Towards More Effective Capacity Building for Counter-Terrorism
9 December 2015

Report of the Meeting

Introduction

A meeting, co-organised by the Luxembourg Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the European Commission (DG DEVCO B5) on the 9th December, brought together more than 60 Counter Terrorism (CT) and development experts to examine different ways of monitoring and evaluating CT capacity-building effectiveness, with a focus on human rights due diligence, monitoring, evaluation and measuring impact.

Capacity building in CT is delivered by a wide variety of actors, bilateral and multilateral; it can take many different forms, but due to their sensitive nature, most of the activities involved are not highly visible. However, this leads to a fragmented approach in terms of assistance to third countries. The pressure for a more effective and efficient use of public funds in the security field has heretofore been less significant than in other areas, such as in the development field, for example, but in principle, CT activities should be undertaken with the same level of accountability. The meeting therefore sought to explore whether lessons learned from past CT interventions and from the development field in terms of better monitoring, evaluation and measuring impact could be considered for future interventions in the CT context.

Differing models of capacity building approaches

Panellists from North Africa and the Sahel, delivering EU funded capacity building projects shared with the meeting their assessment of the various merits, demerits, challenges and opportunities they find in their delivery. They represented a number of models of capacity building, ranging from online training, community level initiatives, to "virtual colleges", peer-based networks, nationally lead and internationally lead capacity building. These were delivered through a number of different partners and institutions, including the UN, the African Union, through EU funded projects implemented by EU Member States organisations, and by the EU directly via CSDP missions.

Participants noted that there are trade-offs to be found, for example between speed of delivery and extent of national ownership; or the ability to build national coordination amongst different aspects of the criminal justice system, or building regional cooperation capacity. The discussions concluded, therefore, that there are many benefits and synergies to be gained from having a range of different models in place simultaneously, and as long as they adhere to a common set of internationally accepted standards and norms, they should be mutually reinforcing.

Where notes of caution were expressed was firstly in ensuring coherence between actors to avoid duplication; secondly that training is appropriate to the levels of national beneficiaries existing capacity – an example was shared of a national capacity building project intended to provide specialized CT training to

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law enforcement, only to discover that basic investigative and case management skills were lacking - and finally being aware of and sensitive to local absorptive capacity of the institutions. Panellists warned that officers can be called to so many trainings they have barely time to do their jobs.

Measuring impact

It was observed that while merits could be seen in all of the different approaches, there remains a significant gap in the capacity to measure the efficacy and impact of CT interventions. Quantifiable metrics like numbers of trainings, meetings, arrests or prosecutions can miss a lot of qualitative benefits that the project may be having, or obscure where a project is in fact reinforcing negative dynamics.

The presenters from all panels offered some insights and lessons learned for evaluation and measuring impact. One important point that was concluded from the discussions was that impact needs to be measured both in quantitative and qualitative measures.

There is little to be learned from using metrics that simply count the number of trainings, or of people trained. Instead metrics need to evaluate the outcome of the trainings – is there evidence that skills are being transferred and applied? While some CT response lend themselves better to quantitative measures than others, for example in Anti-Money Laundering (AML) and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (CFT) related activities, the filing of transaction reports, or scores by international oversight bodies can be good indicators of progress, nonetheless, numbers always need to nuanced with other measures. Even where projects are functioning well, their ability to have efficacy may be hampered by weaknesses in other parts of the juridical chain. So, for example, if increasing number of arrests are used as a metric of success of law enforcement, but there is insufficient capacity for prosecutions, the overall impact may be to overwhelm the criminal justice system, compromising human rights through prison overcrowding, and exacerbate insecurity by creating situations where prisons become a forum for radicalisation.

It was agreed that better follow-up on implementation was required across the board on capacity building inventions: security sector reform is a long-term, generational endeavour, and thus expectations of results need to be accordingly tempered, but without continually employing outcome and impact related monitoring, effecting real change will be a distant goal.

Drawing on other qualitative metrics: perceptions data and capacity assessments can nuance quantitative metrics can created a more nuanced understanding of the genuine impact of an intervention in context.

Effective evaluation also requires a stronger baseline against which to measure progress. Before commencing implementation, projects should be designed around an accurate assessment of local context, national priorities, national security concerns, and current level of capacity. Experts also emphasised that maintaining a continuous monitoring cycle and building in the ability to be flexible and pragmatic to allow scope to change approach during the project cycle may achieve better results in contexts of fragility and volatility.

