



Strengthening Regional Cooperation to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism in South Asia

What Role for Civil Society?

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Like many other regions, South Asia is confronted with a rapidly transforming terrorism threat landscape that is increasingly transnational in nature. Local grievances and sociopolitical dynamics have been exploited by groups such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and linked to a global master narrative of conflict. At the national and local levels, civil society actors, with a wide range of experts and practitioners, seek to address many of these conditions and grievances that fuel support for terrorism and violent extremism, for instance, through improving access to public health, education, and social services; promoting pluralist and tolerant societies; and advocating for more effective and accessible national institutions. These efforts provide important lessons and good practices that can inform cooperative multi-stakeholder

policies aimed at addressing terrorism and countering violent extremism (CVE) in South Asia.¹

Since 2009, the Global Center on Cooperative Security (previously the Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation) has been working with the UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), with generous support from the government of Norway, to develop a process to enhance regional cooperation among all eight member states of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).² The process initially focused on actors in the criminal justice domain, namely judges, prosecutors, and police officers (the criminal justice process), but expanded to include a complementary track that focused on civil society, experts, and

¹ The term “violent extremism” in this context is used to refer to the support for or use of violence to advance rapid sociopolitical change, often by targeting civilians in order to force governments to do or refrain from something. As such, it may refer to acts that are not designated as acts of terrorism but nonetheless rely on the use or threat of violence.

² SAARC member states are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

practitioners from the region through a series of four workshops (the civil society and experts process).³

This complementary civil society and experts process, undertaken in partnership with the Institute of South Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore, encompassed regular dialogue and engagement with nongovernmental actors in South Asia to foster deeper understanding of local and regional drivers of terrorism and violent extremism and to identify critical gaps, opportunities, and priorities for capacity-building support to address the threat.⁴ The process generated greater awareness about established international counterterrorism norms and frameworks. These include the emphasis on regional cooperation in UN Security Council Resolution 1373;⁵ the importance of addressing incitement to terrorism while balancing fundamental freedoms, as highlighted in Resolution 1624;⁶ the international consensus around implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy across its four pillars;⁷ multi-stakeholder approaches to the challenge of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs), as highlighted in Resolution 2178;⁸ and the counterterrorism and CVE activities of UN entities such as the Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) and UN Women through implementation of Resolutions 1325, 2122, and 2242.⁹

This assessment presents key outcomes of this multi-year civil society and experts process. It provides an

overview of regional challenges and the efforts by the Global Center and CTED to identify key needs and priorities to inform responsive policies and programs to address the threat of terrorism and violent extremism in South Asia. This assessment concludes with a set of recommendations on practical ways that multilateral and regional organizations and national governments can work with civil society, experts, and practitioners to address this threat in the region.

Contemporary Violent Extremism and Terrorism in South Asia

South Asia has long confronted complex security and development challenges. Since the partition of India in 1947–1948, ethnoreligious tensions have shaped the region through a variety of conflicts, including wars between India and Pakistan in 1948, 1965, and 1971, which resulted in the establishment of Bangladesh, and ongoing tensions over Kashmir. From 2002 to 2015, the region suffered from more than 25,000 incidents of terrorism.¹⁰ According to the 2016 Global Terrorism Index, South Asia is the second-most affected region with three countries in the region ranking among those with the highest impact of terrorism: Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India.¹¹ Furthermore, terrorism incidents continue to increase in Afghanistan, with the Taliban responsible for the majority of attacks, many of which target

³ The development of this process followed discussions with multilateral and regional stakeholders that emphasized the need to enhance regional collaboration on security issues in South Asia and the role of the United Nations in promoting cooperation and capacity-building activities in the region. Eric Rosand, Naureen Chowdhury Fink, and Jason Ipe, “Countering Terrorism in South Asia: Strengthening Multilateral Engagement,” Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation (CGCC) and International Peace Institute, May 2009, http://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/05/countering_terrorism_in_south_asia.pdf.

⁴ In diplomacy, Track 1 refers to formal interactions between government officials; and Track 2 diplomacy informally engages retired government and military officials, academics, civil society members, and other private sector stakeholders. The civil society process followed a “track 1.5” engagement among government officials, civil society members, academics, and private sector representatives.

⁵ UN Security Council, S/RES/1373, 28 September 2001. The resolution “notes with concern the close connection between international terrorism and transnational organized crime, illicit drugs, money-laundering, illegal arms-trafficking, and illegal movement of nuclear, chemical, biological and other potentially deadly materials, and in this regard emphasizes the need to enhance coordination of efforts on national, subregional, regional and international levels in order to strengthen a global response to this serious challenge and threat to international security.” *Ibid.*, para. 4.

⁶ UN Security Council, S/RES/1624, 14 September 2005.

⁷ UN General Assembly, *The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy*, A/RES/60/288, 20 September 2006. The four pillars of the Strategy are measures to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, measures to prevent and combat terrorism, measures to build states’ capacity to prevent and combat terrorism and to strengthen the role of the UN system in that regard, and measures to ensure respect for human rights for all and the rule of law as the fundamental basis for the fight against terrorism.

⁸ UN Security Council, S/RES/2178, 24 September 2014.

⁹ See UNAOC, <http://www.unaoc.org/> (accessed 2 December 2016); UN Women, <http://www.unwomen.org/en> (accessed 2 December 2016).

¹⁰ This figure includes incidents where there is essentially no doubt of terrorism. National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, “Global Terrorism Database,” http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?chart=overtime&casualties_type=b&casualties_max=&start_yearonly=2002&end_yearonly=2015&dtp2=some®ion=6 (accessed 2 December 2016).

¹¹ Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), “Global Terrorism Index 2016: Measuring and Understanding the Impact of Terrorism,” *IEP Report*, no. 43 (November 2016), http://www.visionofhumanity.org/sites/default/files/Global%20Terrorism%20Index%202016_2.pdf. The SAARC countries with the highest impact of terrorism and their ranking are Afghanistan (2), Pakistan (4), India (8), Bangladesh (22), Nepal (39), Sri Lanka (53), and Bhutan (119). The Maldives was not ranked.

the police, private citizens, and educational institutions.¹²

Incidents relating to left-wing violent extremism have decreased, but it continues to pose a notable threat to the region.¹³ In 2012, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh deemed the Maoist insurgency a “major challenge” for his country.¹⁴ In Nepal, left-wing groups have been the principal source of violence, including numerous ideologically inspired attacks. The rise in incidents reflecting sectarian violence and violence against minorities in the region is also a matter of concern.¹⁵

The violence perpetrated by the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan, combined with the shifting dynamics in the global jihadist landscape, further complicates the insecurity and instability faced by the region.¹⁶ These include the establishment of Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) and ISIL’s growing influence and presence in the region, as demonstrated by sporadic attacks over the last few years in Bangladesh.¹⁷ The July 2016 attacks in Dhaka, claimed by ISIL although investigations in the country are ongoing, followed the group’s call to “Muslims in Bengal to support the Khilafah and close their ranks, unite under the soldiers of the Khilafah in Bengal, and aid them in every

possible way.”¹⁸ In fact, recent issues of *Dabiq*, ISIL’s online magazine, refer to the group’s intention to continue to recruit and unite the “Caliphate’s Soldiers in Bangladesh.”¹⁹ Further highlighting the complexity of attributing attacks to decentralized and transnational terrorism networks, there are claims that local AQIS affiliates were involved in the Dhaka attacks and in attacks in the northern Afghan city of Kunduz, along with fighters from other militant groups operating in Afghanistan, including ISIL.²⁰

Reports of al-Qaeda’s resurgence in Afghanistan more than a decade after the U.S.-led invasion that aimed to degrade the organization underscore the continued threat posed by the group to national and regional security.²¹ The evolution of the Taliban and its strategic direction, particularly after leadership changes, is another issue of concern. After Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar’s death in 2013, some disaffected Taliban members pledged allegiance to ISIL, exploiting fissures within the Taliban to recruit fighters and further discredit al-Qaeda.²² Reports claim, however, that the new Taliban leader is consolidating power by bringing splinter groups back into the fold, putting further pressure on Afghan forces that are struggling to hold the group at bay.²³

¹² Ibid.

¹³ “State-wise Extent of LWE Violence During 2011 to 2016 (Up to 15.09.2016),” Indian Ministry of Home Affairs, n.d., http://mha.nic.in/sites/upload_files/mha/files/Lweviolence_29092016.PDF.

¹⁴ “India PM Singh Says Internal Security a Major Challenge,” BBC, 16 April 2012, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-17724546>. See “Maoists Blow Up Building, Torch Vehicles in Jharkhand,” DNA, 24 June 2014, <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-maoists-blow-up-building-torch-vehicles-in-jharkhand-2227358>.

¹⁵ See Tim Craig, “Sectarian Killings Soar in Pakistan, Raising Fears of Regional Spillover,” *Washington Post*, 15 January 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/sectarian-killings-soar-in-pakistan-raising-fears-of-regional-spillover/2014/01/15/14467cbc-7a1c-11e3-8963-b4b654bcc9b2_story.html; Colleen Curry, “Christians and Muslims Face More Persecution by Hindu Extremists in India, Groups Say,” *Vice News*, 17 March 2016, <https://news.vice.com/article/christian-and-muslims-are-facing-more-and-more-persecution-by-hindu-extremists-in-india>.

¹⁶ See “Al-Qaeda Chief Zawahiri Launches al-Qaeda in South Asia,” BBC, 4 September 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-29056668>; Sudarsan Raghavan, “Islamic State Claims Bombing in Afghanistan That Kills Dozens,” *Washington Post*, 18 April 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/dozens-killed-in-suicide-bomber-attack-outside-an-afghanistan-bank/2015/04/18/3849f572-e59f-11e4-b510-962fcfab310_story.html; Ellen Barry and Julfikar Ali Manik, “ISIS Claims Responsibility for Attack in Bangladesh,” *New York Times*, 24 October 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/25/world/asia/isis-claims-responsibility-for-attack-in-bangladesh-targeting-shias.html?_r=0.

¹⁷ Saroj Kumar Rath, “Wolf-Pack Terrorism: Inspired by ISIS, Made in Bangladesh,” *Yale Global Online*, 5 July 2016, <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/wolf-pack-terrorism-inspired-isis-made-bangladesh>.

¹⁸ “Interview: With the Amīr of the Khilāfah’s Soldiers in Bengal: Shaykh Abū Ibrāhīm Al-Hanīf,” *Dabiq*, no. 14 (2016), pp. 58–66.

¹⁹ Animesh Roul, “How Bangladesh Became a Fertile Ground for al-Qa’ida and the Islamic State,” *CTC Sentinel* 9, no. 5 May 2016: 27–34.

²⁰ Shehryar Fazli, “Bangladeshi Leaders Must Stop Politicizing Counterterrorism,” *Nikkei Asian Review*, 7 July 2016, <http://asia.nikkei.com/magazine/20160707-Deciphering-Duterte/Politics-Economy/Shehryar-Fazli-Bangladeshi-leaders-must-stop-politicizing-counterterrorism>; Ayaz Gul, “Afghan Official: Over 1,300 Foreign Fighters in Kunduz Battle,” *Voice of America*, 15 November 2015, <http://www.voanews.com/a/official-more-than-1300-foreign-fighters-in-kunduz-battle/3058901.html>.

²¹ “The Strong State of a Stateless Al-Qaeda,” TSG Intelbrief, 29 October 2015, <http://soufangroup.com/tsg-intelbrief-the-strong-state-of-a-stateless-al-qaeda/>.

²² Jon Boone, “ISIS Ascent in Syria and Iraq Weakening Pakistani Taliban,” *Guardian*, 22 October 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/22/pakistani-taliban-spokesman-isis-pledge>; Sune Engel Rasmussen, “ISIS Stands to Gain From Taliban Crisis,” *Guardian*, 10 August 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/10/isis-stands-to-gain-from-taliban-crisis>.

²³ Habib Khan Totakhil and Jessica Donati, “New Taliban Leader Moves to Repair Old Fractures,” *Wall Street Journal*, 4 August 2016, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/new-taliban-leader-moves-to-repair-old-fractures-1470333640>.

ISIL's influence and presence in the region alarm many regional stakeholders. In his first public speech, self-appointed ISIL leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi asserted that India would eventually become incorporated into the greater "caliphate."²⁴ ISIL's interest in South Asia was further confirmed in early 2015 with its announcement of the new province Wilayat Khorasan in the Afghan-Pakistani border region and their declared intentions in Bangladesh.²⁵ There are increasing reports of individuals from South Asia traveling to Iraq and Syria to support ISIL and al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra—an estimated 50 from Afghanistan, 23 from India, 200 from the Maldives, and 500 from Pakistan by the end of 2015—although to date it appears the outflow of foreign fighters has remained lower than those from the Middle East and North Africa region.²⁶ Moreover, ISIL's ability to mobilize supporters and affiliates further afield as its strongholds such as Mosul come under attack is a concern and has led to great interest in prevention to address the outflow of fighters and supporters.

