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RESEARCH PAPER

Overarching Meta-Strategies for Community Engagement: PVE in Context

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ABSTRACT

Taking cue from the bottom-up approach, this article sets out to propose five over-arching meta PVE strategies for community engagement. Although all the proposed strategies are, in principle, applicable to all communities, it is crucial to bear in mind that community engagement, especially in the context of PVE must always prioritize indigenous values and local context. This is because each community has its own unique characteristics and it is neither possible nor advisable to create some generic, blanket or universal strategy. PVE strategies therefore, even the seemingly generic ones, must always be indigenous and specific to the local context. Keeping this in mind, the strategies proposed in this article are fairly sensitive and fully aware of this verity as each one of them not only constantly alludes to the importance of indigeneity and local context but also in many ways further strengthen the case for it. All proposed strategies are neither intended to be stringent nor designed to be exhaustive. On the contrary, they merely serve as helpful guidelines that are equally flexible and versatile, depending on the community and context they are respectively applied to.

| **Keywords:** | Community Engagement, PVE, Bottom-up, Indigenous, Local Context, Meta-Strategies |

Introduction

Community engagement here refers to officials and professionals interacting directly or indirectly with a community, vulnerable or otherwise, to tackle issues of general public concern. It involves empowering community members to actively participate in identifying and effectively addressing the root cause of various issues and vices prevalent in the community.

Insofar as Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) is concerned, community engagement is crucial for addressing the root causes and drivers of violent extremism and terrorism. As Cherney and Hartley (2017) note that "Community cooperation is central to mitigating the risks of terrorism" (p. 750). Community engagement in the context of PVE seeks to enable government officials and concerned personnel to come up with specially designed solutions to issues related to VE while leveraging the unique insights of the local population, thereby allowing for the solutions to be sustainable in the long run.

While this is true, it is crucial that all government and non-government led or sponsored PVE initiatives are ultimately adopted as "bottom- up" approaches. This is because "top-down efforts to define and respond to violent extremism run the risk of undermining the very community assets that contribute to community resilience" (Ellis & Abdi, 2017, p. 297). The notion of community engagement and a top-down approach are in fact somewhat oxymoronic since effective engagement of a community would necessitate its active ownership of the enterprise and putting the very community at the heart of any PVE program and initiative. As Campbell and Christie (2008) point out, "Community

Engagement finds itself expressed through: bottom up approaches, community ownership, 'relevance' to community, and collaborative approaches" (p. 6).

Additionally, a top-down approach is also unsuitable because it is not designed to be particularly holistic and inclusive. Most notably, owing to its strict hierarchical makeup, a top down approach will not quite allow the community to be treated as an equal partner and stakeholder. This would effectively undermine the rationale and raison detre of PVE programs and initiatives, which seek to empower the community by placing it at the helm of affairs. It is necessary therefore that all community resilience efforts in the context of PVE, take a bottom-up approach that place the community above all else and let it design and come up with context specific approaches to mitigate the challenges it faces, especially in relation to terrorism and violent extremism.

Taking cue from the bottom up approach, this article will propose five overarching meta-strategies for effectively engaging the community in the context of PVE. Such an engagement, to begin with, demands an open mind and a very accommodating attitude. This is because rigidity and an uncompromising attitude will not only fail to achieve the desired result but will actually prove to be counter-productive. Keeping this in mind, the proposed list of community engagement strategies is neither stringent nor exhaustive. On the contrary, it merely serves as a helpful guideline that is dependent on the respective community it is applied to.

While this article sets out to propose over-arching meta PVE strategies for community engagement, which should in principle be applicable to all kinds of communities and societies, it is worth bearing in mind right at the very start that community engagement, especially in the context of PVE must always prioritize indigeneity. This is because each community has its own unique characteristics and it is neither possible nor advisable to create generic, blanket or universal strategies. All PVE strategies therefore, even the seemingly generic ones, must always be indigenous and specific to the local context. This is precisely why all strategies proposed in this article, in one way or another, seek to bolster and bring to fore the indigeneity of the community concerned. In fact, the first overarching meta strategy is 'primacy of indigeneity'.

