

Community-Centric Approaches to Counter-Terrorism: A Policy Brief on Enhancing PCVE through Collaboration

Cyrus E. Torreña

National Defense College of the Philippines

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100300419>

Received: 21 March 2026; Accepted: 26 March 2026; Published: 11 April 2026

ABSTRACT

This study conducts a comparative analysis of two community-centric social reintegration programs in the Philippines: the AGILA Haven Program in Maguindanao and Ronda Probinsya sa Kalinaw in Sarangani. The primary objective is to evaluate the effectiveness of these localized initiatives in preventing and countering violent extremism (PCVE) and facilitating the successful transition of former violent extremists (FVEs) back into mainstream society. Methodologically, the research employs a qualitative case study design, integrating primary data collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus group discussions involving program participants, community leaders, and key government stakeholders. This approach provides a nuanced understanding of the operational mechanisms and socio-cultural adaptations of each program. The results reveal that both initiatives successfully utilize active community engagement and sustainable livelihood projects to reintegrate FVEs and mitigate the spread of radical ideologies. However, their strategic implementations differ significantly. AGILA Haven adopts a highly integrated approach that incorporates specialized religious education and localized conflict resolution mechanisms to navigate Maguindanao's complex socio-cultural and security dynamics. Conversely, Ronda Probinsya sa Kalinaw leverages the relatively stable environment of Sarangani by focusing heavily on consistent educational interventions and long-term community presence. Despite these achievements, both programs encounter substantial challenges, most notably the relentless recruitment efforts by active extremist factions and the vulnerability associated with fluctuating financial support from governmental and non-governmental entities. The study concludes that while community-centric approaches are indispensable for the sustainable social reintegration of former extremists, their long-term viability is heavily dependent on institutionalized support. To enhance program efficacy, policymakers must prioritize robust inter-agency collaboration, secure consistent funding streams, and maintain continuous community engagement, as these measures are critical for building resilient communities and advancing broader national security objectives.

Keywords: Countering Violent Extremism, Social Reintegration, Community Engagement, Former Violent Extremists, Peacebuilding

INTRODUCTION

Violent extremism is a pervasive threat and a global security concern that impacts both international and local communities (Ibrahim, 2018). In the Philippines, particularly in the southern regions of Mindanao, the threat remains persistent due to its geographical proximity to regional extremist hotspots and a complex history of ethnoreligious civil wars (Agaton, 2022; Henkin, 2021; Hikam & Munabari, 2022). This phenomenon is driven by multifaceted factors, including socio-economic vulnerabilities and governance-related grievances such as poverty, injustice, and state marginalization (Butler, 2020; Tanoli et al., 2022). Extremist groups exploit these conditions through sophisticated and aggressive recruitment tactics, often targeting out-of-school youth who lack educational or employment opportunities to offer them an alternative sense of purpose (da Silva Rebelo et al., 2022; Vuong et al., 2021).

While the Philippine government has historically utilized traditional security measures, such as legislative reforms like the Human Security Act of 2007 (Republic Act No. 9372) and the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020 (Republic Act No. 11479), these reactive strategies often fail to address the deeper underlying issues contributing

to radicalization (Permanent Mission of the Republic of the Philippines to the United Nations, 2020). Furthermore, reactive approaches can lead to alienation and resentment within communities, potentially fueling further radicalization rather than deterring it. Consequently, achieving sustainable peace requires proactive, community-centric strategies that prioritize early intervention and authentic collaboration to enhance the community's resilience (Ellis & Abdi, 2017).

Successful social reintegration must be anchored in addressing root causes through sustainable livelihood initiatives and educational outreach that counters extremist narratives (Freear & Glazzard, 2020; Horgan & Braddock, 2010; Ozer & Bertelsen, 2020). This study examines these dynamics through a comparative analysis of two localized interventions in the Philippines: the AGILA Haven Program in Maguindanao and Ronda Probinsya sa Kalinaw in Sarangani. These programs demonstrate that integrating socio-economic support with direct community involvement is vital for the successful social reintegration of former extremists and the long-term stability of conflict-affected regions.

