Enhancing Global-Local Cooperation in Multi-Disciplinary P/CVE Efforts

25 September 2018 | New York

<u>Meeting Summary</u>

Overview

The Global Center on Cooperative Security, the Prevention Project: Organizing Against Violent Extremism (Prevention Project) and the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) hosted a side-event on "Enhancing Global-Local Cooperation in Multi-Disciplinary P/CVE Efforts" during the 73rd Session of the UN General Assembly.[1] The 25 September event was informed by a closed-door experts' workshop held the previous day. The experts' recommendations on how to strengthen multi-disciplinary P/CVE efforts and collaboration between national and local actors to enable more innovative, locally-owned solutions to emerge global stakeholders were presented at the conclusion of the side-event. They are available here.

Participants in the side-event included representatives from civil society organizations (CSOs), sub-national authorities, local police, researchers, as well as officials from national governments and the United Nations. The discussions focused on key ingredients and barriers to a) successful multi-disciplinary and other locally-led P/CVE approaches; b) national and sub-national governments facilitating more locally-led P/CVE innovations; and c) strengthening collaboration between national and local and other sub-national stakeholders.

The side-event was organized around a series of *Ted Talk-style* presentations from sub-national practitioners and researchers from Australia, Canada, Denmark, Kenya, Nigeria, Serbia, and Tunisia, and featured the release of *A Roadmap for Progress: The State of the Global P/CVE Agenda*. This is a joint Prevention Project -RUSI report that highlights successes and challenges in the P/CVE space, offering a series of practical recommendations for ensuring durable progress on this agenda. Among other things, the Prevention Project-RUSI team highlighted some of the monitoring and evaluation problems in the P/CVE sphere, which the report addresses. These include difficulties measuring impact, conceptual and terminological issues around Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and violent extremism, proving a negative, indicators of success and causative factors, lack of public evaluation data, and operational challenges including reluctance to share failures, limited access to P/CVE programming information, and the cost of monitoring and evaluating programs. (See here for a concise summary of the analysis and recommendations contained in this report.)

Opening Session

During the opening session, representatives from some of the meeting sponsors, including the European Union (EU) and the governments of Australia and Norway, as well as from the UN Office of Counter-

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[1] The side-event and experts' workshop were organized with support from the governments of Australia, The Netherlands, Norway, and Switzerland and the European Union.

Terrorism (UNOCT) highlighted the important role that civil society as well as local authorities and other sub-national actors play in P/CVE and the need to enhance support for their work.

Australia noted how national government engagement with provincial and local governments, civil society and the private sector to identify, address and prevent violent extremism in our communities is a key, shared challenge. It emphasized that while P/CVE National Action Plans (NAPs) "are important statements of approach, there needs to be effective linkages to lower levels of government, community organisations and the private sector" to enable effective implementation on the ground. Australia pointed to the need to enable more conversations of local, national, and global approaches to P/CVE, such as those that took place at the July 2018 Strong Cities Network Global Summit in Melbourne as a recent forum where national and local officials and CSOs from different countries participated.

Norway highlighted the comparative advantages of youth and women (including women-led CSOs) in P/CVE, and the importance of fostering more collaboration among CSOs. This includes via two platforms that Norway helped launch and continues to support: YouthCan and the Global Solutions Exchange (GSX).

Underscoring its long-standing commitment to and support for a "whole of society" approach to the challenge of violent extremism, including through the EU-STRIVE initiative, the European Union noted that the European Commission is currently working to set up a civil society platform with global reach to ensure a more strategic engagement of CSOs in the P/CVE area. This is expected to be operational in the first part of 2019. The EU also emphasized the importance of "sharing", stressing that "there is so much going-on in this field but we all need to share more with our partners, the good and bad. This is the only way to learn."

Speaking on behalf of the UN Under-Secretary-General for Counter-Terrorism, Mr. Steven Sequeira, Deputy Director of the UNOCT, emphasized the importance of prevention and how it "must ultimately happen at the local level – on the frontline." He stressed the need for the UN "to redouble [its] efforts to encourage and assist Member States in translating [the] global conversation on PVE to local action." Mr. Sequeira pointed to the importance of P/CVE NAPs and how they can "serve as the overall framework and catalyst to get together all sectors and levels of government, all sectors of society, to make a difference on the frontline – to enable local action and local impact." He also highlighted the new UNOCT guide for developing NAPs and the UNOCT-UNDP strategic partnership to support requesting Member States in developing and implementing NAPs and regional plans. Turning to the role of civil society, he said that UNOCT is exploring how to ensure more strategic and systematic engagement between this office and civil society, particularly grassroots actors. To this end, he said that UNOCT is looking to implement one of the outcomes of the June high-level UN counterterrorism conference: "to establish as part of UNOCT a unit for civil society engagement."

Ted-Talk-Style Presentations and Discussions. A range of issues were highlighted and discussed, these included:

1. The **need for greater transparency regarding the successes and failures of P/CVE projects.**

    P/CVE programming will become more effective, it was argued, if there were more opportunities for policymakers and practitioners to share lessons learned not only on what has worked, but more importantly what has not. Among other things, this will allow those involved in the design of P/CVE programs to avoid the mistakes of others. Additionally, donors could incentivize risk-taking and innovation by providing long-term and more flexible funding to local grantees, allowing them more space to try new approaches and make adjustments during the project life-cycle. Moreover, speakers noted the misalignment between the current preference for short-term project support,

with monitoring and evaluation limited to the life of the project, and the much longer-term process involved in changing attitudes, *e.g.*, towards violence or "the other", and/or the behaviors of violent extremist.

2. The importance of **carefully choosing (and avoiding certain) terminology in developing and implementing local P/CVE initiatives**, given its relation to stigmatization and the negative effect it has on communities deemed "vulnerable" or "susceptible" to violent extremism.

   Donors and implementing partners need to consider how disenfranchised or historically marginalized groups may feel unnecessarily targeted by P/CVE efforts, which could potentially lead to further feelings of exclusion. The point was made that the most effective way to unify a local community or group around P/CVE is to be sensitive to its concerns, including those related to stigmatization, when designing and implementing programs.

3. The **need to invest more in youth-led and youth-focused P/CVE initiatives, but encourage those more cooperation and collaboration among these.**

   The civil society speaker from Tunisia called for more inclusive and positive narratives online and in the media on how young people from different backgrounds are making a positive impact in societies where youth are too often seen as part of the problem. The activist from Nigeria emphasized the need to invest more in education and youth-led P/CVE initiatives and promote more cooperation among youth in Nigeria and the wider region. Around 40% of the extremist violence in Nigeria is committed by youth. Yet, they are also victims of extremist violence and uniquely placed to contribute actively to efforts to stop the violence.

   Participants lamented that the length of most of the existing youth-led or youth-focused P/CVE initiatives are too short, which mean they are difficult to sustain. This can lead to frustration among the young people leading and the beneficiaries, which creates its own risk.

4. The importance of **understanding why young people can be particularly vulnerable to the lure of violent extremism**.

   In Tunisia, for example, participants pointed to feelings of marginalization, frustration, lack of belonging, fulfillment, and hope, frustration, and "the need for an alternative beyond the usual" as key reasons. Programs and policies that hope to reduce youth radicalization and recruitment need to address these factors and help "build a psycho-sociological defense system" in young people.

5. The importance of forging a **constructive relationship among national and local government authorities and civil society to maximize the effectiveness of P/CVE plans, policies, or programs**.

   One speaker highlighted how, following a terrorist attack in their community – one, which had already suffered from a considerable lack of trust between community members and security actors – local government representatives, community leaders, and security officials sat down to "clear the mistrust" and start a dialogue that eventually led to the development of a multi-stakeholder, local P/CVE action plan. As one speaker noted, "forming the relationships [including between the community and the police] led to developing an action plan that works." One of the key reported developments was that the community, after years of mistrust, started feeling that the government was ready to protect it members from a future attack.

