



Workshop on Strengthening Cooperation and Collaboration Among Civil Society Networks Around the Preventing Violent Extremism Agenda

24-25 April 2017
Geneva Centre for Security Policy
Geneva, Switzerland

Meeting Summary

OVERVIEW

On 24-25 April 2017, the [Prevention Project](#), the [International Civil Society Action Network \(ICAN\)](#) and the [Geneva Centre for Security Policy \(GCSP\)](#) convened representatives from the growing number of preventing violent extremism (PVE) and PVE-relevant civil society networks and organizations. Participants also included representatives from the United Nations, Hedayah, the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF), the European Commission, and select governments.

The purpose of the meeting was to identify ways in which collaboration and cooperation among the growing number of such networks, and civil society organizations (CSOs) working on PVE more broadly, can be strengthened. In this context, discussions focused on how the recently-launched [Global Solutions Exchange](#) (GSX) could both facilitate such collaboration and further strengthen the role of civil society in PVE.

During the workshop, which was conducted under the [Chatham House Rule](#), some 40 participants, *inter alia*:

- a) explored the existing means for sharing information and experiences between and among relevant networks and CSOs;
- b) identified political, technical, capacity, and security challenges to strengthening their collaboration and advancing their work more broadly, and highlighted ways to overcome the challenges;
- c) considered how to deepen the involvement of networks and CSOs in national, regional and global level policy discussions;
- d) demonstrated the critical value added of having women-led and youth-focused organizations and networks at the table providing critical gendered and grassroots perspectives, and highlighting the deep sectoral work that is necessary for effective PVE;
- e) explored practical ways to facilitate more collaboration and cooperation among relevant networks and CSOs, including via the GSX, and how the GSX can help interested governments argue for greater political and funding support for PVE;



- f) highlighted how strengthening the linkages among local, national, regional, and global levels is key to an efficient and sustainable PVE approach; and
- g) considered how the new, online PVE platform developed by GCSP and the Swiss Government can be tailored and leveraged to facilitate more collaboration and cooperation among relevant CSOs and networks.

The below summary is organized into the following sections:

- a) The What, Who, and How of PVE and Related Civil Society Networks (paras. 1-11)
- b) Collaboration and Cooperation: The Exception and Not the Rule (paras. 12-14)
- c) The Challenges CSO Networks and CSOs Face Engaging on PVE (para. 15)
- d) Recommendations for Overcoming the Challenges (para. 16)
- e) What Role for the GSX? (para. 17)
- f) Discussion of New PVE Online Platform and On-Line Information-Sharing and Other Needs of CSO Networks and CSOs working on PVE (paras. 18-23)

THE WHAT, WHO, AND HOW OF PVE AND RELATED CIVIL SOCIETY NETWORKS

1. The thematic foci of the participating networks and CSOs varied – with some squarely in the PVE space and other more “PVE-relevant”. These themes included peacebuilding, rehabilitation and reintegration, early warning of conflict, conflict transformation, security sector reform, counter/alternative narrative development, dialogue, resilience building, community engagement, promoting social cohesion, training and strategic communications support for CSOs.

2. There was also variance as well as overlap among the target beneficiaries and partners with whom participants worked. Notable sectors included young people, women and families, with emphasis on their strengths and the comparative advantages and agency that these sectors of civil society have to offer to PVE.

3. Participants highlighted the critical role that these sectors, particularly women- and youth-led organizations, are having on and should continue to have in influencing the PVE discourse by virtue of their lived experiences and successes by providing positive viable economic, social, religious and political alternatives in their communities to those most at risk of radicalizations. It was also noted how they witness the fast changing dynamics of recruitment and need to adjust strategies, for example work on the educational sector is gaining more traction due to extremists’ increasing shift into the sector from early childhood and tertiary education.

4. Participants discussed the role that networks have played in connecting local civil society actors’ voices and experiences to national, regional, and global conversations, focusing particular attention on those networks that look to amplify the contributions from women, youth, and families in the PVE discourse. Partly as a result of these networks, these critical stakeholders are more regularly part of these conversations. The point was made that more attention needs to be given to avoid their



instrumentalization by governments and to include them as more than just the targets of local PVE programs, and it was noted that the GSX format – by virtue of being led by civil society – can ensure that such stakeholders are welcomed as equal partners in shaping the agenda and discourse, as well as informing policy and practice.

5. The participants highlighted the diversity of activities their networks and organizations implement. These include:

- a) mapping of PVE and PVE-relevant activities and needs for CSOs,
- b) capacity-building programs,
- c) advocacy (including with national parliaments and the UN and regional organizations),
- d) engaging with the media,
- e) monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of programs,
- f) facilitating access of local civil society actors to national, regional, and global policymakers and discussions around PVE,
- g) promoting or hosting dialogues, including between law enforcement and CSOs,
- h) youth policy and youth innovation labs,
- i) funding innovative practices by women-led organizations at the community level through small and medium grants, and
- j) providing deeper analysis of sectoral and thematic issues pertaining to PVE anchored in empirical evidence and experience across many country and local contexts.

