world, making the online space a 'double-edged sword'. Understanding how people relate to the online space, the kind of applications they might find interesting, and the most common ones being used already, would help them navigate the space better, encouraging them to explore the online world in an empowered manner.

GOOD PRACTICE

"CIVECAT" [42]

This is a case study from Malaysia, where they discussed Curbing Ideologies of Violent Extremism Through Comics and Technology, **CIVETCAT**.

"There is a need to employ a variety of means to counter the proliferation of violent extremist ideologies in both the virtual and non-virtual spaces. Based on this premise, SEARCCT worked together with established Malaysian comic artists to produce twelve PCVE-based comics. Comics are an effective medium, particularly because it is a visual medium that allows complex ideas to be broken down to easily consumable images. Also, comics are believed to be fairly popular among the target demographic of vulnerable groups, the readers being between 17 and 30 years of age.

The resulting comics were disseminated online as well as utilised as resources in SEARCCT's outreach programmes."



Key Actions to Consider

***Note:** Local communities here refers to programme beneficiaries. Local communities may not be homogenous which may require a more nuanced approach while posing these questions.

- Consider what local communities understand by participating online
- Consider if local communities might view online participation as a tool to avoid conflict and encourage resolution of tensions
- Consider *how* local communities might view online participation as a tool to avoid conflict and encourage resolution of tensions
- Consider what actions might support local communities in their journey to understand digital spaces better and what kind of support they would like
- Consider in what circumstances local communities might see the online space as an empowering tool
- Consider whether local communities engage in any behaviors online that might be risky without understanding the full consequences of this action



Potential Pitfalls to Avoid

- Disregarding that too much information about navigating online spaces at once can be overwhelming for beneficiaries, producing anxiety [43].
- Disregarding that if most of the resources are new to local communities, learning should be appropriately paced otherwise issue fatigue with the digital world could result.

4. Taking ownership of their privacy and digital presence



Self-assessment questions

- How is digital presence understood amongst local communities?
- Is there an understanding of what digital privacy is amongst local communities?
- Are locals aware of how their digital activity can be used against them, for example by extremist groups to threaten them?

Why is this important?

There are several indicators of digital presence, be it cookies on sites or personal account details on apps we might use. These can make our life simpler, but if we do not have the proper idea of what digital presence means, we cannot decide how we want to engage with the online world. Understanding of digital presence can lead to a more empowered presence online

In contrast, feeling disempowered by the digital landscape may lead people to feel fatigue and get drained by the online world and expose them to harmful content for which they are not prepared. They can not only become more susceptible to extremism but also start propagating it without understanding how and why. Simultaneously, if they are not sharing information in a safe manner, they may hand out personal details making it easier for extremists to locate and threaten them into criminal activities. Stakeholders have recurrently mentioned how extremists threaten people into complying with knowledge of their personal information- the scale of this could widen exponentially with unsafe digital practices, especially due to lack of proper digital awareness.

On the other hand, data privacy can safeguard personal information and empower users to navigate the digital landscape securely. By granting individuals control over their digital presence, data privacy allows them to interact with online services and share personal data confidently, fostering a healthy and innovative digital ecosystem. This in turn makes it harder for extremist elements online to use their data for their own purposes.



Key Actions to Consider

- Consider the actions local communities take when engaging online and what are the common activities undertaken when participating online
- Consider that the online activities of local communities may influence algorithms and shape how they interact with the digital world- for instance, what someone sees online may be influenced by who they are interacting with
- Develop an understanding of the information local communities have about their online presence. For instance, question whether local communities actively recognize that their online presence allows for tracking of their location and preferences
- Develop an understanding of whether local communities are conscious of the implications of their online actions, such as liking specific posts, and how these actions can reveal personal preferences, political affiliations, and activities to a broader audience
- Consider whether local communities possess knowledge of fundamental privacy protection measures, such as refraining from sharing unnecessary personal information like banking details or addresses online



Potential Pitfalls to Avoid

- Disregarding that data regulation rules are often made by the Governments and change very often so programmes with online elements should be flexible
- Overlooking that diverse user-groups might struggle to keep pace with developments in the online world, for instance practices maintaining their privacy and regulate their presence in the online world
- Overlooking that locals may need to speak to an expert to understand how to protect themselves in case their privacy is breached digitally, for instance if their bank details were hacked and they had lost money etc.

