



## **'Ensuring an Inclusive Approach to the Development and Implementation of National P/CVE Action Plans: The Role of Civil Society'<sup>1</sup>**

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Washington, DC

### **Overview and Key Recommendations**

1. As part of its ongoing effort to facilitate greater collaboration between civil society organizations (CSOs) government, multilateral institutions, and other key stakeholders involved in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE), and promoting 'whole of society' approaches to P/CVE more broadly, the [Prevention Project](#) convened the second in a series of roundtables on 'Ensuring an Inclusive Approach to the Development and Implementation of National P/CVE Action Plans: The Role of Civil Society'. The roundtable, which follows one the Prevention Project organized in New York in December, included different stakeholders involved in the design and implementation of P/CVE National Action Plans (NAPs), including from the United States and other national governments, as well as from the United Nations and research, peacebuilding, and other non-government organizations. Throughout the discussion, participants put forward practical recommendations related to ongoing P/CVE NAP efforts. These include:
  - Ensuring NAP design and development efforts are driven by those outside of the national security establishment and build on existing PVE efforts, including ongoing community-led approaches to build resilience and social cohesion in the relevant country.
  - Ensuring the NAP process:
    - reinforces linkages between promoting human rights, good governance, and the rule of law and countering terrorism and doesn't reinforce counter-productive counterterrorism practice;
    - allows for meaningful and sustained contributions by a diversity of civil society actors, including youth- and women-led organizations, including by raising awareness among civil society organizations (CSOs) about the NAP process and creating a standing mechanism to facilitate CSO contributions.
    - involves the creation of a fund to support CSO and other locally-led NAP implementation activities; and
    - includes a gender dimension, as well as involves the different sectors of government and society, including education, health, and socio-economic, which are critical to reducing the feelings of marginalization and exclusion that often drives recruitment and radicalization to extremist violence was identified as a priority.
  - Encouraging more sharing of good practices, lessons learned, and challenges among countries developing/implementing P/CVE NAPs, as well as between those involved in the development of P/CVE and other relevant NAPs.
  - Pursuing community-focused action plans to translate NAPs into relevant local contexts.

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<sup>1</sup> The views expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect those of all participants.

## **Discussion Summary**

2. Participants discussed the work of the [Hedayah-Global Center National Action Plan Task Force](#), which has so far assisted some 20 countries with the development of NAPs, with some five of these having adopted plans. It was noted how the NAP development process is often more important than the plan itself. Among other things, it offers an opportunity to reinforce the linkages between good governance, human rights, and the rule of law and effectively countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism. However, some cautioned that one needs to try to ensure that this opportunity is in fact seized and avoid a situation whereby the process is used to reinforce “bad” counterterrorism practices that are overly state-centric and rely too heavily on military, intelligence, and security services responses.
3. The Task Force’s approach encourages governments to reflect on their existing CT strategy, the nature of the existing violent extremist threats within their borders and regions, and the drivers of that violence. A “healthy dose of self-reflection” by the national government is an important part of the process. Nigeria, which released its [NAP](#) in the early fall, was cited as a good practice in this area, whereby the NAP process allowed for the government to self-reflect on the effectiveness of its approach over the years to reducing the threat posed by Boko Haram: among the conclusions were the need to develop a “whole of society” approach to the problem that involves civil society rather than continue to rely on a military one. This shift is in fact reflected in the comprehensive Nigerian NAP.
4. On a less positive note, however, it was noted that in some countries engaging with the Task Force have continued to prioritize more traditional, security-dominated approaches to CT, paying lip-service to the need to include civil society and seeking to use the P/CVE agenda to target their political opposition.
5. It was also noted how the Task Force emphasizes the need to include both security and non-security components of the government in the process, which can lead to more regular coordination among them. In addition, the Task Force emphasizes the importance of a “whole of society” approach to P/CVE and thus the need not only to involve civil society in the NAP development process, but in the implementation phase as well. Two relevant good practices from the Task Force’s work were cited: 1) Nigeria’s creation of a network of civil society organizations (more than sixty) around the country to engage in the NAP process and beyond and 2) the active involvement of civil society in the Somalia NAP development process, which included extensive civil society-led awareness raising about the NAP process and the role of civil society in P/CVE to local elders and other civil society actors outside of Mogadishu.
6. Ensuring that NAPs do not simply address the security dimensions of the threat and the response, but include a gender dimension, as well as include the different sectors of government and society, including education, health, and socio-economic that are critical to reducing the feelings of marginalization and exclusion that often drivers recruitment and radicalization to extremist violence was identified as a priority. The point was that absent appropriate changes in these sectors – taking into account the drivers of violent extremism – the impact of the PVE NAP development process will be limited and likelihood of it catalyzing national, long-term transformative change very low.
7. Participants considered a recent [report](#) published by the International Civil Society Action Network, which conducted a gendered content analysis of different PVE National Action Plans, with the findings showing that the inclusion of gender has been superficial to date and that some countries, including Kenya, have been “gender-blind” in their approach to developing their NAP.

To address this lacuna, Kenyan civil society has started to work on a women's PVE charter, learning from and collaborating with its Sri Lankan partners during the drafting process.

