Transitioning from agricultural economics to preventing violent extremism

My name is Tomas Kral, from the Czech Republic, and I have been serving as a UN Youth Volunteer at the UN Development Programme (UNDP) Regional Service Centre for Africa in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, since March 2019. As a Programme Assistant, I work on preventing and responding to violent extremism in Africa, a regional project.

Before UNDP, I worked at the Permanent Representation of the Czech Republic to the European Union (EU) in Brussels, Belgium – working closely with the Agriculture and Environment Unit and engaging with the EU’s Task Force for Rural Africa. This provided me with development experience in an agricultural context.
As a recent graduate and practitioner in the field of Agricultural Economics, it has been a challenging yet compelling transition to dive into the approaches to prevent violent extremism (PVE). --Tomas Kral, UN Youth Volunteer, UNDP

Upon joining the Regional PVE team in Addis Ababa, I was briefed about the ongoing projects and activities the Project team had engaged in and I was formally introduced to UNDP colleagues in the focus countries.

The UNDP PVE Project stands at the forefront of shaping understanding and framing conversations about preventing and responding to violent extremism in Africa. Its engagement with country offices and governments in 18 countries, regional bodies, civil society and others across the continent has enabled the emergence of nationally and regionally-owned solutions to violent extremism that are innovative, evidence-based and system-wide.

As part of my assignment, I provide ad-hoc support, communicate with UNDP focal points in the focus countries and contribute to the development of several research projects, including leading the redesign of the survey for the second phase of Journey to Extremism in Africa study.

I am also guiding the creation of a web-based virtual platform that depicts how life under terrorist groups has been experienced by local communities, with focus on women and girls living in communities under the territorial control of terrorist groups. -- Tomas Kral

The virtual platform aims to provide PVE-practitioners with a nuanced and evidence-based background on the diversity of roles of women in terrorist group organizational structures to better inform gendered interventions. The aesthetic and interactive nature of these animated stories is useful particularly for practitioners that directly work with the target group of
women at risk of recruitment by terrorists.

To enable and facilitate peer-to-peer learning among UNDP colleagues working in the PVE field, in 2019, we established a Community of Practice and initiated the development of PVE Quarterly Newsletters to highlight PVE activities and projects on the continent.

Finally, I would like to highlight the activities of a Learning Committee that was established at the UNDP Regional Service Centre with great support from UN Volunteers. Our objective is to create a space for mutual learning and promote the professional development of staff at all levels through different events and programmes.

Initially fully funded by my government (Czech Republic), my assignment is currently funded directly by the project. I am honoured to continue my UNV experience in Ethiopia in 2020 – to follow my passion and contribute my time, skills & knowledge to create a significant force and have a positive impact on people living in at-risk communities on the continent.

- Czech Republic • International Youth Day • prevention of violent extremism
- United Nations Development Programme

Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions, SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals