



The Global Solutions Exchange

A Global Civil Society Advocacy, Policy Analysis, and Collaboration Platform Dedicated to Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE)

CONTEXT

The phenomenon of violent extremism has been spreading for decades, tied to a mix of factors ranging from poor governance and inadequate economic policies to address the needs and aspirations of a growing youth population, to the deliberate spread of particularly intolerant religious teachings and the failure of educational systems to deal effectively with increasing pluralism in societies. These issues have been exacerbated in many contexts and globally by military and security interventions and conflict.

There is growing recognition from experts and policy makers that a limited security-oriented approach is insufficient for addressing the conditions that lead to rising violent extremism, and thus a more holistic, “whole of society” approach is needed. Managing, reducing, and preventing the threat – as well as the extremism that can create and enable violence to emerge – while providing positive alternatives that foster pluralism, dignity and human security, requires partnerships among a wide array of government and non-government stakeholders. This includes both security and development actors who can help reach people at the local level.

The field of preventing violent extremism (PVE) is founded on the assumption that initiatives to build and strengthen individual, community, and societal resilience to radicalization, intolerance and violence are key to a sustainable solution to violent extremism. Moreover, given that women and other marginalized groups are often the first to see and feel the impact of rising extremism and thus initiate preventive measures, it is logical to amplify their voices and efforts along with other community-based organizations and leaders who have the trust and authenticity to engage locally.





Across the globe, however, trends for civil society-led programming and advocacy are bleak. We are witnessing some of the most severe government crackdowns on civil society in a generation. A key problem is that civil society is still not being given enough of a role when it comes to: a) harnessing the power of communities to prevent violent extremism at the local level; b) influencing national, regional, and multilateral strategies, policies, and programs to address the threat; or c) engaging in honest, safe discourse with states and international actors about policies and programs that foment or feed into extremism, rather than ameliorating conditions. In addition, there is clear indication that some states are using the PVE agenda itself to further limit the efforts of the independent civil society sector. This is counterproductive, as a vibrant and independent civil society sector that provides opportunity for interactions between and among diverse populations, and a space for constructive critical engagement with the state, is an essential pillar of prevention.

Too many states continue to view the challenge of violent extremism exclusively through a security lens and thus as one that should be addressed exclusively by national government actors, and principally the security sector. Despite the rhetoric in multilateral venues like the United Nations, national governments are too often reluctant to provide community actors the legal and political space to maximize their contributions to building local resilience against violent extremism and other forms of violence. More fundamentally, too many governments are mistrustful of civil society and actively restrict their ability to operate independently, if at all.

THE CIVIL SOCIETY GAP

Progressive thinking on PVE that has recently emerged in some national capitals and multilateral bodies is unlikely to continue absent formidable and more strategic civil society engagement. It is therefore more important than ever that civil society and international NGOs, many of which come to the recently created PVE domain with extensive experience in related fields (e.g. conflict prevention, youth empowerment, peacebuilding, education, and women's rights and human rights), organize themselves better on these issues and advocate in national, regional and global settings for "whole of society" approaches to address violent extremism, in particular at the local level. Such approaches will not be effective if they are not adequately informed by the perspectives of diverse local actors and if the space for independent civil society activism continues to shrink.

The need for systematic and structured civil society-government interaction was the impetus for the establishment of the **Global Solutions Exchange (GSX)**, an initiative that the International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN), as coordinator of the Women's Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL), [launched](#) in partnership with Royal Norwegian Government on the margins of the September 2016 UN General Assembly (UNGA).

The need for such a platform was further underscored in the Prevention Project's recent report, [Communities First: A Blueprint for Organizing and Sustaining a Global Movement against Violent Extremism](#), which identified three key challenges that such a platform would help address: a) global, regional, and national-level strategic and programmatic discussions around PVE too rarely include local voices and perspectives; b) the civil society PVE environment is fragmented, with the absence of a coherent, civil society-led "pro" PVE movement that connects the many groups, individuals, and networks working (whether explicitly or not) to prevent and counter violent extremism at the





community level; and c) insufficient attention is being paid in PVE conversations to “how” governments treat their citizens – or the so-called “push” factors that can make people susceptible to violent extremist recruitment.

THE GLOBAL SOLUTIONS EXCHANGE (GSX)¹

The GSX serves as a durable mechanism for systematic and structured interactions between governments and independent civil society organizations, such as members of WASL and others with a track record in programming, analysis and policy advocacy to address extremism and related militarism and help sustain a “communities-first,” “whole of society” approach to PVE. As noted during the UNGA launch, the purpose is to enable the exchange of effective solutions and recommendations for critical policy and programming reform. As such the GSX will:

- 1) Enable more substantive and regular interactions between governments and CSOs about PVE issues to inform bilateral and multilateral institutions’ policies and programs based on ground realities;
- 2) Elevate and amplify local civil society voices in global, regional and national PVE policy conversations – voices that are too often absent or otherwise not heard;
- 3) Enable governments to learn of the impact of existing PVE policies and practices on affected populations, and hear of the solutions offered;
- 4) Encourage more in-depth focus on issues and solutions across sectors, notably security, governance, economic, education and other spheres that are relevant to long-term prevention and peacebuilding beyond the security oriented responses;
- 5) Enable lessons-learning vertically between local CSOs and governmental partners from different countries facing similar manifestations of extremism, including highlighting “know-how” and good practices;
- 6) Facilitate analyses to increase the knowledge of the gender dimensions of extremism and the conditions that enable it with a focus on solutions, including early warning and preventive action;
- 7) Foster greater trust and understanding between governments and CSOs in their efforts to promote rights, peace and pluralism, and push back the tide of extremism and militarism;
- 8) Connect the growing number of existing networks including global, regional, national and sub-national PVE or PVE-related civil society initiatives; and

¹ The Global Solutions Exchange was launched in September 2016 to facilitate regular interaction and dialogue on issues, ideas, and solutions between senior government representatives and independent CSOs, including members of the ICAN/Women’s Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL), that have experience in PVE. Office of the Prime Minister, Norway, Women’s Alliance for Security Leadership [“Concept Note: Global Solutions Exchange on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism,”](#) 20 September 2016.





- 9) Enable coordinated advocacy at the global, regional, and national level in support of the “whole of society” PVE agenda.

To achieve these goals, activities under the GSX umbrella will include:

- a) **Thematic working groups on critical topics related to extremism:** GSX partners will lead thematic, cross-regional working groups to enable in-depth interactions between civil society, government and multilateral actors within sectors on specific issues as they intersect with the complex dynamics of violent extremism and in some cases contribute to drivers of radicalization (e.g. abusive security interventions or intolerance in educational systems). These working groups will provide a space for exchange of analysis and effective programmatic and policy solutions to inform and improve government and multilateral strategies (such as national action plans), as well as a mechanism for monitoring resulting developments.
- b) **Regional convenings:** GSX partners will also convene regionally to interact with and inform key regional bodies (e.g., AU, ASEAN, and OSCE) to ensure tailored regional responses that capture the range of thematic issues needed to achieve a ‘whole of society’ approach to PVE.
- c) **Unified advocacy:** On the margins of key inter-governmental meetings (e.g. World Bank, UN, GCTF, OSCE, OECD’s Development Assistance Committee or its International Network on Conflict and Stability (INCAF), ASEAN, AU, etc.), GSX partners will also convene and enable coherence among CSOs around different elements of the PVE agenda to ensure that: a) attention to community resilience is genuine (locally-owned and led) and sustainable, and b) the voices and perspectives of independent civil society are heard in multilateral settings.
- d) **A global PVE impact database:** The database will capture information on all known PVE interventions worldwide as a basis for a global meta-evaluation of the impact of PVE, as well as more detailed, region-specific impact studies. Analysis of this information would inform the development of and be integrated into the annual report on the state of the PVE agenda mentioned in section e) below.
- e) **PVE analysis and policy recommendations focused on global, regional, national, and local stakeholders:** This will include: a) an annual report on the state of the “whole of society” global PVE movement that includes policy-relevant recommendations informed by, but independent from, the global PVE impact database (which will not offer policy recommendations); b) discrete thematic policy-relevant reports focused on specific aspects of the PVE agenda (e.g. donor coordination, integration of PVE and SDGs, integration of human rights into PVE, engagement between law enforcement and local communities in the context of PVE); and c) good practices and lessons (including for national governments) across a range of PVE issues from the perspective of civil society. This will be linked to the database to help ensure that its findings are acted upon and



so that more positive practices in one country or community are shared, adapted and adopted by others.

- f) **Channeling resources to the grassroots:** Leveraging ICAN's existing Inclusive Challenge Fund (ICF) grants capacity, the GSX will help local network partners that do not want to receive or are unable to access funding directly from international donors or institutions such as GCERF (the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund) and Hedayah to sustain their programmatic activities and contributions to relevant research, advocacy and best practice dissemination efforts.
- g) **A GSX dedicated website and interactive online hub:** This website will incorporate a secure platform for civil society to coordinate, communicate and keep up-to-date information on CSO involvement (e.g. programmatic and policy advocacy) in one location online.

The GSX Steering Group: The Steering Group will be co-led by ICAN in its capacity as coordinator of WASL, the Prevention Project, with the Global Center on Cooperative Security and the Royal United Services Institute as the other initial members of the group. This group could expand over time, as appropriate, to include new partners, including those mentioned below. Individual members will assume a discrete role in leading implementation, drawing on their relevant expertise, and ensuring inclusion and collaboration with other steering group partners in each area of activity. Individual members will assume a discrete role in leading implementation, drawing on their relevant expertise, and ensuring inclusion and collaboration with other steering group partners in each area of activity.

Other Partners: Activities will be coordinated closely with other key partners including GCERF, Hedayah, the RESOLVE Network, the Youth, Peace and Security Network, the UN CTITF, UNDP and its Oslo Governance Center, the EU Radicalization Awareness Network, as well as relevant regional and local civil society organizations and networks, to draw upon the data they are collecting in the field about good practices as well as challenges. This initiative will also make referrals to GCERF and PVE donors concerning its findings, including prioritized civil society recommendations for future investment.



WOMEN'S ALLIANCE FOR SECURITY LEADERSHIP
Promoting Extremism by Promoting Rights, Peace & Resilience