6. The participants discussed their sources of funding used to sustain their work, with most of the funding originating from national governments and international agencies. They noted the paucity of resources coming from other sources such as foundations, the private sector, and membership fees. Participants noted that much of their funding remains short-term and project-based and that they do not receive adequate long-term funding for core operations initiatives (i.e., more than two years). The point was made that this approach is not conducive to ensuring the sustainability of projects and building the capacity of organizations and networks. This makes it difficult to address the roots of the problem and therefore focus sufficient attention on prevention.

7. It was noted how the tendency of donors to prefer to provide short-term funding in the field of PVE where it is difficult to demonstrate concrete results during the life-cycle of a project that lasts only one or two years (at most), can undermine the search for “what works” in this field. Further, participants noted the general focus of donors on short-term M&E approaches that were neither consistent with the realities on the ground nor with the nature of things being measured (e.g., changes in attitude towards violence or the “other”). Discussion also centered on how the M&E frameworks being used were in many cases not fit for purpose, especially when considering the small amount of funds being provided to local CSOs.

8. The representatives from the various networks shared the ways in they select or recruit their members. The point was made that members of networks often have different missions, approaches, and capacities and there was need to maintain this diversity, while identifying a common denominator



or unifying theme for network members, e.g., the need to preserve space for civil society to engage in PVE and related work.

9. Participants discussed the tools and resources that the networks currently rely on most and additional ones they would like access to carry out their mandate more effectively. The most important existing ones include: evidence-based research on local drivers of violent extremism and other PVE and PVE-relevant publications (including reports by USAID, OSCE, and EU etc.), impact evaluations on “what works” in the PVE field, exchange with other members or organizations, access to workshops, political leverage as well as accountability, and M&E tools. One network has developed a “Network Accountability, Learning, and Planning System” and a Participatory Review and Analysis Process, tools which assist with identifying capacity needs of its members.

10. A number of participants said they would like more access to a) relevant research, including evidence-driven data on what works to build resilience against violent extremism and what does not and b) relevant best practices and policy instruments. Overall, it was noted that the research/best practices/instruments exist but are too rarely shared with CSOs. Moreover, some noted that CSOs often do not have access to host government information on drivers, which, it was recommended that donors could help obtain.

11. Further, it was pointed out that more of the tools need to be available in the relevant local languages and local CSOs need to be engaged in their development so the tools become more comprehensive and therefore more useful in practice to local actors.

COLLABORATION AND COOPERATION: THE EXCEPTION AND NOT THE RULE

12. Collaboration between CSO networks and CSOs, as well as engagement between networks and CSOs, governments and multilateral bodies was discussed. While some networks such as the Women’s Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL) and the youth, peace and security network prioritize peer-to-peer learning and collaboration, many noted the limited work in this regard (both between CSO networks and CSOs), in part because the resources and incentives for such cooperation were not clear. In some cases, individuals with connections to multiple networks/organizations facilitate cooperation among different actors on a project or ad hoc basis. There was a general feeling that CSO networks/CSOs need to be more forthcoming in sharing information with other networks/CSOs and that donors should encourage incentivize and otherwise encourage this. It was also noted that there was some ad hoc cooperation and collaboration with national governments and multilateral bodies (such as the UN), and some cooperation from various networks/organizations, but only through discrete pieces of project work, and that this was not sustained.

13. Participants stressed that CSO networks and CSOs are generally too far from policy-making discussions and decisions related to PVE. However, it was noted that some multilateral platforms are creating more opportunities to involve them in regional and global PVE discussions. The Global



Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), Hedayah, GCERF, and the RESOLVE network have been among the most active in encouraging civil society participation in their work, although the extent the participation has been on an equal footing as other stakeholders, e.g., governments, has varied from platform to platform.

14. The participants expressed interest in deeper involvement in the relevant multilateral policy discussions. They emphasized how it was particularly important for national governments to hear from and interact with local organizations that are directly affected by violent extremism and how networks could facilitate these engagements. The point was also made, however, that participation should not be limited to short, project-specific presentations by a handful of local CSOs.