These examples illustrate the range of challenges posed by transnational violent extremist groups in South Asia, particularly for the international community, when they reject the international state system and its norms and conventions, espouse objectives incompatible with political negotiations, and target civilians as a deliberate strategy. They are increasingly decentralized and able to operate and recruit across borders and regions, benefiting from technological innovations and modern communication platforms. The current and potential scale of destruction posed by such organizations is an additional characteristic of terrorism in the 21st century. Rapid urbanization has led to a proliferation of population centers with unprecedented density and, together with the increasing ease of access to communications platforms, raises the prospect of catastrophic damage from a relatively simple attack.

This is particularly the case when terrorist attacks more often than not target civilians and communities, rather

than particular officials or institutions, in order to sow increased fear and gain publicity, which helps drum up recruits and support. Attacks on schools, markets, town centers, development projects, transportation, and tourist destinations do not only have security repercussions but impede socioeconomic development and foreign investments. The death or impairment of a household's primary or sole breadwinner, particularly in traditional families where the mother's responsibilities are in the domestic sphere, and the long-term psychological trauma suffered by victims and their families are just a few of the devastating effects of terrorism and violent extremism that are often beyond the scope of most government-sponsored support and compensation plans.²⁷

At the same time, groups such as ISIL and the Taliban premise their legitimacy on their ability to govern or provide services that the state is unable or unwilling to provide. The perception of these groups as service providers can offer incentives for marginalized communities to believe their narrative and respond with support or recruits. In fact, this is central to the differences between al-Qaeda and ISIL, where the latter purports to engage in a state-building enterprise that includes space for recruits who may be interested in civilian roles, such as doctors, mechanics, and, importantly, wives and mothers.²⁸ The brutality and violence that these groups inflict on communities can even be a key factor for mobilizing support from those who view these acts as a reflection of the groups' integrity, commitment to the groups' ideology, capacity to protect supporters, and ability to project an image of governance in accordance with a just and pious state.²⁹

The dangers of the struggle between supporters of al-Qaeda and ISIL being played out in South Asia raise concerns for many in the region, enhancing fears of increased violence as each group seeks to outdo the other and exploit existing sociopolitical tensions, with civilians paying the greatest price in destruction and casualties. This competition also fosters an enabling environment for other groups to address the grievances or

²⁴ Udit Thakur, "The Islamic State Eyes Expansion and Recruitment in India," *Terrorism Monitor* 12, no. 17 (5 September 2014): 5–7.

²⁵ Animesh Roul, "Wilayat Khorasan: Islamic State Consolidates Position in AfPak Region," *Terrorism Monitor* 13, no. 7 (4 April 2015): 3–5.

²⁶ Alex P. Schmid and Judith Tinnes, "Foreign (Terrorist) Fighters With IS: A European Perspective," *ICCT Research Paper* 6, no. 8 (December 2015).

²⁷ Henry Dodd, "Anatomy of a Suicide Bombing: Moon Market Attack, Lahore, Pakistan," in IEP, "Global Terrorism Index 2014," n.d., pp. 71–73, http://www.visionofhumanity.org/sites/default/files/Global%20Terrorism%20Index%20Report%202014_0.pdf.

²⁸ Naureen Chowdhury Fink and Benjamin Sugg, "A Tale of Two Jihads: Comparing the al-Qaeda and ISIS Narratives," IPI Global Observatory, 9 February 2015, <http://theglobalobservatory.org/2015/02/jihad-al-qaeda-isis-counternarrative/>.

²⁹ See Lina Khatib, "The Islamic State's Strategy: Lasting and Expanding," Carnegie Middle East Center, June 2015, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/islamic_state_strategy.pdf.

dynamics that lead to support for groups such as ISIL, further polarizing society and enhancing support for violence. On the other hand, although ISIL threatens the Taliban's stronghold in Afghanistan and tries to siphon away its members, there have been instances where the two groups have worked together against the Afghan forces, further complicating efforts to maintain the stability of the region.³⁰

Engaging Civil Society, Experts, and Practitioners

Civil society actors and experts play roles that are critical to national, regional, and international efforts that address security and developmental challenges. They have important roles to play in education, oversight, and policy advocacy. They can play a constructive role in the redress of grievances and provide a voice to marginalized groups, often including families of victims and survivors of terrorist attacks. They also complement or support governmental efforts through the provision of information, analyses, training, and outreach. They can help align counterterrorism and CVE measures with respect for human rights and the rule of law and ensure that counterterrorism capacity-building measures have attendant benefits in strengthening national institutional capacities.³¹

The complexity of the contemporary terrorism and violent extremism threat calls for increased regional cooperation on security issues in South Asia at the track 1 level while requiring proactive engagement with civil society actors, experts, practitioners, and the media to assess regional needs and priorities and facilitate opportunities for collaborative CVE interventions.