[39] MIT Initiative on Digital Economy. 2016. "Digital Identity: The Key to Privacy and Security in the Digital World." Accessed June 13, 2024. <https://ide.mit.edu/insights/digital-identity-the-key-to-privacy-and-security-in-the-digital-world/>

[40] Cyber Citizenship. n.d. Digital Citizenship 101: Responsible Online Behavior. Accessed May 17, 2024. <https://www.cybercitizenship.org/digital-citizenship-guide/>.

[41] WHO. "Be Careful What You Share. Things Aren't Always What They Seem Online." September 21, 2021. Accessed May 8, 2024. <https://www.who.int/news/item/22-09-2021-be-careful-what-you-share.-things-aren-t-always-what-they-seem-online>.

[42] UNDP. Preventing and Countering. Handbook. Putrajaya: UNDP, 2022.

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3 DIGITAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Interviews and working groups with GCERF grantees highlighted the essential role of community engagement in successful PVE initiatives. Involving communities ensures their voices and needs are addressed, enabling grassroots organizations to develop relevant and effective interventions. This engagement builds trust and collaboration, which has already led to more sustainable outcomes.

With increasing digital access in Mali, the community-centered approach offers new opportunities for PVE in the digital space. The third section of this Toolkit provides guidelines for adapting this approach to the digital space through digital community engagement platforms.

Online digital community engagement platforms are digital spaces facilitating dialogue and collaboration within and across communities, as well as between communities and grassroots organizations in PVE work.

They can serve as virtual round tables for discussions, Q&A forums, and exchange hubs for sharing experiences, best practices and giving feedback.

While acknowledging the ongoing digital divide, digital community engagement platforms can provide promising avenues for grassroots organizations to bridge geographical gaps and engage with communities, even those in remote areas or those inaccessible because of security concerns. By leveraging digital technologies such as mobile phones and internet connectivity, organizations can facilitate dialogue, two-way communication and foster community participation in PVE efforts. As digital access continues to grow in Mali, these platforms have the potential to play a vital role in empowering communities, amplifying their voices, and promoting resilience against violent extremism.

Community Engagement Platforms: What Can They Look Like?



Some Examples...

Online Community Forums: Grassroots organizations can establish their own discussion and communication platforms on popular social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram, Instagram, TikTok or YouTube.

Facebook: Facebook can be used for digital community engagement by creating and managing groups to facilitate discussions, share updates, and gather feedback from members. Additionally, it allows for organizing events, promoting initiatives, and leveraging targeted advertising to reach specific demographics and enhance community interaction. Groups can be created for dedicated spaces for community members to join and engage in ongoing conversations, share updates, and collaborate on projects related to PVE efforts. Group admins can control membership, moderate content, and create events to facilitate offline interactions.

WhatsApp: WhatsApp can be used for digital community engagement by creating group chats to facilitate real-time discussions, share updates, and gather immediate feedback from members. It also supports broadcast lists for sending information to large groups and foster collaboration between grassroots organizations, and for inter- and intra-community purposes. Grassroots organizations or communities can also create groups for specific purposes or beneficiary audiences, such as community leaders or youth groups.

Telegram: Telegram can be used for digital community engagement by creating channels for broadcasting messages to a large audience and setting up group chats for interactive discussions and feedback. It supports features like polls and bots for automated interactions. Grassroots organizations can for example use Telegram channels to share important announcements, resources, and updates with community members in a structured manner.

Instagram and TikTok Content: Both TikTok and Instagram are highly popular social media platforms that emphasize visual content, foster strong community engagement, and offer robust tools for creators and advertisers. TikTok focuses on short-form, music and trend-driven videos with a younger user base and a highly interactive, algorithm-driven interface. Instagram offers a broader range of content types, including photos, stories, IGTV, and Reels, catering to a wider demographic with diverse content and more established influencer marketing. Both platforms excel in engagement but differ in their primary content focus and user interaction styles. Grassroots organizations can use these platforms to share content and stories from community members, create awareness campaigns related to PVE efforts or encourage certain discussion topics.

YouTube: YouTube can be used for digital community engagement by creating and sharing video content to inform, educate, and engage a broad audience. It allows for live streaming events, hosting webinars, and facilitating discussions through video comments, fostering a dynamic and interactive community environment.

Alternatively, discussion forums can also be incorporated directly into the grassroots' website using free or low-cost plugins like Disqus.