1. Primacy of Indigeneity

The notion of indigeneity or indigenous values, though often differently interpreted, typically refers to naturally occurring local customs, traditions and belief-systems of any given community. These inherent values are in many ways the defining characteristic of the members of the respective community or society. Without these values or defining characteristics, a community loses the right to be called a community, which could inadvertently trigger identity crisis or worse, an existential dilemma. It is therefore not surprising that all communities generally tend to be very protective of their indigenous values and belief systems.

Dismissing, bypassing or trivializing indigeneity therefore risks alienating not only the concerned community but also any enterprise intended specifically for the benefit or social uplift of the very community. Any community engagement program or initiative, must as of necessity, give utmost importance to primacy of indigeneity.

Indigeneity is not simply the first and foremost component of community engagement but it is effectively the very core of any PVE undertaking in general. This is because PVE seeks to understand and address the factors responsible for terrorism and violent extremism in any given community or society, which is not possible without taking due account of the indigenous realities and local context. Any PVE undertaking must therefore always prioritize indigeneity of the concerned community. As Leanne Kelly et al.

(2024) note "P/CVE programs should be tailored to the specific needs, challenges, and cultural contexts of the community they serve" (p. 95).

While it is true that some local customs and cultural values are in one way or another responsible for violent extremist behavior, it is still crucial to not disregard and condemn them unequivocally as it risks alienating the entire community that may understandably hold those very controversial values in high esteem. In other words, even though some indigenous values may well be regressive and undesirable, they still should not be dismissed out of hand. Gaining the complete and utmost confidence and participation of a community is of utmost priority even if it demands accepting some uncomfortable and potentially objectionable parameters laid out by the community itself. This of course does not mean that these parameters or boundaries are set in stone that cannot change or dissolve over time. Instead, the idea essentially is to first gain the complete trust and confidence of the society by accepting its sensitivities and parameters unreservedly and then gradually working with the community to reform and redress these shortcomings over a considerable period of time.

Community engagement is an incredibly slow and gradual process that demands tremendous patience and fortitude. It can neither be rushed nor can it be fast tracked. Addressing or altering any long-established local traditions or values requires significant behavioral and cultural changes that simply cannot happen overnight. Indeed, if a community has to reassess and reevaluate its value-orientations or closely held habits, it will need a significant amount of time and space. In fact, the primary purpose of PVE is to allow the community to directly face, confront and address its problems and shortcomings, including the prevailing norms, culture and tradition. For this to materialize, it is crucial that the indigeneity of the community takes primacy over everything else.

Primacy of indigeneity is not only necessary for a community to face, confront and address its inner demons, but it is also needed to dispel any misgivings and apprehensions regarding PVE in general. Communities, especially the ones vulnerable to violent extremism, typically tend to be conservative and are often fairly apprehensive of PVE programs and initiatives. This is because conservative communities, especially the religious ones, "have a tendency to equate efforts to prevent VE with some hidden foreign agenda" . Given the range of different stakeholders involved in a typical PVE undertaking (IGOs, NGOs and government functionaries), the amount of conspiracies and misgivings subsequently generated in a community, is perhaps not surprising. To effectively dispel all such conspiracies and gain trust and confidence, it becomes imperative to prioritize, protect and promote the indigenous character of the concerned community.

Dismissing, bypassing or trivializing indigeneity risks jeopardizing not just community engagement but PVE as well. Any PVE undertaking, especially the ones involving community engagement, must therefore give the utmost importance to primacy of indigeneity.

2. 'With Them' Versus 'To Them'

Given the general misgivings regarding govenrment-led initiatives in all developing countries, it is crucial that PVE programs are not viewed as something that is being done "to" a community as opposed to something that is being done "with" them (Nasser-Eddine et al., 2011). This is because "power differences between government and community contribute to fears that the program activities will be used against rather than for the benefit" of the community (Ellis & Abdi, 2017, p. 295).