The need for a comprehensive approach to terrorism and violent extremism that engages civil society and communities in counterterrorism and CVE efforts was reflected in a number of UN Security Council resolutions and reports. For instance, Resolution 1624 stressed “the importance of the role of the media, civil and religious society, the business community and educational

institutions ... in fostering an environment which is not conducive to incitement of terrorism.”³² Resolution 2129 invited CTED to enhance partnerships with “international, regional and sub-regional organizations, civil society, academia and other entities in conducting research and information-gathering, and identifying good practices” and “underscores the importance of engaging with development entities.”³³ Resolution 2178 encouraged member states to “engage relevant local communities and non-governmental actors in developing strategies” to counter violent extremism, the first time CVE is mentioned in a resolution adopted under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.³⁴ More recently, the UN Secretary-General's plan of action on preventing violent extremism emphasizes the need for member states to “develop joint and participatory strategies, including with civil society and local communities, to prevent the emergence of violent extremism.”³⁵

The valuable potential of civil society and experts in developing and implementing comprehensive responses to terrorism and violent extremism was also recognized by the UN General Assembly through the adoption of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. The Strategy recognized the important roles played by a range of key stakeholders, including states, regional and subregional organizations, and civil society organizations. In its 2016 review of the Strategy, the General Assembly encouraged member states and the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF) and its entities to “enhance engagement with civil society ... and to support its role in the implementation of the Strategy.”³⁶

In addition to the United Nations, the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), an informal multilateral counterterrorism platform comprising 30 members, including India and Pakistan, has identified the need to develop multidimensional responses that balance preventive and reactive actions and emphasize engagement with civil society actors to address the wide spectrum of threats posed by sympathizers, supporters, and

³⁰ Jessica Donati and Habib Khan Totakhil, “Taliban, Islamic State Forge Alliance of Convenience in Eastern Afghanistan,” *Wall Street Journal*, 7 August 2016, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/taliban-islamic-state-forge-informal-alliance-in-eastern-afghanistan-1470611849>.

³¹ Eric Rosand, Alistair Millar, and Jason Ipe, “Civil Society and the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy: Opportunities and Challenges,” CGCC, September 2008, http://globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/09/civil_society.pdf.

³² UN Security Council, S/RES/1624, 14 September 2005, p. 2.

³³ UN Security Council, S/RES/2129, 17 December 2013, para. 19.

³⁴ UN Security Council, S/RES/2178, 24 September 2014, para.16.

³⁵ UN General Assembly, *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism: Report of the Secretary-General*, A/70/674, 24 December 2015, para. 51(a).

³⁶ UN General Assembly, *The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy Review*, A/RES/70/291, 19 July 2016, para. 10.

active participants of violent extremism and terrorism.³⁷ Furthermore, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe reinforces the critical importance of involving civil society in CVE efforts, for example, through developing partnerships, increasing civil society organizations' awareness about ways in which they can contribute to CVE, and improving relationships between law enforcement and communities.³⁸

The White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism in February 2015, which brought together more than 90 international leaders and experts, also highlighted the essential role of civil society organizations in CVE efforts. Several follow-up regional summits were hosted by different countries to expand on the global CVE movement. Prior to the South and Central Asian regional CVE summit hosted by the government of Kazakhstan in Astana in June 2015, the Global Center organized a regional dialogue in Istanbul to explore the role of civil society in CVE in South and Central Asia. This civil society-focused event provided a valuable platform for regional civil society actors to identify concrete initiatives and to reflect on good practices and lessons learned to enhance capacity and community resilience against violent extremism.³⁹ Key outcomes from this meeting were presented to government officials at the Astana summit and reflected in the outcome document.⁴⁰

Engaging Civil Society and Experts

Together, these frameworks widen the scope of responses to terrorism and violent extremism with a focus on building resilience; strengthening community engagement, including with faith leaders, women, and youth; promoting human rights; and utilizing strategic communications, among others, to challenge extremist narratives while providing positive alternatives. Reflecting this multidimensional approach and recognizing the critical need to strengthen regional cooperation to address the growing transnational and diffuse threat

of violent extremism and terrorism, the Global Center in consultation with CTED developed the civil society and experts process as a spinoff to the criminal justice process.