Online Surveys or Digital Questionnaires: These tools can be used to assess thoughts, opinions, and feelings of a specific community on any PVE-related topic or initiative. Online surveys allow questions to be asked in a variety of ways (e.g., Multiple Choice, Text, Ranking). Examples of such tools include Survey Monkey, Google Forms, or Typeform.

Virtual Roundtable Platforms: These platforms enable grassroots organizations to conduct interactive conferences and meetings in the digital space and create virtual spaces for community engagement. Examples of such platforms include Zoom, Google Meets, and Teams.

Keep in mind...

When utilizing the community engagement platforms, consider the sensitivity of shared information on these platforms and the goal of your community engagement effort. Furthermore, look up the requirements for user sign-up on each platform. Consider prioritizing privacy and security measures that align with community needs and protect user data accordingly.

Additionally, it's important to note that the accessibility and functionality of these platforms are rapidly changing and may vary by countries and regions, where access can be influenced by the local political and regulatory context. Also, platform users should be aware that the power and agency behind many of these platforms remain in the hands of private companies, which can affect how these platforms operate and their availability.

The following non-exhaustive table provides examples of popular platforms and some of their key characteristics (as of June 2024).

Based on the Grantee **Interviews**, **WhatsApp**, **Facebook**, and **Youtube** are the most popular platforms, with **Instagram** and **TikTok** increasingly gaining users as well.

Social Media Platforms

Platform	Owner	Features	Encryption	Data collected and shared	Hosting	Costs	Participant Limit	Account Requirements	Access	Bandwidth Requirement
Facebook	Meta (Commercial company)	Voice, Video, Text, Sending Files, Live Streaming, Group Chat, Group Creation	To-Server	Extensive	Hosted on Meta's Servers	Free	Varies (up to 50 in Rooms)	Email or phone number	Browser or app	Medium to High
Instagram	Meta (Commercial company)	Text, Voice, Video, Sending Files, Live Streaming, Stories, Group Creation	To-Server	Extensive	Hosted on Meta's Servers	Free	Up to 4 on video calls	Email or phone number	Browser or app	Medium to High
TikTok	ByteDance (Commercial company)	Video, Text, Live Streaming, Sending Files, Group Creation	To-Server	Extensive	Hosted on ByteDance's Servers	Free	N/A for direct interactions, varies for live streaming	Email or phone number	Browser or app	High
YouTube	Google LCC (Commercial company)	Video sharing, live streaming, community posts	To-Server	Extensive	Hosted on YouTube's Servers	Free	No formal limits	Google account required for creators; No requirements for watching videos	Browser or app	Medium to High

Messaging and Communication Apps

Platform	Owner	Features	Encryption	Data collected and shared	Hosting	Costs	Participant Limit	Account Requirements	Access	Bandwidth Requirement
Telegram	Telegram FZ-LLC (Commercial company)	Text, Voice, Video, Sending Files, Channels, Groups, Bots	End-to-End (Secret Chats) To-server (Regular Chats)	Minimal	Hosted on Telegram's Servers	Free	Up to 200'000 in Groups, unlimited in channels	Phone number	Browser or app	Low to Medium
WhatsApp	Meta (Commercial company)	Text, Voice, Video, Sending Files, Group Chat, Status Updates, Group Creation	End-to-End	Medium	Hosted on Meta's Servers	Free	Up to 8 on video calls	Phone number	Browser or app	Medium
Signal	Signal Foundation (NPO)	Text, Voice, Video, Sending Files, Group Creation	End-to-End	Minimal	Hosted on Signal's Servers	Free	Up to 40 on Group Calls	Phone number	Browser or app	Medium
Viber	Rakuten Viber (NPO)	Text, Voice, Video, Sending Files, Group Chats, Public Accounts	End-to-End	Medium	Hosted on Viber's Servers	Free	No formal limity	Phone number	Browser or app	Low to Medium
Delta Chat	Delta Chat Team (Open-source project)	Text, voice, video, sending files, group creation	End-to-End	None	Self Hosted (uses email servers)	Free	Varies (based on email provider limits)	Email	App	Low to Medium
Wire	Wire Swiss GmbH (Commercial company)	Text, voice, video, sending files, screen sharing, meeting recording, group creation	End-to-End	Minimal	Hosted on Wire's servers, Self-Hosted (Enterprise)	Free (basic) Fee (paid plans)	Up to 25 on group calls	Email	Browser or app	Medium to High
FaceTime/iMessage	Apple (Commercial company)	Voice, video, text, sending files, group creation	End-to-End	Minimal	Hosted on Apple's servers	Free	Up to 32 on FaceTime	Apple ID	App (iOS, macOS)	Medium to High
Duo	Google LCC (Commercial company)	Voice, video, text, group creation	End-to-End	Medium	Hosted on Google's servers	Free	Up to 32	Phone number	Browser or app	Medium