8. More broadly, the point was made that as the efforts to develop individual NAPs have intensified, there are too few opportunities for cross-learning among those involved in the different national-level efforts. Similarly, there are many lessons to be learned from other relevant NAP development efforts, including around the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda, that may be missed as countries are under increased pressure to develop PVE NAPs. It was noted that civil society networks and platforms such as the [Women's Alliance for Security Leadership](#) (WASL) and the [Global Solutions Exchange](#) (GSX) can be crucial tools to connect stakeholders from different regions and support good practice and lessons learned sharing on a regional and global level.
9. With the United States currently updating its NAP (due to Congress in June), participants discussed some of the shortcomings of the process in 2011 that led to the existing document. These include how the plan was developed by national security actors in Washington, with limited consultation with and involvement of civil society (let alone state and local actors), and law enforcement agencies driving its implementation. It was noted that this approach contributed to the growth of an "anti-CVE movement" driven by civil society. Participants expressed hope that that the development of the updated NAP will learn from previous efforts and, *inter alia*, be an inclusive process that is not dominated by law enforcement agencies and includes extensive consultations with civil society and state and local actors across the country.
10. The recently-adopted [Swiss NAP](#) was also discussed. It targets all forms of violent extremism, encompasses 26 measures across four areas of activity, and includes a mechanism to facilitate sustained cooperation between government and non-governmental stakeholders during its implementation phase – five years. Among other things, the NAP includes enhanced measures to encourage "active citizenship and democracy", an emphasis on preventing radicalization on-line and in schools. In addition to including a \$5 million fund to support community-level programs to support NAP implementation, the federal government is making a concerted effort to raise awareness concerning the NAP among civil society groups across the country, given the critical role they have to play in its implementation.
11. Although security related authorities led the drafting of the Swiss NAP, the process included a diversity of non-security agencies of all levels of government, including cantons and cities. Thus, the NAP recognizes that much of the P/CVE expertise and authority in the country lies outside of the federal government.
12. Participants also discussed NAP-related developments in the Western Balkans. It was noted that Albania, Montenegro and Kosovo currently have such plans, with Macedonia in the process of developing one. The point was made that while all such governments have recognized the importance of a developing a "whole of society" approach to addressing the threat of violent extremism, participation of civil society, particularly women and women-led organizations, in the development of NAPs has been limited. However, CSOs are increasingly being included in NAP implementation efforts.
13. Participants shared some of the reasons for limited CSO involvement. These include a) national government denial of the existence of the existence of violent extremist threats in the most affected communities, b) lack of awareness among CSOs of the role they can play in a "whole of society" approach to the challenge, c) lack of technical skills or broader capacities to contribute, and d) concerns over personal security in an environment where radicalization networks remain active in some form in communities in the region. It was emphasized that these issues should be

given greater priority during the NAP development phase. Participants also noted how the compressed timeframe for developing NAPs leaves too little time and too few opportunities for addressing these issues during the design phase.

14. Participants also highlighted how the historic lack of regional cooperation in the Western Balkans is inhibiting cross-border cooperation and collaboration and the sharing of good practices among P/CVE stakeholders in the region. The point was made that more attention should be given to including a regional dimension to NAP development and implementation, which should be encouraged by the growing number of donors supporting NAP and broader P/CVE efforts in the region. Finally, participants were reminded of the importance of ensuring that there is a budget for supporting NAP implementation at the community level, something often lacking in plans in the Western Balkans and beyond. In this context, the suggestion was made for donors to encourage the creation of new or leveraging of existing “small-grants programs” to support CSO-led NAP implementation efforts. It was noted how programs such as the ones established by the Global Center on Cooperative Security<sup>2</sup>, which have been implemented in a variety of regions and have led to concrete outcomes, such as a [Youth Positive Practice Memoire on Rehabilitation and Reintegration](#) in Cameroon and the wider Lake Chad Basin region, or ICAN’s “[Innovative Peace Fund](#)”, has funded a variety of PVE and related projects implemented by women-led organizations, could be linked to or other leveraged for CSO-led NAP implementation efforts.
15. Looking at the burgeoning efforts of multilateral bodies to support the PVE agenda, participants noted the United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP’s) increasingly important role. Among UNDP’s comparative advantages in this area include its decentralized nature, working through its country offices around the globe, coupled with a headquarters-led coordination effort that oversees UNDP’s involvement globally and helps ensure lessons learned and good practices are being shared among countries and across regions.
16. With all of the attention that P/CVE NAPs and P/CVE more broadly continue to receive from donors and the international community more broadly and the desire to mobilize continued political and funding support for these efforts, participants underscored the need to “define and demonstrate” success. The point was also made that NAP work should build on existing PVE efforts, including ongoing community-led approaches to build resilience and social cohesion. Some urged caution with the “rush to move forward with a NAP in each and every country” and that such efforts should, where appropriate, proceed in a more deliberate fashion and one that allows for sufficient time to ensure an inclusive process that involves civil society and active involvement from non-security agencies and other actors. Ideally, the point was made, not only should the face of NAP design and development efforts be driven by those outside of the national security establishment in the relevant country, but the efforts should involve building the capacity of CSOs to contribute to the process, and include complementary local, community-action plans to help translate the NAP into the different local context across the country.
17. Finally, participants highlighted the importance of involving returning foreign fighters and other former violent extremists in a wide range of P/CVE efforts. However, participants also noted the challenges to realizing such involvement. These include the lack of relevant legal and policy

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on the Global Center’s small-grants programs see: Rafia Bhulai, “Going Local: Supporting Community-Based Initiatives to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism in South and Central Asia,” December 2017, [http://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Going-Local\\_PCVE-in-South-and-Central-Asia.pdf](http://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Going-Local_PCVE-in-South-and-Central-Asia.pdf); Global Center on Cooperative Security, “Call for Proposals: Engaging Civil Society Actors in the Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Violent Extremist Offenders and Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters,” October 2016, [http://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/16Jul20\\_CfP\\_EN.pdf](http://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/16Jul20_CfP_EN.pdf)

frameworks to facilitate engagement, including by CSOs, with “formers” and their families. It was noted that in many countries laws prohibit the engagement with terrorist groups altogether; often this also prohibits the engagement with family members, including children and women, who often need support the most