



IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GCTF GOOD PRACTICES FOR NATIONAL - LOCAL COOPERATION

A Strong Cities Network Policy Brief





Background

Released in September 2020, the [Global Counterterrorism Forum \(GCTF\) Memorandum on GCTF Good Practices for Strengthening National-Local Cooperation for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism Conducive To Terrorism](#) was designed with the understanding that national-local cooperation (NLC) is an essential component of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) conducive to terrorism.

The Memorandum details 13 Good Practices for P/CVE actors to consider as they look to enhance coordination and cooperation between national and local government, civil society organisations (CSOs) and the private sector. These include, among others:

- identifying the political, coordination-related, and cultural barriers that can stand in the way of effective NLC;
- aligning perceptions of the threat between national and local actors;
- identifying the P/CVE comparative advantages of different national and local stakeholders;
- ensuring the development and implementation of national frameworks are informed by inclusive dialogues (e.g., including between national/local, government/non-governmental, and mainstream/historically under-represented stakeholders);
- investing in local prevention plans, programmes, networks, funding schemes and monitoring and evaluation frameworks; and
- and putting in place effective horizontal and vertical coordination mechanisms, including to build trust and facilitate the sharing of information and lessons learned.

With funding support from the Australian [Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade \(DFAT\)](#), the [Strong Cities Network \(SCN\)](#) is now developing a user-friendly toolkit to facilitate the tailored implementation of the Good Practices in diverse contexts. The Toolkit will include case studies from different regions of how the Good Practices are applied, as well as implementation checklists and guidance tailored to different contexts. This product will be particularly useful for those developing, reviewing, revising or implementing a national or local P/CVE action plan or other relevant P/CVE framework, and/or when supporting focused NLC implementation efforts in specific thematic areas of P/CVE.

To inform the Toolkit, SCN is conducting a number of mapping and analysis exercises in collaboration with local experts in West Africa, Indonesia, and Uganda. The purpose of these exercises is to identify and understand the strengths and barriers to NLC in different global contexts. Further, with support from the European Union (EU), SCN worked with the Royal United Services Institute in Nairobi to map NLC strengths and challenges in East Africa. The SCN team also continues to conduct additional desk research on existing NLC practices to ensure a comprehensive understanding of global NLC efforts.

Initial findings from the East Africa and West Africa research were shared with national and local stakeholders at SCN regional workshops in Nairobi and Dakar earlier this year, and those from the Uganda and Indonesia research will be discussed in multi-stakeholder dialogues in both countries in October and November.

This Policy Brief includes preliminary findings and a select number of recommendations that draw on SCN's NLC work so far.



Preliminary Findings

Strong Cities' in-depth mapping and analysis of NLC strengths and challenges in East Africa, West Africa, Indonesia and Uganda, and broader desk research reveals that many key barriers to NLC are shared across contexts. These include:

1. The National Approach: Overly Centralised/Securitized

A majority of central governments continue to exert tight control over security issues, viewing threats related to terrorism and violent extremism within their exclusive domain. As such, many capitals do not consider their local counterparts to be partners in addressing the violent extremist threats that continue to spread.

Although most governments seem to embrace the importance of a whole-of-society approach in theory, their efforts to actually implement such an approach have largely neglected local authorities and other non-security actors. For example, even though a number of states have pursued holistic, national P/CVE plans of action as encouraged by the UN PVE Plan of Action, in many, there is confusion over the extent to which civil society and local government can become involved in P/CVE initiatives. In some contexts, the role of local actors is limited to community-focused, primary prevention activities that are often far-removed from the threat. In other contexts, local authorities remain desensitised to the threat and their role in P/CVE, perceiving it as either emanating from outside their community, city or country and/or as a security issue that the national government is responsible for addressing.

So far, our research has found that the more the national response to violent extremism and the framing of P/CVE is highly securitised – and closely connected with counterterrorism – the more difficult it will be for local authorities (and civil society) to see their role in P/CVE. This can complicate efforts to facilitate the implementation of any national, regional or global P/CVE frameworks on the ground.

Although we noticed some progress towards a comprehensive approach to addressing the threat, a number of national governments continue to prioritise a militarised one. The implications of this are many, including all too frequently the lack of attention to addressing the underlying issues that can lead to violent extremism, which is where the P/CVE comparative advantages of local actors lie.

National governments that want to open up the P/CVE space to a broader range of actors must be mindful of the need to frame these issues in ways that are most likely to resonate with and play to the comparative advantages of local stakeholders. For example, our research has revealed that the more P/CVE can be seen as part of local governments' existing responsibility to safeguard their communities, rather than an isolated security matter, the more likely both central and local authorities will see a role for the latter in P/CVE.