Online Survey Platforms

Platform	Owner	Features	Encryption	Data collected and shared	Hosting	Costs	Participant Limit	Account Requirements for Creators	Participant Requirements	Access	Bandwidth Requirement
Survey Monkey	Momentive Inc. (Commercial company)	Customizable surveys, templates, analytics, integrations	To-server	Medium	Hosted on Survey Monkey's Servers	Free (basic) Fee (paid plans)	Free plan up to 100 responses/survey; higher limits with paid plans	Email	None	Browser or app	Low to Medium
Google Forms	Google LCC (Commercial company)	Basic survey creation, real-time collaboration, templates	To-server	Extensive	Hosted on Google's Servers	Free	No formal limits	Google Account	None	Browser or app	Low
Type Form	Typeform S.L. (Commercial company)	Interactive forms, customizable design, integrations	To-server	Medium	Hosted on Type-form's Servers	Free (basic) Fee (paid plans)	Free plan up to 10 questions/ form and 100 responses/month; higher limit with paid plan	Email	None	Browser or app	Low to Medium
JotForm	JotForm Inc. (Commercial company)	Drag-and-drop form builder, templates, analytics	To-server	Minimal	Hosted on Jot-Form's Servers	Free (basic) Fee (paid plans)	Varies (based on email provider limits)	Email	None	Browser or app	Low to Medium
Microsoft Forms	Microsoft (Commercial company)	Survey and quiz creation, real-time collaboration	To-server	Extensive	Hosted on Microsoft's Servers	Free with Microsoft Account	Free plan up to 200 responses/month; higher limits with Office 365 subscription	Microsoft Account	None	Browser or app	Low

Video Conferencing and Collaboration Platforms

Platform	Owner	Features	Encryption	Data collected and shared	Hosting	Costs	Participant limit	Account requirements	Access	Bandwidth requirement
Zoom	Zoom video communication (commercial company)	Voice, video, text, sending files, screen sharing, meeting recording, breakout rooms, whiteboards, group creation	To-server (end-to-end for paid plans)	Medium	Hosted on zoom's servers, self-hosted (zoom rooms)	Free (limitations) Fee (paid plans)	Up to 100 (free) Up to 1000 (paid)	Email	Browser or app	High
Google meets	Google LCC (commercial company)	Voice, video, text, sending files, screen sharing, meeting recording (paid plans), group creation	To-server	Minimal-medium	Hosted on google's servers	Free (limitations) Fee (paid plans)	Up to 100 (free) Up to 250 (paid)	Email	Browser or app	High
Jitsi meet	8x8 (commercial company, open-source project)	Voice, video, text, screen sharing, meeting recording, breakout rooms, group creation	To-server (end-to-end in some cases)	None-minimal	Hosted on 8x8's servers, self-hosted	Free	Up to 75 (performance may vary)	None	Browser or app	Medium to high
Bigblue button	Blindside network (commercial company, open-source project)	Voice, video, text, sending files, screen sharing, meeting recording, breakout rooms, whiteboards, shared notes, group creation	To-server	None-minimal	Self-hosted	Free (open-source) Fee (hosted by blindsides networks)	Up to 100 (depends on server capacity)	None	Browser	High
Whereby	Whereby (commercial company)	Voice, video, text, screen sharing, meeting recording, group creation	To-server	Minimal-medium	Hosted on whereby's servers	Free (basic) Fee (paid plans)	Up to 100 (paid plans)	Email	Browser or app	Medium to high
Bluejeans	Verizon (commercial company)	Voice, video, text, sending files, screen sharing, meeting recording, breakout rooms, group creation	To-server	Medium	Hosted on verizon's servers	Fee	Up to 200	Email	Browser or app	High
GoTo Meeting	Logmein (commercial company)	Voice, video, text, sending files, screen sharing, meeting recording, breakout rooms, whiteboards, group creation	To-server	Medium	Hosted on logmein's servers	Fee	Up to 250	Email	Browser or app	High
Microsoft Teams	Microsoft (commercial company)	Voice, video, text, sending files, screen sharing, meeting recording, breakout rooms, whiteboards, shared notes	To-server (end-to-end optional for one-on-one calls)	Minimal-medium	Hosted on microsoft's servers	Free (basic) Fee (paid plans)	Up to 300 (paid plans)	Email	Browser or app	High
Element	Element (commercial company)	Text, voice, video, sending files, screen sharing, meeting recording, breakout rooms, whiteboards	End-to-end	None-minimal	Hosted on element's servers, self-hosted	Free (basic) Fee (paid plans)	Varies	Email	Browser or app	Medium to high