To theoretically anchor the shift toward proactive, community-centric strategies, this study utilizes the Cyclic Integration Model of Reintegration Behavior, which is fundamentally grounded in Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (1991). This conceptual framework posits that the social reintegration of Former Violent Extremists (FVEs) is governed by interconnected psychological drivers. Initially, an individual's belief systems—comprising behavioral beliefs about expected outcomes, normative beliefs regarding social support, and control beliefs concerning perceived facilitators or barriers—directly influence their mindset. These foundational beliefs subsequently shape the FVE's psychological drivers, specifically their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Ultimately, these factors determine their intention to reintegrate and take concrete actions, such as seeking employment or participating in community activities. A critical feature of this model is its circular feedback mechanism, where the tangible outcomes of reintegration efforts continuously re-evaluate and influence the individual's initial beliefs and subsequent behaviors.

Viewed through this theoretical lens, successful social reintegration must be anchored in addressing root causes through sustainable livelihood initiatives and educational outreach that counters extremist narratives. These interventions actively reshape the normative and control beliefs of FVEs. This study examines these dynamics through a comparative analysis of two localized interventions in the Philippines: the AGILA Haven Program in Maguindanao and Ronda Probinsya sa Kalinaw in Sarangani.

This brief outlines the critical need for robust community-centric approaches to Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE). The scope of this study is a comparative analysis between two prominent social reintegration initiatives in the Philippines: the AGILA Haven Program in Maguindanao Province and Ronda Probinsya sa Kalinaw in Sarangani Province. The research utilizes a qualitative case study methodology, integrating data from interviews, focus group discussions, and secondary reports to evaluate the methodologies and effectiveness of these programs.

The objective of this brief is to provide strategic guidance on utilizing inter-agency collaboration and direct funding to improve the social reintegration of former violent extremists (FVEs). Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Compare and contrast the strategies and effectiveness of the two programs in returning FVEs to civilian life.
2. Identify and analyze the key successes, such as increased surrender rates and community resilience, as well as significant challenges like erratic funding and persistent extremist recruitment.
3. Derive policy implications that emphasize proactive, community-based strategies over reactive security measures.
4. Formulate strategic recommendations at the national, regional, and provincial levels to ensure the long-term sustainability and scalability of localized PCVE efforts.

Ultimately, this research serves as a framework for policymakers and practitioners to enhance culturally sensitive

and sustainable reintegration initiatives that contribute to regional peace and national security.

METHODOLOGY

This research employed a qualitative case study methodology to perform a comparative analysis of two prominent community-centric social reintegration programs in the Philippines. The study utilized a qualitative focus to enable a comprehensive evaluation of program strategies, their effectiveness, and the dynamic interaction between participants and the established frameworks.

The approach was structured as follows:

Comparative Case Analysis

The study derived insights from two active local reintegration models to identify effective practices and reveal potential gaps within their respective frameworks. This design allowed for a nuanced exploration of how each program succeeded or encountered challenges within its unique sociopolitical context.

Focus Programs

AGILA Haven Program in Maguindanao (Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao) and Ronda Probinsya sa Kalinaw in Sarangani (Region XII).

Data Collection and Participants

The study employed a purposive sampling approach to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the rehabilitation and reintegration processes. Participants were deliberately selected based on their direct involvement in, or affection by, the AGILA Haven and Ronda Probinsya sa Kalinaw programs. This strategy was designed to gather in-depth qualitative data from individuals who could provide nuanced insights grounded in their specific roles and experiences within the programs.

Data was gathered through semi-structured qualitative instruments—specifically In-depth Interviews (IDI) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD)—to capture the diverse experiences, perceptions, and impacts of the initiatives from multiple stakeholder perspectives. Prior to data collection, comprehensive guides were designed to systematically explore various program aspects, including effectiveness, operational challenges, community engagement, and suggestions for improvement with strict adherence to ethical safeguards to ensure participant protection and data integrity.

Participants for the focus programs were selected to represent both strategic oversight and on-the-ground implementation, as summarized in Table 1. For AGILA Haven, participants included a governor, a military colonel, a commander, and two program staff members. For Ronda Probinsya sa Kalinaw, data were collected from the provincial administrator and the program’s focal person.