Moreover, PVE programs are often initiated, backed or sponsored by foreign countries or international organizations. Conspiracies regarding some foreign agenda or international plot are typically rife in communities that are vulnerable to terrorism and

violent extremism. Such stereotypes regarding international sponsorship or foreign patronage could easily undermine the prospects of PVE programs, especially if the community views it as something that is forcefully being done "to" them against their wishes, consent or better judgment.

Communities that are struggling with VE, generally as a rule tend to be skeptical and apprehensive of government led initiatives, even if they are not backed or sponsored by international partners. If a community is to take the lead in building its resiliance to VE, then it is crucial to ultimately put it in the driving seat just as the government and the civil society gradually take the back seat. For this to happen, it is important that all P/CVE initiatives, right from the very start, are seen as something that is being "with" the community as opposed to something that is being done "to" them.

Effective strategies to counter and prevent VE require a strong foundation of trust between vulnerable communities, government officials and international partners. Generally, in communities where VE is prevalent, this bond of trust is very weak, owing to a multitude of factors including, political grievances, corruption, ineffective governance and a controversial history of state-sanctioned violence. These factors are further aggravated when a PVE program or initiative is seen as something that is being done to the community by some alien or foreign entity as opposed to something that is being done with them as equal partners and stakeholders.

Such lack of trust between the community and government officials takes a fair amount of time and effort to heal and mend. To bridge this gap, it is of paramount importance that the population is engaged effectively while access to government officials is also made direct, convenient and easy, thereby ensuring the citizens that the government is indeed there to genuinely address their concerns and look after their best interests. Government officials should make consistent efforts to engage with citizens in a direct and transparent manner, all the while assuring them of the government's primary intention to alleviate and resolve their most outstanding issues. Easy and direct accessibility to government officials is necessary for inculcating trust in the community and for reassuring them that they are the main stakeholders and all PVE related activities are being done "with" them and not "to" them.

3. Civil Societies over Government Functionaries

Owing to still being in infancy, the field of PVE is fairly open-ended and undetermined. Keeping aside the confusion and disagreement over its key determinants and constituents, there appears to even be a lack of clarity over who should take the lead when it comes to implementing and carrying out PVE programs and initiatives. Where such lack of clarity could potentially lead to a tussle or friction of sorts between different stakeholders, there it can also significantly undermine the efficacy of the entire PVE enterprise. It is crucial therefore to determine right at the start as to who will take the lead, who will play a supporting or auxiliary role and what will their relation be in respect to each other and the community at large.

To understand and resolve this issue, we have to first identify and acknowledge all major actors and stakeholders usually involved in the PVE process. There is first the concerned government officials that are deployed in the field by the state itself. As official representatives of the state, they are in principle responsible for facilitating and in effect carrying out numerous government policies and strategies. While that may be so, community engagement programs, especially in the context of PVE, are not some ordinary government policy initiatives where civil servants alone can take the lead simply by virtue of being direct representatives of the state. Such initiatives are in fact typically undertaken when traditional government structures, hierarchies or modus operandi have proven to be

futile or ineffectual. To put a government official in the lead would, therefore, in many ways, defeat the very purpose of the entire undertaking.

The same is also true for the other major stakeholder, namely the security forces. In conflict-ridden regions where community engagement programs are usually undertaken, security forces occupy centre stage. Tasked with rooting out terrorist networks and carrying out military operations against proscribed organizations, security forces are amongst the key players in any conflict-ridden community.

However, owing to being trained in and tasked with kinetics, the security personnel are neither qualified nor mandated to proactively engage a community by means of non-kinetics. To have the security personnel lead or carry out community engagement programs is in fact both oxymoronic and paradoxical. For how can an entity trained in kinetics be tasked with carrying out non-kinetics? For the sake of argument, can someone of non-kinetic disposition and background, be tasked with carrying out or leading kinetic military operations? The answer to these questions is unambiguously obvious. Just as a person of non-kinetic disposition cannot lead or spearhead a military operation, a person trained in kinetics his entire life cannot and should not be expected to plan, devise and carry out non-kinetic programs and initiatives.