Priority Checklist

- Identifying community needs and objectives of the community engagement efforts
- Safe and inclusive set-up of digital community engagement platform
- Ethical and safe assessment and further development of the community engagement platform

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1. Identifying community needs and objectives of the community engagement efforts



Self-assessment questions

- Which specific community or demographic group has been identified as the target beneficiary of the community engagement efforts?

What are the primary objectives of the digital community engagement platform? (e.g.: facilitating intra- or inter-community dialogue, generating feedback for PVE initiatives, sharing information and best practices, or fostering collaboration between communities and grassroots organizations...)
- What are the existing digital engagement practices within that community, if any?
- How do community members currently access digital resources, considering factors such as internet connectivity, smartphone ownership, and digital literacy rate?
- What barriers is the community facing in terms of access to digital resources?
- Are there specific digital platforms preferred within the community, and if yes, which ones?
- What pool of platforms hold potential for engagement within that community?
- How secure are the community engagement platforms under consideration in terms of privacy and data security aspects?

Why is this important?

Understanding the specific community or demographic group targeted for engagement ensures that the digital initiatives are tailored to their needs and preferences. By identifying existing digital practices within the community, grassroots organizations can leverage strengths and address challenges to enhance future community engagement. Assessing how community members access digital resources and the barriers they face allows for customized strategies to maximize participation. Recognizing preferred digital platforms provides insights into effective engagement channels. Exploring a range of platform options widens strategic opportunities for optimal community engagement. Lastly, evaluating platform security ensures community trust and data privacy, important for fostering confidence in digital initiatives.



Key Actions to Consider

- Have the objectives of the community engagement platform been identified?
- Can a digital platform be identified that would be preferred amongst the beneficiary community?
- Has there been an assessment of the different platform options in terms of their accessibility, considering factors such as language, user-friendliness, device-compatibility, and costs?
- Has there been an assessment of the different platform options in terms of their safety aspects, including data collection practices, privacy policies, and measures for ensuring the security of the community members' information?



Potential Pitfalls to Avoid

- Neglecting the heterogeneity within the community and failing to consider the diverse digital needs and preferences of different groups can lead to disengagement and inequitable access.
- Failing to involve community members in the planning process of setting up digital platforms can hinder engagement and prevent the establishment of ownership over digital initiatives.
- Overlooking digital security and privacy aspects can pose significant risks to the community, compromising the safety of their information shared on the platform.
- Ignoring the different information requirements of various platforms during sign-up and activity can jeopardize the privacy of community members, especially when sensitive topics are involved.

GOOD PRACTICE

"Data Minimization Concept"

Data minimization refers to the practice of limiting the collection, processing, and retention of personal data to the minimum amount necessary for a specific purpose. It emphasizes the importance of only gathering essential data and avoiding the unnecessary accumulation of information.

In the context of online PVE work involving online community engagement platforms, data minimization involves the strategic limitation of the collection and retention of personal data to only what is essential for the initiative's purpose. It ensures that sensitive information is handled with care, reducing the risk of data breaches and safeguarding the privacy of the community members but also the grassroots organization.

Example 1: An organization is launching an online platform for community discussions on PVE. They want to ensure they only collect necessary information from participants to protect their privacy.

Question: What specific data points are essential for registration on the platform, and how can we minimize the collection of additional personal information?

Example 2: A PVE project plans to conduct surveys through an online platform to gather feedback from community members about their perceptions of extremism and their needs for support.

Question: How can we design the survey to collect the minimum amount of identifiable information while still obtaining valuable insights from participants?