Table 1. Comparative Summary of Focus Programs, Data Collection Method used, and Participants.

Program	Data Collection Method	Participants
AGILA Haven	In-depth Interviews	Military Colonel, Commander, Governor
	Focus Group Discussions	2 Program Staffs
Ronda Probinsya sa Kalinaw	In-depth Interviews	Provincial Administrator, Focal Person

To complement the primary qualitative data, secondary data sources—including program documentation, reports, and relevant literature—were thoroughly reviewed to assess methodologies and overall effectiveness.

Evaluation Metrics

The analysis evaluated the programs through the primary lenses of Approaches and Effectiveness. Specific metrics included:

- **Community Engagement Levels:** Assessing the depth of involvement with local leaders, religious figures (Uztads), and general constituents to foster trust and cooperation.
- **Socio-economic Impact:** Evaluating the provision and success of sustainable livelihood initiatives, such as agricultural and livestock projects, in addressing root causes of radicalization.
- **Cultural Inclusivity:** Examining how programs integrated local socio-cultural dynamics, including religious education to counter extremist narratives and conflict resolution mechanisms like Rido (clan war) settlement.
- **Sustainability of Funding and Administrative Support:** Analyzing the resilience of operations despite challenges such as erratic funding, leadership changes, and shifts in national or regional policy priorities.

Data Analysis

Collected data were analyzed following a Thematic Analysis framework to identify recurring patterns, themes, and significant insights across both case studies.

RESULTS

Successes of Community-Centric Models

Both the AGILA Haven and Ronda Probinsya sa Kalinaw programs demonstrate that integrating socio-economic development with cultural and religious inclusion significantly aids in the rehabilitation and social reintegration of Former Violent Extremists (FVEs). By providing sustainable livelihood initiatives—such as agricultural tools, livestock, and vocational training—the programs address the root causes of radicalization, specifically poverty and economic marginalization. This economic support is coupled with religious education, where respected religious leaders (Uztads) and revised Madrasah curricula are used to counter extremist doctrines with the peaceful teachings of Islam. These community-centered strategies have yielded tangible results, including increased surrender rates among active extremist members and the fostering of a "culture of security" within local communities.

Financial Instability

A primary vulnerability identified in the sources is the heavy reliance on fluctuating local budgets rather than consistent national or regional funding. For instance, the AGILA Haven Program is solely funded by the Office of the Provincial Governor, receiving no financial support from the BARMM regional government and only minimal, one-time contributions from national agencies. Similarly, Sarangani's program faces erratic funding that can slow down critical projects like artisan and vocational training. This fiscal strain makes it difficult for provincial governments to maintain the "expensive endeavor" of peacebuilding alongside other administrative responsibilities.

Coordination Gaps and Systemic Vulnerabilities

Despite local successes, these programs face critical threats to their long-term sustainability due to a lack of institutionalized national policy. Reintegration efforts are often hindered by insufficient inter-agency collaboration, resulting in fragmented efforts and inefficiencies. The effectiveness of localized interventions is frequently tied to the individual political will of current leaders; every election cycle introduces the risk that a new leader might discontinue established programs. Consequently, the absence of a cohesive, multi-layered strategy that aligns local, regional, and national resources limits the ability to scale these successful local models into a robust national counter-terrorism framework.

DISCUSSION AND STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The following strategic recommendations are designed to enhance Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) by addressing the systemic gaps in funding and collaboration identified in the comparative study. By applying the Cyclic Integration Model of Reintegration Behavior, these policy recommendations aim to systematically foster the psychological drivers—attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control—necessary for sustained FVE reintegration across all levels of government.

At the national government level, there is a critical need to institutionalize direct funding by allocating and legally ring-fencing dedicated national funds for local PCVE reintegration programs. Sustained funding ensures that the feedback mechanism of the Cyclic Integration Model remains positive, as erratic funding breaks trust and negatively impacts the FVE's control beliefs regarding their future stability. Furthermore, national policy must shift from purely reactive security measures, which can lead to community alienation, toward proactive, nationwide socio-economic and educational interventions. Such proactive strategies build a foundation of trust and address the cognitive vulnerabilities associated with radicalization before it escalates into violence, effectively reshaping the baseline behavioral beliefs of marginalized populations (Ellefsen & Sandberg, 2022; Ibrahim, 2018).