Although this verity is both obvious and intuitive, unfortunately, owing to power dynamics in developing and underdeveloped countries, there is a serious danger of PVE initiatives being hijacked by unqualified security personnel, which risks undermining and jeopardizing the efficacy of all such programs. This does not mean that security personnel have no role whatsoever to play in PVE initiatives like community engagement, but to merely point out that they should not play a leading role where they get to plan and supervise all such programs as well. Instead, they must play a supporting, facilitatory and auxiliary role, as determined by the non-kinetic entities that must lead and devise the PVE enterprise.

It is worth bearing in mind here that the notion of community engagement, as a rule, entails non-kinetic intervention, especially when kinetic measures have either failed altogether or have not yielded any desirable payoffs. This, by default, therefore necessitates the primacy and supervision of non-kinetic or non-militaristic entities that include a range of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOS) and most importantly, the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

While there are a number of non-kinetic stakeholders involved in PVE initiatives generally, the CSOs, however, are the most standout of all such entities. CSOs are non-government, usually non-profit, self-run voluntary amalgamate of a range of groups and individuals with shared interests, values and ambitions that come together to address the underlying social issues of any given community. The most standout and useful feature of a CSO, however, is the representation and participation of members of the community itself and its designated welfare groups and societies that act as vectors and provide the crucial point of intersection within the target community. CSOs tend to form close partnerships with government officials, security forces and a number of different NGOs and IGOs.

NGOs and IGOs, such as Save the Children Internation, Doctors Without Borders, Edhi Foundation and United Nations' Specialized Agencies like UNODC, UNESCO, and UNHCR are all dedicated non-kinetic forums that specialize in a range of different community engagement programs. Owing to their pacifist manifesto, rich experience, specialized expertise and lack of political biases and agendas, such NGOs and IGOs offer ideal partnership for civil societies, especially insofar as community engagement in the context of PVE is concerned.

Due to their deep-seated connections and understanding of the local communities within which they operate, CSOs are indeed pivotal for all PVE efforts (Ellis & Abdi, 2017). It makes them ideal in bridging the gap between a community's needs and any planned government or non-government initiative. By allowing the CSOs to take the lead, governments, NGOs and IGOs can utilize local expertise and knowledge to ensure that effective PVE strategies are being implemented in all affected areas. This type of partnership will ensure that interventions are tailored to the specific context of the region and that all cultural and local sensitivities are duly taken account of.

CSOs can effectively be seen as "agents that have the most close day-to-day contact with people in the community. They are more likely to notice changes in behavior, attitudes or orientations that may signal heightened risks or raise concerns" (Prislan et al., 2020, p. 227). This makes CSOs ideal for societies that are vulnerable to terrorism and violent extremism. It also in part explains why CSOs must take the lead in all PVE related community engagement plans and activities. By putting CSOs in the driving seat and establishing a close partnership with other government and non-government stakeholders, we will be able to not only closely monitor the progress of PVE efforts but in the long run, also achieve the goal of addressing the root causes of terrorism and violent extremism.

Thus, effective PVE initiatives, especially in communities that have grown skeptical or wary of the country's security apparatus or government functionaries in general, due to prolonged kinetic policies or strategies, must be introduced and coordinated through trusted civil societies. As Van and Scherer (2023) argue that security actors should not be in the driving seat in conflict-affected areas, instead, civil societies should be the face of assistance and PVE led initiatives, even in "areas of high levels of violence" (p. 48).