Example 3: A PVE initiative uses an online community forum for discussing sensitive topics related to extremism and radicalization. The organization wants to maintain a balance between anonymity for participants and accountability within the community.

Question: What measures can be implemented on the platform to ensure participant anonymity while still promoting respectful and constructive dialogue among community members?

2. Safe and Inclusive set-up of Digital Community Engagement Platform



Self-assessment questions

- How can the use of the selected digital platform be made more inclusive for all members of the beneficiary community, especially those with limited technological literacy or resources?
- What steps can be taken to enhance the safety and privacy of community members and grassroots organizations engaging on the digital platform?
- How can community guidelines be collaboratively developed and maintained to encourage positive participant behavior and content on the digital platform?
- In what ways can the language used on the digital platform be more inclusive and accessible to all members of the beneficiary community, considering linguistic diversity?
- How might additional support be provided for community members with lower literacy levels, such as offering audio-visual content or incorporating voice-based interaction options?

Why is this important?

In the context of PVE in Mali, ensuring the accessibility, safety, and inclusivity of digital community engagement platforms is important. Many communities in Mali face challenges related to limited technological literacy and resources, as well as diverse linguistic backgrounds and varying levels of literacy. By prioritizing the accessibility of digital platforms, PVE initiatives can effectively reach and engage all members of the beneficiary community, fostering participation and dialogue. Moreover, implementing robust measures to safeguard the safety and privacy of community members and grassroots organizations is essential for building trust and mitigating risks associated with online engagement. Clear community guidelines play a crucial role in promoting respectful and constructive interactions, while efforts to ensure inclusive language usage and accommodate low literacy levels contribute to equitable access and participation.



Key Actions to Consider

- Is there a possibility to prioritize platforms that are accessible via mobile devices, while keeping in mind the data security and privacy aspects?
- Is there a possibility to prioritize platforms that require lower bandwidth to function while keeping in mind the data security and privacy aspects?
- Can (video)-tutorials and support mechanisms be offered to the beneficiary community on how to use the digital engagement platform?
- Have clear guidelines for online conduct on the engagement platforms been established and communicated to the community?
- Is there a possibility to include visual- and/ or audio interaction elements such as videos, voice memos, emojis, or pictures on the digital engagement platforms?



Potential Pitfalls to Avoid

- Overcomplicating platform design or functionality can alienate users with limited technological proficiency.
- Neglecting to keep the design simple and intuitive, while ignoring existing platform limitations, can lead to user frustration.
- Disregarding the privacy and security concerns of the beneficiary community can erode their trust and reduce their willingness to share information online.
- Failing to provide necessary training or support for the beneficiary community on how to use the platform can result in disengagement and frustration.
- Underestimating the time and resources required to effectively moderate and manage the digital community engagement platform can allow the proliferation of misinformation or harmful content.
- Relying solely on online community engagement without complementing it with offline activities can exclude community members with limited or no internet access.

GOOD PRACTICE

"Web TV de la Paix"

Think Peace Sahel has launched an innovative initiative called "WebTV de la Paix," a digital channel aimed at fostering peace and unity across the Sahel region. This WebTV platform seeks to engage and organize local populations through a series of informative and participatory programs. Their shows include "Actu-paix," which provides weekly summaries of peace-building activities by Think Peace Sahel and other organizations, "Ambassadeurs de la Paix," featuring interviews with national and international peace advocates in Mali and the Sahel, and the monthly show "Ben Kéné: La parole aux communautés," which addresses conventional themes related to peace, coexistence, human rights, security, democracy, governance, rule of law, and issues affecting displaced persons. The content is accessible on both Facebook and YouTube.

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3. Ethical and safe assessment and further development of the community engagement platform



Self-assessment questions

- What insights can be gathered regarding the experiences and satisfaction levels of community members with the digital engagement platforms?
- In what ways can the online engagement of the beneficiary community on the community engagement platform be monitored in cases of misbehavior that goes against the guidelines established?
- How can evolving digital platforms and changing preferences within the community be included, allowing for the identification of emerging trends and opportunities?

Why is this important?

Evaluation provides valuable insights into the effectiveness and impact of the digital engagement community platforms, informing future decision-making and resource allocation. The monitoring of ongoing online community engagement platforms enables grassroots organizations to track progress, identify emerging trends, and proactively address challenges or opportunities in real time.



