

## The Countering Violent Extremism Agenda and Media Development: How Political Aims Can Derail Good Intentions

A new CIMA report by Courtney C. Radsch, Ph.D., coming in October 2016

As policymakers have sought new approaches in combatting terrorism over the past few years, worldwide attention has been focused on initiatives grouped together under the rubric of Countering Violent Extremism, or CVE. Given the belief that new media technologies were partially responsible for the success of extremist groups such as ISIS, a significant number of the projects gathered under the CVE rubric involve media components. Not surprisingly, the media focus of the CVE agenda has meant that CVE projects and media development projects are now often operating in the same space, and potentially even vying for the same funds.

Continuous discussion of the CVE agenda among policymakers and international donor organizations has caused quite a stir in the media development community, which, in general, is skeptical of both CVE methods and objectives. Indeed, as the recent report *Countering Violent Extremism Through Media and Communications Strategies* by Kate Ferguson illustrated, there is little evidence that the strategic communication and counter-messaging efforts that are common in CVE projects are actually effective. Furthermore, media projects are seen as less credible when they are linked to a specific political agenda. This is especially true when funds come from a foreign donor.

Thus, the rise of the CVE agenda has provoked a number of important questions within the media development and press freedom communities: Are CVE and media development goals compatible? Are CVE efforts diminishing the funds available for media development? How is the CVE agenda impacting press freedom globally? This report examines these questions in an attempt to better understand how the CVE agenda will impact efforts to develop sustainable and pluralistic media ecosystems worldwide.