Local communities are typically less wary and suspicious of civil societies that directly employ members from their own community. Concurrently, they generally tend to be skeptical of government and security personnel, especially if force or violence has been employed in the past to mitigate terrorism and violent extremism. For effective PVE policies and community resilience exercises, it is crucial therefore to let the civil societies and community members take the lead. In fact, it will not be an exaggeration to suggest that in some cases, the most effective and useful role the state functionaries can play is to not do anything at all and let the community and civil societies manage PVE all on their own.

This is of course not to say that government operatives, bureaucrats or security personnel, are not required to play any part in community engagement specifically and PVE generally. On the contrary, the success of PVE related community engagement in many ways rests on the shoulders of government officials and security personnel. However, this success often demands an auxiliary, facilitatory and in some cases even inaction from the concerned state functionaries, because in order to be fruitful and effective, PVE community engagement, more often than not, requires space and freedom, especially from state functionaries.

4. Positive Behavioral Communication Engagement

Communication, broadly speaking, is the mean of interaction and process by which we share and exchange ideas, sentiments, thoughts, feelings, emotions and information. Communication may utilize a range of different tools including speech, poetry, songs, writings, signs and even body language.

The notion of communication in many ways also refers to attribution of meanings to words, symbols and gestures or simply the social construction of language and the subsequent generation and propagation of narratives.

Though undoubtedly intrinsic and distinctively organic, mode and style of communication is inherently subjective and specific to context. Every community or society has its own set of communication styles that are equally unique and distinctive. Communication, therefore, is not just what sets us apart as humans, but it effectively also helps outline the boundaries and parameters of different communities and societies that have acquired, created or adopted different and unique communicative styles over the years.

Owing to being unique and specific to region and context, communication styles and patterns can tell us a lot about the communities they respectively belong to. They can, for instance, help us understand and determine the social habits, attitudes and behaviors of different communities, whether positive or negative. In a way therefore, patterns and styles of communications can allow us to gauge the respective strengths and weaknesses of any given community.

In the context of PVE and community engagement, communicative behavior holds the key to untangling the idiosyncrasies and peculiarities specific to the community, especially in relation to generation and propagation of dangerous and harmful narratives, which in one way or another encourage proclivity towards violent extremism.

As we know, terrorism and violent extremism never take place in a vacuum and are due to a range of different drivers and factors. These drivers and factors are often either directly linked to or owing to existing communicative behavior of the community susceptible to such vices. Any PVE community engagement undertaking must therefore carefully examine and take account of the existing channels and modes of communication in the community.

A community that continues to struggle with sporadic episodes of terrorism and violent extremism over a long period of time, as a rule, must seriously reevaluate and reassess its patterns and styles of communication. This has become all the more crucial in an age that is widely referred to as the age of communication. Although patterns and styles of communication of a community should neither be confused nor conflated with technological advancement in mediums of communication, it is important still to fully consider and take account of its impact on the society generally. Advances in communication technology, for instance, significantly amplify the generation and propagation of narratives, which we know play a central role in both terrorism and violent extremism.

Since communities susceptible to terrorism and violent extremism have some intrinsic communicative norms and practices that create breathing space for such vices to diffuse and disperse, the success of any PVE community engagement enterprise would substantially depend on positive communicative behavorial changes in the community.

Behavorial changes or modifications, be it in relation to a community's mode of communication or any other social attribute, is a fairly drawn-out and tedious undertaking. However, in spite of its protracted nature, it is crucial for finding long-term and sustainable solutions to a community's recurring problems. In this vein, a number of different behavorial tools and theories can be utilized. The purpose of all such behavorial change theories and approaches is essentially to "understand why people behave as they do and how the change is possible to achieve" (Kauppi, 2015, p. 4).

Although a number of different theories can potentially be utilized for this explicit purpose, one standout approach, especially in the context of PVE and community engagement, is the Behavorial Change Communication (BCC) strategy.

BCC is a strategic mode of communication that encourages a community to develop viable, healthier and sustainable communicative practices. BCC primarily seeks to positively

improve and influence a community's attitude and way of life. It first sets out to discern a community's behavior and patterns of interactions and then gradually and carefully aligns them with persuasive and effective communication strategies (Bubeck et al., 2024).