At the regional government level, authorities must mandate active inter-agency collaboration between security, social welfare, and economic development agencies to prevent "siloed" operations. For example, it is crucial that regional programs like the BARMM TUGON are better integrated with provincial efforts like AGILA Haven to avoid fragmented responses. Additionally, regional authorities should prioritize socio-economic integration by facilitating programs that link Former Violent Extremists (FVEs) directly to formal education and vocational training. Providing technical and vocational education (TVET) gives ex-combatants a clearer path to a stable future, which theoretically enhances their perceived behavioral control and empowers them with the actual skills required to turn the intention to reintegrate into concrete action (Ahmad, 2015; Arango-Fernández & Zuilkowski, 2022). Concurrently, regional governments must deploy ideological counter-narratives by partnering with prominent religious leaders and institutions to systematically dismantle extremist ideologies. A clear example of this strategy is utilizing Uztads to promote the "correct" Islamic teachings and peace-based curricula, as successfully demonstrated by Maguindanao's MCAO and Sarangani's partnership with Mindanao State University.

Finally, at the provincial and local government levels, Local Government Units (LGUs) must utilize local networks to design interventions tailored to specific socio-cultural dynamics. An excellent example of this is how Maguindanao successfully integrated Rido (clan war) settlement into its PCVE framework, recognizing that local clan conflicts are a unique driver of extremist recruitment in that province. Furthermore, received funding should be directly deployed into sustainable, community-based livelihood programs, such as agricultural cooperatives and livestock activities. These initiatives provide "Golden Purposes" for surrendering, offering tangible alternatives to the economic grievances exploited by extremist recruiters and facilitating the ultimate action phase that allows FVEs to physically demonstrate their intention to reintegrate (Mazerolle et al., 2020). To support this, provinces must build grassroots institutional partnerships with local civil society, tribal leaders, and schools to foster widespread community ownership. Because engagement with the local community is the "cornerstone" of successful reintegration, positive community reception builds the trust and cooperation necessary to sustain a "culture of security," validating the FVE's subjective norms and completing the positive feedback loop of their long-term reintegration journey (Ellis & Abdi, 2017).

Summary Of Policy Implications

The evidence from the comparative study of the AGILA Haven and Ronda Probinsya sa Kalinaw programs clearly indicates that social reintegration programs cannot survive in isolation. While these localized initiatives have proven effective in fostering community resilience and mitigating extremist ideologies, their long-term viability is often hampered by inconsistent funding, leadership changes, and community resistance. Successful social reintegration must be anchored in a "whole-of-nation approach" that integrates socio-economic development with deep community engagement to address the root causes of radicalization. Viewed through the lens of the Cyclic Integration Model of Reintegration Behavior, this holistic approach is fundamentally necessary

to systematically reshape the behavioral and normative beliefs of Former Violent Extremists (FVEs). Without a cohesive framework that connects local efforts to broader regional and national security policies, these localized programs remain vulnerable to the "expensive endeavor" of peacebuilding. Such vulnerability threatens to disrupt the positive feedback mechanisms that are essential for validating an FVE's intention to reintegrate.

To secure long-term success in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE), practitioners and policymakers must mandate seamless inter-agency collaboration across all levels of government—local, regional, and national—to ensure a unified strategy that pools resources and shares best practices. This seamless collaboration is vital for deploying consistent ideological counter-narratives and socio-economic interventions that empower FVEs, thereby strengthening their perceived behavioral control. Furthermore, it is imperative to secure direct, institutionalized funding mechanisms for local initiatives to insulate them from political shifts and regional budget deficits. National support should be "funneled directly" to the provincial government to ensure that the necessary resources for livelihood, education, and security are sustained and continuous. Only through such institutionalized commitment and robust collaboration can localized PCVE efforts maintain the necessary socio-cultural support structures, ensuring they remain adaptable and effective in the face of evolving extremist threats.