THE CHALLENGES CSO NETWORKS AND CSOs FACE IN ENGAGING ON PVE

15. Participants discussed the range of challenges CSO networks and CSOs face in engaging in PVE or PVE-relevant work. This includes operational, technical, and political challenges. A brief summary of those identified during the workshop follows:

- The sensitivity of the issues – both violent extremism and PVE – and the lack of appropriate communications strategies to manage those sensitivities. Local communities often do not know enough about PVE – what it is and is not – which can complicate efforts to promote community involvement in and support for PVE work.
- Maintaining the operational security of local CSOs and CSO networks working on PVE and the tensions between drawing attention to local practices, particularly by women-led groups, and risking security threats, versus lack of attention and marginalization of innovative practices. In some contexts international attention is welcomed, while in others, a low profile is needed.
- A wide range of organizations are working on PVE, but not necessarily putting the PVE label on the project or themselves for a variety of reasons. It is therefore often difficult to identify which CSOs are the ones that should be collaborating around PVE. This complicates efforts to strengthen cooperation/collaboration among relevant CSOs and networks in a particular geography and with host governments, donors, and the UN and to expand CSO involvement in national, regional, and global advocacy efforts and policy dialogues around PVE.
- A lack of CSO capacity and experience in PVE project implementation, including reporting and M&E.
- Too often CSO networks and CSOs are funded to implement short-term projects, with often onerous reporting requirements, leaving few resources for cooperation with other CSOs/networks or engagement in policy discussions.
- The disconnect between project work of CSOs and policies of host governments and diplomatic engagement by donors. This can lead to the “projectizing” of PVE whereby the focus is on identifying and supporting CSO-led PVE projects with governments not paying sufficient attention to the larger policy dimensions of PVE, which include the need to address the grievances that can fuel recruitment and radicalization.
- Varying degrees of trust between CSOs and governments; the less trust there is the more difficult it is to engage on PVE issues let alone implement PVE projects.



- Difficulties reaching beyond the “usual suspects” so that donors can work with more “remote” CSOs that are not on everyone’s radar.
- Donor funding timeliness, time-lines, and sustainability: long-term funding of over two years is needed to incorporate research and an appropriate timeframe for the inception phase of a project.
- Aligning donor interests with the interests and priorities of CSO networks and CSOs. In some instances a donor may place a premium on funding “counter-narrative” or “counter-speech” interventions, when the network members may see different local priority needs in other PVE realms.
- A tendency for donors, CSO networks, and CSOs to want to develop new PVE tools as opposed to leverage existing ones, which they may be unaware of due to limited information-sharing among CSO networks and CSOs. This limitation is partly the result of a culture of CSOs treating tools produced with donor funds as proprietary information.
- A balance between transparency and confidentiality has to be found to ensure information-sharing efforts among CSOs without compromising the confidentiality of sources and resources.
- The need for local communities to see the impact of specific PVE programs in the short-term, in order to maintain their support for this work, while recognizing the long-term nature of PVE efforts.
- Often non-existent or inadequate legal/policy frameworks to allow for CSO involvement in a field that many governments still consider principally the domain for national governments and security services.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES

16. Participants discussed different ways to overcome some of the above challenges identified by participants. The recommendations included:

- Strengthen horizontal collaboration among CSOs, including via the GSX, to allow for more sharing of experiences, joint capacity-building, training, project opportunities, and impact assessments.
- Further amplify the voice(s) of civil society in PVE policy discussions at the national, regional, and global levels through such increased horizontal collaboration.
- Expand involvement of CSOs in PVE work of multilateral fora, including UN and GCTF; the example of the upcoming “civil society day” on the margins of the OSCE counterterrorism/PVE conference in Vienna (May 2017) was cited as a best practice that should be replicated in other regional bodies as well as the GCTF and UN.
- Intensify intra- and inter-donor coordination around PVE, with a particular focus on breaking down silos (e.g., peacebuilding, human rights, peace and security, and development), and ensuring multi-stakeholder process that are fully inclusive of women and youth.
- Avoid always presenting PVE as a new agenda, which risks scaring away key stakeholders, but rather one that combines a range of well-established agendas – includes those mentioned



above. Increase focus on bringing these agendas and their relevant stakeholders together to work together to prevent violent extremism.

- Expand the use of technology by CSO networks, including for the purpose of involving grassroots CSOs with limited resources for participation in networks or for cross-CSO collaboration.
- Encourage more donors to invest in promoting the role of CSOs in PVE beyond the narrow, single-CSO projects they might be funding. This could include encouraging policy changes by host governments and adjustments to donor diplomatic strategies so more attention is paid to addressing grievances.
- Pool donor resources in particular geographical settings and focus on channeling funds to smaller number of CSOs, but allow for more resources to be devoted to CSO capacity-building and longer-term projects.
- Map the landscape of CSO involvement in PVE and PVE-relevant work in key regions and share the results with donors to help inform future programming decision and move beyond the “usual suspects”.
- Develop good practices for donor-CSO engagements on PVE, including a focus on grant-making. Among other things, this might increase the willingness of donors to invest their PVE resources in local CSOs.
- Not only respect the ‘do no harm’ principle, but encourage the full inclusion of CSOs in national and local PVE efforts, through meaningful participation and dialogue in national and multilateral fora.
- Develop a “PVE 101” guide for CSOs to help local CSOs better understand what is/isn’t PVE and how to best situate their work with this discourse, without necessarily being coopted by it.
- Increase local CSO involvement in the design of CSO-led PVE project and donor support in the project implementation phase.
- Increase the recording and sharing of data on what works to build resilience and social cohesion and the sharing of government and CSO-led research on drivers of violent extremism, so that fewer CSO-led PVE projects need to begin with and precious resources need to be spent on a drivers’ study.

