

6. Socioeconomic Empowerment and Sense of Purpose

Socioeconomic factors such as poverty, inequality, unemployment, and underemployment can be conditions conducive to violent extremism, and when compounded or triggered by other factors, increase vulnerability to radicalization.¹⁸⁶ The economic disempowerment of women, can contribute to the motivations of women and girls joining violent extremist groups in search of dignity and purpose. For women and girls disassociating from violent extremist groups, education or training in life and job skills is a critical component of full rehabilitation and reintegration in society. But to be effective, the often hidden obstacles to women's access to skill trainings, education or jobs must be addressed. They can include conflicting domestic and caretaking obligations, inability to pay school fees, and insecurity at and on the way to training centres and schools, including fear of sexual harassment and assault.¹⁸⁷ Female-headed households have different needs, because women are usually responsible for taking care of children. If providing livelihood skills, job training or other support that engages the woman in working away from home, disengagement, rehabilitation and reintegration practitioners must consider the impact of and on childcare responsibilities. In Pakistan, PAIMAN Alumni Trust addresses these barriers by undertaking market studies to determine the gaps in skills and services, then provides trainings for women in skills that are both economically viable and culturally acceptable, and which, if necessary they can undertake from home. States have obligations to respect, protect and fulfil the rights to an adequate standard of living, to work, to social protection and to education.¹⁸⁸

Aspiring to affluence



Men shelter from the sun in northeast Nigeria

In some contexts, the relative affluence of life with violent extremist groups compared to their lives back in their communities (or in camps) can be a persistent pull factor for returned women and girls, especially those who were married to fighters in higher ranks, even among abductees. Effective socioeconomic rehabilitation and reintegration is vital to addressing this dynamic.

Yet there are significant challenges. Reintegration programming that confers relative affluence on participants can exacerbate tensions between them and communities.¹⁸⁹ Services provided to those associated with VE groups, should be matched for those who were their victims, including their communities, otherwise perceptions of injustice and rewarding violence can be perpetuated.¹⁹⁰ This is a challenge in many societies struggling with economic crises, austerity and shrinking of public services and social welfare.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁶ Piedmont, D., & Belli, G. (n.d.). Countering Violent Extremism, DDR, Social Capital, and the Women, Peace & Security Agenda (available at: www.extremelytogether-theguide.org/pdf/kaf_extremism_EN_WEB.pdf).

¹⁸⁷ Amnesty International (2008), Liberia: A flawed process discriminates against women and girls (available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/AFR34/004/2008/en/>).

¹⁸⁸ OHCHR (2015), Human Rights, Terrorism and Counter-terrorism Fact Sheet No. 32. (available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/48733ebc2.html>).

¹⁸⁹ Holmes, G., & Shtuni, A. (2010), Returning Foreign Fighters and the Reintegration Imperative. USIP Special Report (available at: <https://www.usip.org/publications/2017/03/returning-foreign-fighters-and-reintegration-imperative>).

¹⁹⁰ Cockayne, J., & O'neil, S. (2015), UN DDR in an Era of Violent Extremism: Is It Fit for Purpose?

¹⁹¹ Naraghi Anderlini, Sanam & Holmes, Melinda. (2017), From the Ground Up: The Nexus of Economic Policy, Gender and Violent Extremism.

In Nigeria, civil society actors have found that women returnees with husbands have better financial stability, confidence, and support, while those without husbands are often forced to beg.¹⁹² But many of the women returnees associated with VE groups are heads of household for the first time. Without a source of income, their vulnerability increases, and the risks facing their boys and girls heighten. In Iraq for example, local CSOs fear the rise of new VE groups if the teenage boys of Daesh widows (or abandoned wives) are not reintegrated effectively. Similarly, there is higher risk of forced marriages for young girls, thus perpetuating the cycle of violence and exploitation.

More than material well-being



Young women attend a training on peace and security in Iraq

Livelihood support can be a very strategic tool for rehabilitation, according to Mira Kusumarini from Indonesia. In conservative societies, such as the Pashtun areas of Pakistan, it can be difficult to get women out of the house to teach them. PAIMAN Alumni Trust overcame this by negotiating with the community elders and male relatives of women, building trust with them before talking to the women. As noted above, when women finally came out of their houses, PAIMAN taught them livelihoods skills while educating them about their rights, Islam, and their role in society. Women make products using basic skills such as samosa making, fabric printing and dyeing, embroidery, quilting, and sewing bags, and their sons or other male relatives are included by taking the products out to sell. Men appreciate the extra income for their families and

view the women working as positive, even in this conservative society. In such contexts, giving the women the opportunity to work from home makes it possible for them to gain confidence through both knowledge and earning income. With the confidence to raise their voices and knowledge about violent extremism and the signs of radicalization, women for the first time see they have a role in peace and security.

Socioeconomic interventions can also contribute to trauma healing and psychosocial rehabilitation. Through working in groups to learn and establish enterprises, women learn cooperation and sharing, which helps them to overcome mistrust and develop positive social behaviours. In fact, finding a “livelihood is one of the most important dimensions of rehabilitation,” according to Dr. Fatima Akilu.¹⁹³

“[L]ivelihood is one of the most important dimensions of rehabilitation”



PAIMAN raises awareness and trains women in livelihood skills in parallel

¹⁹² Focus group discussion in New York, March 2018.

¹⁹³ GSX Oslo Workshop, April 2018.