



## 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 failures 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 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 addressing 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 youth, 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; and c) engaging in honest, safe discourse with states and international actors about policies and programs that foment or feed into violent extremism, rather than ameliorating conditions. In addition, there is clear indication that some states are using the threat of violent extremism to further limit the efforts of credible and independent civil society actors. 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 preventing violence and conflict.

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, 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, human rights including women's 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 an independent civil society continues to shrink.

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

WASL and the Prevention Project are now spearheading efforts to transform the GSX, with its original focus on women-led organizations, into a global civil society platform dedicated to preventing violent extremism.

In its recent report, [Communities First: A Blueprint for Organizing and Sustaining a Global Movement against Violent Extremism](#), the Prevention Project identified three key challenges that the GSX will 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 local 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)

The GSX will serve 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”, gender sensitive 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 negative impact or side-effects 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 security-oriented responses;
  - 5) Enable lessons-learning vertically between local CSOs and governmental partners from different countries facing similar manifestations of violent extremism, including highlighting “know-how” and good practices;
  - 6) Facilitate analyses to increase the knowledge of the gender dimensions of violent 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
  - 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:

- 1) **Thematic working groups on critical topics pertaining to the rise of extremism and related violence:** GSX partners will lead thematic, cross-regional working groups to enable in-depth interactions between civil society, government, and multilateral actors on issues that 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 safe space for exchange of experiences, lessons learned, and analysis of effective programmatic and policy solutions to inform and improve government and multilateral strategies (such as national PVE action





- plans), as well as a mechanism for monitoring progress and new developments.
- 2) **Regional convenings:** GSX partners will also convene regionally to interact with and inform key regional bodies (e.g., AU, ASEAN, ECOWAS, IGAD, and OSCE) to ensure tailored regional responses that capture the range of thematic issues needed to achieve a “whole of society” approach to PVE.
  - 3) **Unified advocacy:** On the margins of key inter-governmental meetings (e.g. UN, World Bank, GCTF, OSCE, OECD’s Development Assistance Committee or its International Network on Conflict and Stability (INCAF), ASEAN, AU, etc.), GSX partners will also aim to provide a platform for 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.
  - 4) **A global PVE impact database:** The database will capture information on PVE programs and policies 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 an annual report on the state of global PVE efforts mentioned in section 5) below.
  - 5) **PVE analysis and policy recommendations focused on global, regional, national, and local stakeholders:** This will include: a) an annual report on the state of “whole of society” global PVE efforts 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 PVE aspects (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, etc.); and c) good practices and lessons learned (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 findings are acted upon and that more positive practices in a country or community are shared to potentially be adapted and adopted by others.
  - 6) **Channelling resources to the grassroots:** Leveraging ICAN’s existing Inclusive Challenge Fund (ICF) grants capacity, the GSX will help local network partners that prefer not 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.

- 7) **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, and the Prevention Project, with the Global Center and RUSI as the other initial members. 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.

**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 CTED, CTITF, UNDP, and its Oslo Governance Center; the European Commission's 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 investments.



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