Key Actions to Consider

- Are the community members' feedback and satisfaction rates with the digital engagement platform being captured and considered in the further development of the digital community engagement platform?
- Are there established mechanisms and protocols for monitoring the online engagement of the beneficiary community?
- Can emerging digital platforms and trending community preferences be considered in the further development of the digital community engagement platforms?



Potential Pitfalls to Avoid

- Consider that collecting feedback and incorporating it into platform improvement can be important in terms of avoiding diminishing community engagement.
- Consider that there might be a great diversity of community perspectives and needs when it comes to feedback in terms of the digital community engagement platform.
- Consider that insufficient monitoring of online engagement can lead to delays in addressing emerging issues or trends, which can undermine the platform's effectiveness.
- Consider that adaptation to the changing digital landscape and community preferences can be important to avoid outdated or obsolete engagement platforms.
- Consider that there is a need for resources and capacity from the grassroots organization to effectively analyse and act upon community feedback.

4 DIGITAL COLLABORATION BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONS

Albeit with limited digital access, online platforms are expected to increase their significance when considering their use both by violent extremists and humanitarian organizations to attain their political objectives; to disseminate information, mobilize targeted population, and (de)militarize them. To amplify the effectiveness of PVE, the organizations should see the possibility of collaboration with regional, national and international actors to maximize effectiveness of their outcomes. Careful designing of online platforms, appropriate division of tasks, and revision of the platforms allows for establishment of collaborative digital communities where digital media outputs and essential information can be effectively shared to facilitate prevention of violent extremism. This collaborative platform should be constructed and maintained with thorough discussion pertaining to information security to avoid the risks of data leak potentially

Priority Checklist

- Designing the trans-organizational platform where organizations can collaborate with each other.
- Functionalizing the organizations' tasks and share social media output with each other.
- Regular reviewing and monitoring of the design and functions of the platform

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1. Designing the trans-organizational platform where organizations can collaborate with each other.



Self-assessment questions

- Have opportunities been identified for both vertical (between public and private sectors) and horizontal (between private sectors) collaborations?
- Have protocols been established for data encryption, access controls, and regular security audits to maintain the integrity of the platform?

Why is this important?

Collaborative platforms need to include both public and private actors to effectively circulate digital and non-digital information to facilitate PVE. Horizontal networks between organizations denote collaborations between grassroots organizations. This online space allows exchanging essential information efficiently and effectively, shown by one of the Grantee Interviews. The creation of horizontal collaboration appears to be relatively easy to achieve, as it does not involve governmental actors, which typically requires a lot of time and procedures before a project can begin. On top of that, vertical collaboration, the collaboration between the state and the local organizations, can lead to ameliorating the mistrust of people in the state and rebuild trust between the state and people. Creation of this type of online collaborative space should be conceived in parallel with the digital community engagement discussed in section 3 by casting eyes on how this collaboration between organizations can intersect with the targeted population. Furthermore, it is imperative to consider ways to protect data from leaking outside to avoid inflicting trouble on the organizations and their involved populations.



Key Actions to Consider

- Identify the specific needs and requirements of the organization and stakeholders.
- Determine the scope and scale of the platform.
- Ensure that the platform incorporates as diverse organizations as possible to collect a variety of perspectives and experiences.
- Incorporate necessary security measures to safeguard sensitive information.



Potential Pitfalls to Avoid

- Neglecting to involve key stakeholders in the design process, resulting in limited collaboration.
- Obscuring the purpose of the platform and tangible actions to achieve the goal(s), making the platform ineffective.
- Neglecting to incorporate robust security measures may expose sensitive information to breaches and compromise organizational integrity.

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2. nctionalizing the organizations' tasks and share social media output with each other



Self-assessment questions

- Are roles and responsibilities clearly defined within the collaborative framework to ensure efficient task execution and content sharing among organizations?
- Is there active collaborating with community leaders and influencers to foster trust and credibility in the organizations' online messaging and initiatives?

Why is this important?

The organizations should functionalize their tasks and share output's each other to maximize its reach and effectiveness. They have to clearly define the roles for each organization and ensure that all the organizations execute their assigned roles. One attribute they can collaborate on is the share of media contents of Instagram, twitter and their website to accelerate the dissemination of counter discourse towards radicalization. Sharing online outputs can maximize its reach as more and more organizations share the contents. By collaboratively creating and sharing discourse to counter violent extremists, radicalization through online world can be countered.