WHAT ROLE FOR THE GSX?

17. Participants discussed how the GSX could help implement many of the above-mentioned recommendations and enhance the contributions of CSOs and CSO networks to efforts to prevent violent extremism. These include:

- Provide a “safe space” for honest regional, cross-regional, and/or global conversations around PVE, which could include government policymakers and practitioners who might otherwise not engage with CSOs from their own country on PVE. Providing more opportunities for face-to-face interactions between CSOs and practitioners will help these different stakeholders connect on both a professional and personal level, which will help build trust.



- Bring local voices and experiences, and data on “what works” to the regional and global levels to strengthen arguments for more political and financial support for PVE and PVE-relevant activities.
- Generate and communicate innovative policy recommendations, based on voices and experiences of civil society actors.
- Integrate various agendas/frameworks/stakeholders that are too often treated separately at the global level, e.g., Women Peace and Security (WPS), Youth Peace and Security (YPS), conflict prevention, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG16), and PVE into a single conversation, where appropriate.
- Map and share with donors which CSO activities PVE and PVE-relevant activities in specific regions, identify credible partners on the ground, and help ensure local CSO research is getting elevated to policymakers.
- Serve as a capacity-building (e.g., training, program development, implementation, M&E, and advocacy) platform for CSOs that can channel resources and tools to the local level.
- Build a collective (but not uniform) political voice for civil society around PVE, including based on a shared objective of preserving the space for civil society to engage on PVE and related issues.
- Publish a PVE blog aimed at elevating the local civil society voices and experiences.
- Prepare and disseminate a PVE 101 toolkit for CSOs.
- Create new or, where appropriate, partner with or build on existing CSO hubs in key regions to facilitate greater CSO collaboration on PVE at the regional level.
- Develop good practices on donor-CSO engagement on PVE.

DISCUSSION OF NEW PVE ONLINE PLATFORM AND ON-LINE INFORMATION AND OTHER NEEDS OF CSOs/NETWORKS WORKING ON PVE

18. Participants discussed the new [PVE Online Platform](#), welcoming the joint initiative of Switzerland and the GCSP. The PVE online platform was established to create a working space where different practitioners can engage with each other to share best practices and inform on past, current and forthcoming activities. The platform currently focuses geographically on Africa and the Middle East, and includes information in both English and French. Some participants asked to have separate pages for these two languages and to add more languages, if possible.

19. Participants welcomed the initiative and discussed some of the information sharing requirements of relevant CSOs and networks, at least some of which the platform could support. These include having access to:

- a) relevant good practices, tool kits (e.g., on M&E), strategies, and plans of action;
- b) PVE workshop/conference calendar;
- c) research/scientific literature;
- d) information (including websites of relevant organizations) on what different CSOs and CSO networks are working on in various geographic and thematic contexts on PVE – this should



include a living list of active PVE-specific and PVE-relevant programming, categorized by region, actor and theme;

- e) discussion board to enhance reoccurring face-to-face interactions;
- f) capacity-building tools;
- g) calls for proposals/funding opportunities; and
- h) GSX guidelines and meeting materials, enabling ownership and engagement with CSO networks.

20. Participants underscored the importance of ensuring that the information on the portal was accessible to local end-users and not just governments and larger CSOs.

21. Discussion focused on ensuring that existing, relevant web-based portals, of which there are already a number (either in existence or in development, including Hedayah, GCTF, UN, and RESOLVE), whether focused on PVE or related fields, are inter-connected and integrated with existing social media tools where possible. It was also suggested that email reminders and calendar notifications would be a helpful tool to keep track of changes. Some suggested that a short quarterly newsletter would be helpful to highlight new events and allow CSOs to keep track of general PVE processes and developments.

22. Some cited security as a key concern, noting that local CSOs in particular will be reluctant to contribute to a web-based portal or app unless they feel the tool is secured and the information cannot be accessed by governments.

23. The point was made that it might not be possible to satisfy the PVE information-sharing needs of governments and CSO networks and CSOs with a single portal or other tool. Rather, different tools might be needed for the different audience. Therefore, it was suggested that the GCSP portal should be updated to best position itself to serve the interests of governments and multilateral organizations, but that CSOs/networks would likely require a separate, but perhaps inter-connected, platform.