BCC demands extensive preliminary research to assess and map the problematic patterns of behavior and habits that need to be changed, reformed or modified. Participatory research methods, such as focus group discussions and community mapping have proven to be useful research tools in this vein (Davis & Thomas, 2004). Such comprehensive field research allows the concerned communities, civil societies and policymakers to pinpoint and identify the specific communication areas that require interventions.

BCC demands strong and sound knowledge of how a community thinks, behaves and acts, which is only possible through rigorous on-ground research. Based on careful examination of local and indigenous realities, it devises tailored messages and communication activities. The messages devised must 'be concise, easy to understand, and delivered in a manner' that directly applies to the community and its peculiar behavior. Such tailored messages can then be "disseminated through various selected channels of communication, such as peer-to-peer, group, and mass media to bring about the desired positive changes in behavior regarding specific challenges" (*Behavior Change Communication*, n.d.) especially in relation to violent extremism. Role of media, information ministries, communication subject experts and most importantly civil societies is crucial for devising and implementing effective and meaningful behavior change communication strategies.

It is worth bearing in mind that BCC, like all other behavior change theories and strategies, demands patience and forbearance since "Behavior change does not happen overnight, it requires sustained efforts by multiple stakeholders working at different levels" (Behavior Change Communication, n.d.) over a long period of time. Without challenging or undermining indigeneity, it is the responsibility of the government and the concerned civil societies to encourage the community to explore positive behavior change options that would allow it to build durable and lasting resilience against violent extremism.

5. Peer to Peer Initiatives

Communities that typically fall pray to violent extremism often have some standout characteristics that make them particularly vulnerable. Amongst these characteristics, is the pronounced absence of effective communication, counseling and interaction between the members of the community. 'Peer to Peer' or P2P initiative seeks to overcome these challenges by creating platforms where members of a community can come together and discuss their shared problems and concerns in a safe and protective environment.

Owing to its "Peer" centric approach, P2P acknowledges the differences between varying age groups, preferences and priorities and is extremely wary of creating arbitrary groups or clusters that have nothing in common. In fact, the primary objective of a P2P exercise is to create groups and associations that not only share common interests and ambitions but are also on the same wavelength. Members of a community (especially the young), who would otherwise be shy, reserve and reclusive would be far more comfortable amongst their own peers. P2P acknowledges and addresses the peer gaps and limitations in any community engagement exercise and produces activities that are far more resourceful, meaningful and impactful.

P2P initiative has not only proven to be a very effective mode of community engagement but has also been a highly useful tool to build a community's resilience over time. The initiative typically encourages peers of different age brackets to form distinct social groups among themselves. These groups would then meet periodically to discuss issues of mutual concern that plague or threaten the community at large. The groups would

be encouraged to familiarize themselves with recent news and ideally some academic and policy literature surrounding the issues so that their discussions and interactions can be rich and well-informed. The sessions would be moderated by a subject expert who merely plays a facilitatory role and provides context and recommends reading materials.

Such P2P initiatives are especially beneficial for youth struggling with both a sense of purpose and identity. P2P interactions in the presence of a subject expert and their own peers would allow them to open up, realize that their peers are also going through or experiencing similar issues, build their knowledge base and confront the harsh facts and truths about the challenges they face as a collective.

In the specific context of PVE, P2P exercises will seek to encourage the community to form peer groups among themselves and discuss issues of mutual interest and concern. Each peer group would possibly approach the issue of violent extremism differently. The youth for instance would be fairly open-minded and open to change and revision. The mature and elderly on the other hand would be far more conservative and resistant to change. The varying standpoints will allow the different peer groups to confront their respective biases without any external stimulus, prejudice or judgment.