Key Actions to Consider

- What kind of preexisting resources are there for inter-organisational collaboration and how can these be improved ?
- Is there a comprehensive plan for dividing the tasks to each organization and sharing the outputs, especially media content ?
- Is compatibility with various social media platforms and formats to maintain consistency among the organizations ensured?
- Have collaborative spaces for national, regional, communal actors be created?



Potential Pitfalls to Avoid

- Failing to tailor messages to specific cultural contexts and local languages can limit the effectiveness of communication and outreach efforts, impeding the delivery of critical information and services to affected populations.
- Neglecting to establish clear guidelines and protocols for sharing content, risking misuse or misrepresentation.
- Failing to address privacy concerns related to sharing sensitive information on social media platforms.

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3. Regular reviewing and monitoring of the design and functions of the platform



Self-assessment questions

- Has there been a regular review and reconsideration of the objective of the collaboration to ensure alignment with evolving needs and goals?
- Are regular meetings scheduled to assess the performance of the collaborative platform and initiatives?

Why is this important?

Maintaining an opportunity to exchange their ideas and opinions about how and why the organizations collaborate with each other is a key to longstanding collaboration and consistent improvements of this collaboration. It is also encouraged to use these meetings to consider alternative and new collaborative projects to overcome common problems and enlarge the effectiveness of their outputs.



Key Actions to Consider

- Are regular meetings scheduled to assess platform performance?
- Is feedback gathered from users to identify areas for improvement?
- Are thorough evaluations of security protocols conducted and updated as necessary?



Potential Pitfalls to Avoid

- Remaining fixed in existing approaches and methodologies, hindering the ability to adapt to evolving needs and challenges.
- Disregarding stakeholder feedback, or failing to act upon it, which will hamper collaborations.
- Failing to take into account the risk of share of personal information to mitigate the risks of being hacked and manipulated by extremists.

GOOD PRACTICE

According to the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the Intercommunication Center for Asia and Nippon (ICAN), a Japanese NGO, has been actively involved in improving healthcare in Payatas, Philippines, since 1996. Payatas faces challenges due to its status as home to the largest garbage dumpsite in the country, leading to poor living conditions and health issues among residents, including respiratory and infectious diseases.

To address these issues, ICAN launched the Japan–Philippines Partnership Program (JPP) in Payatas from November 2007 to October 2010. This program provided medical examinations, health education, tuberculosis control, and childcare support, with the involvement of local residents who underwent healthcare training to become community healthcare volunteers. To ensure sustainability, ICAN established a community cooperative association, allocating profits from the association to healthcare activities. Moreover, ICAN's collaboration with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) extends beyond the JPP. Various initiatives, such as teacher overseas training, fairtrade events, and NGO human resources development training, have been undertaken to widen the scope of cooperation. Collaboration with JICA's Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCVs) and Coordinators for International Cooperation has also been initiated since fiscal year 2010.

These partnerships demonstrate a multifaceted approach to addressing healthcare challenges in Payatas. By empowering local residents through training and establishing sustainable systems, these efforts aim to improve the overall health and well-being of the community.

RESOURCE LIST

Below is a provisional and non-exhaustive list of resources that may be identified in PVE program planning, implementation, and evaluation & sustainability according to our Toolkit:

CATEGORY	DETAILED RESOURCE AND EXAMPLE
Financial Resources	-
Human Resources	Toolkit Part 1: Local key/ representative actors of the community to support in building trust and monitoring
	Data and Security Management Experts
	Digital Engagement Platform Manager
Material Resources	Infographics
	Video/ Audiovisual Tutorials
	Toolkit Part 3: Online Conduct User Guidelines
	Toolkit Part 4: Content Sharing Guidelines and Protocols
Technological Resources	SNS Services: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (X), Telegram, WhatsApp, Tiktok etc.
	Free Website Builders: Wix.com, Google Sites (for basic sites), Web Flow (for advanced designers)
	Tools for Online Surveys: Survey Monkey, Google Forms, TypeForm etc.
	Designing Tools for Media Content: Canvas, VistaCreate, Visme, Adobe Spark etc.
Information Resources	Toolkit Part 2: Government Data Regulation Rules
	Toolkit Part 4: Organizational Data Privacy and Security Regulations

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