REFERENCES

1. Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179–211. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978\(91\)90020-T](https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978(91)90020-T)
2. Agaton, S. I. G. (2022). The Kantian Categorical Imperative and Marawi Refugees: Affirming the Importance of the Anti-Terrorism Law. *Masyarakat, Kebudayaan Dan Politik*, 35(2), Article 2. <https://doi.org/10.20473/mkp.V35122022.231-241>
3. Ahmad, K. B. (2015). Educational practice: Lessons to be learned from madrasah and religious schools in contemporary Southeast Asia. *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, 5(1), Article 1. <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v5i1.29-48>
4. Arango-Fernández, M. P., & Zuilkowski, S. (2022). The Role of Technical and Vocational Education in Social Reintegration: Insights from Colombian Ex-Combatants. *Journal on Education in Emergencies*, null, null. <https://doi.org/10.33682/tehb-tshy>
5. Butler, M. (2020). Using Specialised Prison Units to Manage Violent Extremists: Lessons from Northern Ireland. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 32(3), 539-557. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2017.1388791>
6. da Silva Rebelo, M. J., Fernández, M., & Meneses-Falcón, C. (2022). Chewing Revenge or Becoming Socially Desirable? Anger Rumination in Refugees and Immigrants Experiencing Racial Hostility: Latin-Americans in Spain. *Behavioral Sciences*, 12(6), Article 6. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs12060180>
7. Ellefsen, R., & Sandberg, S. (2022). Everyday Prevention of Radicalization: The Impacts of Family, Peer, and Police Intervention. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 0(0), 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2022.2037185>
8. Ellis, B. H., & Abdi, S. (2017). Building community resilience to violent extremism through genuine partnerships. *American Psychologist*, 72(3), 289-300. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000065>
9. Freear, M., & Glazzard, A. (2020). Preventive Communication: Emerging Lessons from Participative Approaches to Countering Violent Extremism in Kenya. *The RUSI Journal*, 165(1), 90-106. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2020.1734316>
10. Henkin, S. (2021). Dynamic Dimensions of Radicalization and Violent Extremism in Sabah, Malaysia. <https://www.resolvenet.org/research/dynamic-dimensions-radicalization-and-violent-extremism-sabah-malaysia>
11. Hikam, M. A. S., & Munabari, F. (2022). Unholy War: Violent Extremism in Marawi and Its Impacts on Muslim Communities in Indonesia. *KnE Social Sciences*, 91-109. <https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v7i4.10517>
12. Horgan, J., & Braddock, K. (2010). Rehabilitating the terrorists?: Challenges in assessing the effectiveness of de-radicalization programs. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 22(2), 267-291. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546551003594748>
13. Ibrahim, N. A. (2018). Countering Violent Extremism in Canada and Abroad. *Inquiry@Queen's*

Undergraduate Research Conference Proceedings. <https://doi.org/10.24908/iqurcp.11804>

14. Mazerolle, L., Eggins, E., Cherney, A., Hine, L., Higginson, A., & Belton, E. (2020). Police programmes that seek to increase community connectedness for reducing violent extremism behaviour, attitudes and beliefs. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 16(3). <https://doi.org/10.1002/cl2.1111>
15. Ozer, S., & Bertelsen, P. (2020). The moral compass and life skills in navigating radicalization processes: Examining the interplay among life skills, moral disengagement, and extremism. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 61(5). <https://doi.org/10.1111/sjop.12636>
16. Permanent Mission of the Republic of the Philippines to the United Nations. (2020). Measures Undertaken by the Philippine Government to Eliminate International Terrorism. https://www.un.org/en/ga/sixth/75/int_terrorism/philippines_e.pdf
17. Tanoli, I., Pais, S., Cordeiro, J. M. M., & Jamil, M. (2022). Detection of Radicalisation and Extremism Online: A Survey. <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-1185415/v1>
18. Vuong, Q.-H., Le, T.-T., & Nguyen, M.-H. (2021). The psycho-religious mechanism behind suicide attacks: A mindsponge-based Bayesian statistical investigation and implications for the post-9/11 world. <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/5npaz>