'Voices Against Extremism' (VAE), a campaign designed by University students in Vancouver, is a standout example of a typical P2P PVE initiative. VAE "encourages and provides funding for university students from around the world to develop and carry through with their own CVE campaigns. The program particularly seeks to inspire university students 'to operate at the community level by targeting and incorporating peers, other students, local citizens, and community groups and organizations in the fight against violent extremism" (Macnair & Frank, 2017, pp. 154-155). VAE and similar initiatives could potentially be replicated in various other communities affected by violent extremism.

Addressing violent extremism demands serious introspection, which requires the community to directly face and confront some harsh truths and realities, including longstanding cultural norms, traditions and values. This can be difficult to accomplish in a group or a gathering that makes an individual insecure or uncomfortable. Arbitrary groups that include people of all ages, for instance, could make both the elderly and the young equally uncomfortable to share their respective opinions on difficult, divisive and controversial subjects. Owing to this grave handicap, sensitive subjects like violent extremism, will only be discussed or engaged with superficially. For the sake of effective PVE, P2P therefore becomes a social imperative, since only a peer group can provide the necessary space, comfort and familiarity that other platforms simply do not.

It can of course be argued that there are also clear advantages of putting different peer groups together. Firstly, peer groups, especially elderly groups, have a tendency to be monotonous and repetitive, owing to long-held stubborn viewpoints that are overly resistant to change. Putting them all together in one peer group would unhelpfully recycle and reinforce the same beliefs, ideas and biases. Secondly, community engagement is not just about the old or new ideas, but in fact, about bringing the two together, and the best way to accomplish that would be to bring the different peer groups together. Lastly, a key objective of any community engagement exercise is to overcome generational gaps and allow the youth to open up to their elders, which can only be possible through active cross-generational interactions.

While that maybe so, it is worth bearing in mind that communities that are struggling with societal ills like violent extremism, are usually fairly conservative and orthodox. Cross-generational groups or activities in such societies would likely make the participants hesitant, reluctant and reclusive, which would defeat the purpose of community engagement. Even if some participants muster the courage to speak and participate freely on difficult and divisive issues, it could easily lead to unnecessary friction

and hostility between different peer groups. For all such societies, it is therefore necessary that community engagement first starts with P2P exercises and then gradually over time, when the community has matured as a whole, it can transition into cross-peer groups.

Random and arbitrary engagement with a community that ignores group dynamics, peer-to-peer relations, age brackets and social hierarchies, will defeat the purpose and yield little to no result insofar as effective engagement with the community is concerned.

Conclusion

Though admittedly community engagement is first and foremost a context-specific undertaking, there are however, some standout overarching factors that can help tailor and shape our response or strategy, especially in relation to PVE. This article set out to accomplish just that.

Taking cue from the bottom-up approach, it has proposed five non-exhaustive and non-stringent overarching meta-strategies, which should serve as a helpful guideline and a starting point for any PVE related community engagement undertaking.

Although all proposed strategies have been devised in a manner that they should, in principle, be applicable to all communities and societies, it is crucial still to understand that both the notions of PVE and community engagement are highly context specific and vary from community to community. It is therefore typically neither possible nor advisable to create some generic, blanket or universal strategies, since that risks undermining or bypassing indigenous values and local sensitivities.

With that being said, all strategies discussed in this article were fairly sensitive and aware of this verity and each one of them not only constantly alluded to the importance of indigeneity and local context but also in many ways further strengthened the argument. The first overarching meta-strategy, for instance, is in fact about the very 'primacy of indigeneity' that makes a strong and persuasive case for prioritizing the local context and indigenous values. Similarly, the second proposed strategy of 'with them versus to them' is critical of all approaches that do not take the concerned community in confidence or fail to treat it as an equal, if not a lead partner. The remaining three strategies are also in one way or another equally dismissive of exclusionary policies that do not place the community at the helm of affairs or undermine directly or indirectly, its indigeneity or local context.

All proposed strategies are neither intended to be stringent nor designed to be exhaustive. On the contrary, they merely serve as helpful guidelines that are equally flexible and versatile, depending on the community and context they are respectively applied to.

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