2. Elusive mandates for local government

We came across numerous examples of where CSOs are involved in P/CVE efforts, including the implementation of national P/CVE action plans. However, the same does not apply to local governments. Few such governments are provided or otherwise believe they have a mandate to contribute to P/CVE, this despite their significant comparative advantages.



National governments often lack trust in local authorities (particularly when their mayor or governor is from the opposition party) to engage in what central governments consider a security matter. Our research has so far revealed only a few instances where the central government has either devolved responsibility for non-law enforcement-related prevention and/or recognised the role of sub-national governments in P/CVE.

Some central governments have encouraged sub-national authorities to develop their own P/CVE plans to suit the needs and priorities of their towns and communities. However, this encouragement has generally not followed with resources or guidance, and few local plans have emerged.

In the rare instance where a mandate has been given to local governments, it is limited to larger cities, overlooking remote municipalities or villages that can be more vulnerable to the spread of violent extremism. Moreover, it is often done without consulting them beforehand. For example, a number of countries that have a national P/CVE policy framework, following international good practice, have formed a national steering committee to lead the development process as well as to implement the plan through a cross-cutting, multi-stakeholder national campaign. However, we found few examples, where representatives of local authorities are included in any of these processes. The committees and the related consultations have more typically involved a diversity of national-level and civil society actors.

The tendency is for those responsible for P/CVE at the national level – typically security actors – to consider their local government counterparts relevant only in the aftermath of a terrorist attack or otherwise when the threat of violent extremism is acute. However, they are most relevant when it comes to prevention, which includes both leveraging their early-warning capabilities and building community cohesion and resilience, which can help mitigate damage to the city's social fabric following an attack.

Moreover, where civil society is included, it is often limited to those groups that have existing relationships with the government, with CSOs from remote or marginalised communities rarely consulted or otherwise involved.

3. Trust deficits remain

Lack of trust between national and local and between security and non-security actors is a common barrier to the involvement of local stakeholders in P/CVE efforts. For example, we found that levels of trust between national and local governments are likely to be lower where there is a popular local leader, particularly from an opposition party that central government officials view as a threat to the 'status quo'. Moreover, national-local trust deficits appear to be most significant where law enforcement (often deployed by and reporting to the national government) has been involved in or accused of human rights violations or other abuses in local communities, including looting, extortion, and other threats.

Further, reflecting the often-blurred lines between counterterrorism and P/CVE, security actors in a number of contexts have been accused of engaging with communities to gather information about particular threats or individuals of concern rather than to exchange ideas and build meaningful relationships. Frequent redeployment of security personnel is also perceived to be an obstacle to establishing trust and healthy relationships with communities.

Among the advantages that local government and other local actors have over their national counterparts in P/CVE stems from their proximity to and understanding of local communities, and thus the ability to access them in ways their counterparts in the capital cannot. However, their ability to tap into this advantage is undermined where young people from historically marginalised communities feel detached and distrustful of local and national government institutions – in particular, law enforcement.



In these contexts, young people are less likely to share concerns with local authorities about specific individuals who show behavioural signs of turning to violence and may be hesitant to work with those authorities to steer them down a peaceful path.

Corruption at both the national and local levels has also contributed to the deterioration of trust between local communities and the governments that are supposed to represent their interests.

4. Resources vs. rhetoric

In most contexts, there is a disconnect between the rhetoric around and resources allocated to P/CVE, with resource constraints impeding NLC. Competition for limited resources is growing and the security sector, despite the recognition of the need to focus more attention on prevention, continues to receive most of the funds from national budgets for addressing terrorism and violent extremism. We found that international donors and development actors continue to prioritise support for locally-led P/CVE activities (primarily activities involving civil society rather than local governments). Where international donors are engaged, host governments rarely include an allocation for P/CVE, including for local initiatives, in their national budgets. Moreover, we found that while donors have generously invested in locally-led CSO programs across numerous countries, the selection and funding of CSOs are too often based on donor priorities and guidelines, rather than reflective of local needs or a coherent strategy or framework. Moreover the lack of coordination and coherence among the various programme implementers, not to mention the short-term nature of many of the programmes, can lead to redundancies and limit impact and sustainability of the initiatives.

Further, we found that local governments might be willing to dedicate some of the limited resources they control and to leverage existing resources or programmes to support the tailored implementation of the national P/CVE framework on the ground if they have been engaged in the development and have a sense of ownership of the framework. This is rarely the case, however.