New frameworks and integrated approaches

The discussions recognized that in the Sahel, as in many places where CT interventions are required, there

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are a number of systemic, root-cause issues which seriously compromise the ability to have impact. These include, for example, extensive insecurity and ongoing conflict; weak state institutions and widespread corruption and impunity; interdependent vulnerabilities with neighbouring countries in North and West Africa. The region suffers from extensive socio-economic and development challenges, including widespread poverty, income inequality, acute food insecurity and these are compounded by structural demographic issues such as disproportionate youth populations and some of the highest population growth rates in the world.

These realities have a number of consequences for our expectations in regards to counter-terrorism capacity building. Firstly, it means that 'hard security' interventions are unlikely to be effective unless they are complemented by efforts to address root causes of the rise of violent extremism and insurgency. Secondly, with weak state institutions, low levels of citizen engagement with the state and competing governance structures, capacity building directed exclusively at state actors will have limited efficacy. Not only do capacity building requirements in these contexts have to emphasize important principles for example on the rule of law, human rights and citizen-centricity such that they can build positive linkages between security actors, the state and the population.

The discussion over the course of the day strongly highlighted the need to ensure that CT interventions are predicated on a proper political-economy and conflict analysis, to ensure that they do not reinforce existing (negative) power dynamics. Participants shared examples where they have seen internationally supported specialized security units used to support undemocratic regime changes, or to serve a coercive force in corrupt regimes. It was observed that independent, civilian or international oversight or ensuring checks-and-balances in the system can help guard against this kind of abuse. The promotion of peacebuilding, human security or human rights to guide project formulation was proposed as an alternative lens through which to frame security objectives.

It was strongly emphasized by all participants the need to engage with and build the capacity of not only national institution building, but also to work with a range of other actors: civil society and grass-roots level interventions, including women and youth. They often have an important role to play not only in serving to catalyse national priorities, but can also provide civilian oversight, serve as important interlocutors and bridges between security forces and marginalised communities affected by terrorism, and finally as means by which to counter the growth of violent extremism. One valuable component of CT capacity building can also be to help national institutions to recognise the value of civil society and learn to engage them in CT efforts – for example in working with religious leaders or the media in countering radicalisation.

In thinking through broader questions of impact, policy-makers and practitioners working closely with civil society highlighted the concern that CT measures should not come at the expense of broader development objectives. For example, legislation to prevent terrorist financing has seriously constrained the ability to fund civil society. Increased regulation has also impacted the ability of communities in the Horn of Africa to access vital remittances that underpin community resilience. They strongly emphasised that CT interventions must be universally aware of their impact on human security and development.

The issue of human rights adherence and promotion was emphasized as a priority in the meeting. While there is a need to strengthen legal and regulatory frameworks as a result of terrorist threats, this should not come at the expense of fundamental human rights. Lack of accountability and checks and balances will

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jeopardise the integrity of a project, undermine the trust of stakeholders, and erode the foundations of the rule of law upon which any successful CT or CVE initiative must be predicated. This is equally true for both internal and external CT and security interventions. The discussions concluded that the DEVCO commissioned human rights toolkit is a comprehensive piece of work which can add significant value to the programming process and in ensuring human rights coherence.

Key Conclusions

The discussions acknowledged that efforts to build CT capacity often have multiple objectives: they respond both to internal and external security concerns, and have been used as a way of initiating cooperation and building trust with national counterparts. The credibility of the EU as an actor in the security sector is growing.

This said, however, a key conclusion was that there is not enough known about what, when and why CT and CVE interventions are effective. There is a great distance between the stated importance of these issues as a political priority, and the lack of empirically-grounded research and basic programming tools (metrics, indicators) to underpin interventions. Participants recommended that investing in such research and supporting tools development based upon experiences and lessons learned from existing interventions would be a valuable contribution.

Recognising the need to ensure that capacity building interventions need to be supported with development programming targeted a root causes and preventive measures, the participants expressed the hope that both the EU development financing instruments and the new European Union Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing the root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa could perhaps also be used to further CT and CVE objectives. At the same time, they sounded a note of caution that the prioritization of migration as an issue would not detract from the long-term efforts to counter terrorism and build security in the Sahel and North Africa.

In conclusion Member States participants and COTER delegates welcomed the meeting as having been interesting and having provided valuable insights that can guide better programming interventions for CT and CVE programmes globally. Gratitude was offered to the Luxembourg Presidency and DEVCO B5 for having organised the meeting, and encouraged further such discussions to be convened.

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