The representative from the Nordic Safe Cities – a network of some 30 cities across Scandinavia – highlighted how it continues to support its members in designing and leading their own P/CVE efforts, which reinforce and inform P/CVE strategies and plans at the national level.

6. The need to **have local voices at the table when discussing – whether at the global, regional, national, or local level – policies and programs to address violent extremism**.

   Those responsible for developing and implementing such policies and programs need to hear directly from local actors about how different P/CVE interventions have affected their communities and how to develop more effective programs. Local actors often have the most insight as they operate programs that engage people in communities that are actively dealing with the repercussions of violent extremism. Providing a platform for front-line voices from the community to engage directly with the relevant government officials – on different local priorities and concerns – as is being done in parts of Kenya, can help to fill the vacuum, which unfortunately emerges, when P/CVE NAPs are developed with limited inputs from local actors. This is no substitute, however, for locally relevant NAPs.

7. The rise in **multi-disciplinary approaches to P/CVE and the growing involvement of municipalities and other sub-national authorities in this area**.

   Participants discussed the multi-agency "situation table" model that has been developed in a number of cities across Canada. This involves the creation of pro-active, risk-based, multi-agency teams (that can include local police, social workers, mental health professionals, teachers, community leaders, and NGOs) focusing on the "pre-criminal" space, in order to intervene with "at risk" individuals before they have committed a crime. Some tables focus only on issues of violent extremism, such as in Calgary, whereas others, such as Toronto, have layered P/CVE into an existing program that focuses on all forms of violence or harm. Participants discussed the role that local police play in these "tables". In some instances, including in Peel, because of their existing relationships and familiarity with the relevant communities, the local police play the lead role. There, the local police and other relevant agencies and service providers have received training and education, including on how to engage with communities and individuals, around issues of violent extremism.

   Participants also discussed the importance of ensuring that multi-agency programs are designed to avoid stigmatizing communities and that they rely on existing local capacities, *e.g.*, of municipal agencies and local NGOs, whenever possible. It was noted that without the active involvement of the police, the capacity to identify individuals for referral to the "table" would be diminished.

8. How **efforts to address gender-based violence can contribute to P/CVE.**

   Participants were briefed on a multi-disciplinary approach – this one framed around gender-based violence – that is also helping to identify young men showing signs of extremist violence (including right-wing and ISIS-inspired) as well. This NGO-led program in Novi Pazar, Serbia has received 95 referrals from the community, with the average age of the referred individual 19.5 yrs. According to the NGO involved in the program, 78% of the families with known extremists in the community were also suffering from gender-based violence, with 39% of recorded perpetrators of gender-based violence also showing signs of "extremism". While searching for violent extremists and when sifting through the referrals of young men, the NGO goes to great lengths to examine their views and attitudes towards women, gender equality, and sexual minorities. At the same time, with victims of violence the NGO searches for information on the perpetrator and the underlying value systems

fueling that violence. The organization has found a 60% increase in the number of positively identified youth at-risk of extremist violence in local communities in Serbia when cross-referencing these two data-bases.

9. The **inter-play between social cohesion and P/CVE.**

One speaker argued that P/CVE is fundamentally about social cohesion as violent extremists are trying to divide communities and societies more broadly. The speaker from the New South Wales (Australia) government noted how resilient and socially cohesive communities are thus the best defense against violent extremism. He provided an overview of the state's COMPACT (community/partnership/action) program, which provides small grants and capacity building to -- and facilitates networking and collaboration among – community-based organizations working to build social cohesion against all forms of hate and extremist violence. The program has four overarching objectives: preparedness (to proactively maintain and build strong, secure, networked, responsive and aware communities); prevention (to build networked communities with the will and capacity to support preventative or intervention programs); response (to mobilize communities and their networks to stand up and stand united in the face of tensions brought about through violent extremist threats and acts); and recovery (to mobilize community networks and relationships to support each other and maintain or restore social cohesion in the wake of an incident or crisis brought about by violent extremism).