5. Coordination and information sharing challenges

Although many national officials recognise the importance of coordination among the multitude of actors that should be included in whole-of-society P/CVE efforts, our research has so far revealed few instances where governments have developed let alone effectively operationalised P/CVE coordination mechanisms or platforms. The coordination deficit is particularly evident with processes like information-sharing, where central governments are often reluctant to share relevant data on threats with local actors because the former considers them to be matters of national security. The ability of local authorities and community-based organisations to respond to the threat, especially in the immediate aftermath of an attack, is often slowed down by insufficient and unclear information-sharing protocols and processes between national and local authorities.

At the CSO-level, we found that competition for limited funds, gaps in capacity and differences in mandates and overarching goals – often dictated by different donors – has also limited information sharing.

A significant impediment to coordination and NLC more broadly is how P/CVE approaches often exist in isolation from other government strategies and therefore compete rather than complement other services and structures. At the national level, where departments and organisations have been created with a P/CVE or counterterrorism mandate, they often operate in siloes, with neither the necessary horizontal or vertical structures in place to coordinate or communicate with other central government agencies or those at the local level. This has caused confusion on the ground in a number of contexts, with P/CVE programmes



too often being developed by national actors without prior notification of or coordination with the local government.

Combined with the lack of trust between national and local actors, and among national actors, this has meant that agencies that should be working in tandem towards a single goal are often competing for influence, control and limited resources, further undermining inter-agency collaboration and cooperation.

Recommendations

Efforts to overcome the above (and other barriers) to NLC will need to be tailored to the particular country and sometimes local context; with this in mind, the forthcoming toolkit will elaborate a menu of options for different national and local actors to consider, drawing on promising practices identified during our mapping initiative. Nevertheless, there are a number of broad areas where attention should be focused: this paper highlights three.

- 1. Invest in trust-building:** Greater efforts should be taken to support opportunities for dialogue and sharing between national and local actors on the nature of the threat, how best to prevent and counter it and the appropriate role(s) of different national and local actors. Dialogues should be inclusive, i.e., not limited to 'usual suspects', and ongoing, i.e., not limited to the development of a national P/CVE plan, including through existing or new prevention networks.

Local governments should take steps to enhance trust with their communities, including through policies and programmes that allow citizens to share their needs and concerns with public officials and, more broadly, foster accountability, transparency and good local governance. More broadly, greater transparency and accountability mechanisms should be considered at both national and local levels to root out corruption, which is almost unanimously cited by local communities and non-law enforcement professionals as one of the greatest barriers to trust-building. Independent, apolitical and nonpartisan third parties should be relied upon to oversee, host, fund or participate in some of these initiatives.

- 2. Ensure the necessary coordination mechanisms are in place** to help ensure national frameworks are informed by local perspectives, that local actors feel a sense of ownership over those strategies and plans and that they have access the information they need to facilitate their implementation. National P/CVE frameworks, even when preceded by outreach to local actors, frequently do not sufficiently reflect their needs or concerns. This lack of meaningful inclusion in the process often leaves them bereft of the necessary political will, support and capacity to develop a local plan linked to a national prevention policy and the resources that might be allocated to support its implementation. A coordination mechanism that includes the relevant national and local actors, is not lead by a security agency, and allows local actors to access and share relevant information, including on the threat and lessons learned in preventing it, can help address this limitation.
- 3. Provide local governments with the necessary mandate, capacities, expertise and resources to contribute to P/CVE efforts:** National governments should ensure that local authorities, including urban centres and remote rural communities, have a mandate to contribute to P/CVE efforts. Most local governments stand to benefit from P/CVE and related training and other capacity-building initiatives to better understand the threat and how to develop and implement effective local policies and programmes to address it. This should proactively engage young people and tap into existing or new multi-disciplinary local prevention networks that can help address a range of local concerns, including other forms of violence (e.g., gang-related, gender-based and hate-motivated).



Conclusion

The initial findings and select recommendations contained in this Policy Brief, which draw on comprehensive desk research and the results of four deep-dive mapping and analysis exercises in East Africa, West Africa, Indonesia, and Uganda, are now guiding and shaping the SCN's forthcoming Toolkit. The final product, which will be completed in mid-2023, will include case studies from different regions on the implementation of the 13 Good Practices, as well as implementation checklists and guidance tailored to different contexts.

Drawing on our consultations with national and local stakeholders across the above-mentioned regions and countries, we are confident that the Toolkit will be an important resource for those developing, reviewing, revising or implementing a national or local P/CVE action plan or other relevant P/CVE framework, and when supporting focused NLC implementation efforts in specific thematic areas of P/CVE.



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