The civil society and experts process began with an inception meeting in April 2012 to explore practical contributions that civil society organizations and nongovernmental partners can make toward a more collaborative regional approach to addressing terrorism and violent extremism.⁴¹



Participants at the inception meeting on the role for civil society and multilateral actors in strengthening regional security cooperation in South Asia, Singapore, April 2012

It was widely agreed during this meeting that there was a critical need to raise awareness and offer practical guidance and training on addressing terrorism and violent extremism, including challenging extremist narratives and ideologies. Among some of the issues considered were the role of the media in creating or mitigating an atmosphere conducive to the spread of extremism and terrorism, the role of women in addressing crucial development and security issues that might underscore grievances that lead to terrorism, the efforts of think tanks in forging national and regional strategies promoting a whole-of-government approach to counterterrorism, and civil society efforts to promote a rule of law-based approach to countering terrorism

³⁷ GCTF, "Ankara Memorandum on Good Practices for a Multi-Sectoral Approach to Countering Violent Extremism," n.d., https://www.theGCTF.org/documents/10162/72352/13Sep19_Ankara+Memorandum.pdf; Council of the European Union, "European Union Counter-Terrorism Strategy," 14469/4/05 REV 4, 30 November 2005.

³⁸ "Preventing Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization That Lead to Terrorism: A Community-Policing Approach," Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, February 2014, <http://www.osce.org/atu/111438?download=true>.

³⁹ "Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism in South and Central Asia: The Role of Civil Society," Global Center on Cooperative Security (Global Center), n.d., <http://www.globalcenter.org/events/preventing-and-countering-violent-extremism-in-south-and-central-asia-the-role-of-civil-society/> (accessed 2 December 2016).

⁴⁰ "Central and South Asia Regional Conference on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) (Summary Report)," General Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 29 June 2015, <http://prokuror.gov.kz/eng/printpdf/38979>.

⁴¹ "Strengthening Regional Security Cooperation in South Asia: What Role for Civil Society and Multilateral Actors?" Global Center, n.d., <http://www.globalcenter.org/events/strengthening-regional-security-cooperation-in-south-asia-what-role-for-civil-society-and-multilateral-actors/> (accessed 2 December 2016).

and violent extremism. These ideas formed the basis for the development of four thematic workshops.

Each workshop provided unique opportunities for an exchange of knowledge, good practices, and insights, bringing together practitioners and experts from all SAARC countries for dialogue on national and local challenges and opportunities for collaborative responses to terrorism and violent extremism in the region. The workshops provided a platform to introduce the emerging focus on CVE policy and practice to a diverse group of actors whose work may relate directly or indirectly to CVE, such as those with expertise in media, governance, education, development, peace-building and conflict mitigation, security sector reform, and rehabilitation and reintegration. Each workshop emphasized challenges and opportunities in working across political boundaries and exploring the role of international actors, such as the United Nations and GCTF, in strengthening practical counterterrorism and CVE cooperation in the region. In addition, the workshops brought together relevant practitioners and stakeholders whose work can inform nascent CVE efforts in the region, as many experts were not familiar with this area of policy and practice.

The process brought together more than 100 civil society representatives and experts representing all SAARC countries and more than 80 national, regional, and international organizations. In addition, the workshops have included international experts and representatives from CTED, the CTITF, the UNAOC, and UN Women, as well as from Hedayah, the International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism, established under the aegis of the GCTF.

The following sections summarize some of the key themes that emerged from the process.

The Role of the Media in Addressing Violent Extremism

The first thematic workshop, supported by the government of Denmark, produced a robust debate around the role of the media in addressing terrorism and violent extremism in South Asia. Some participants questioned whether the media should be involved in CVE at all, asserting that their job is to report the news rather than promote an agenda. Others argued that media outlets have a responsibility to starve terrorists of the “oxygen of publicity” and to promote counternarratives to terrorist and violent extremist propaganda.

Nevertheless, it was agreed that media professionals do not need to deliberately create or convey a particular narrative but may contribute to CVE efforts by prominently placing victims’ stories, ensuring high-quality journalism, and helping frame narratives through editorials and opinion sections. In view of Resolution 1624, discussions at this workshop also focused on balancing a prohibition of incitement to and *apologie* for terrorism with the need to report events and ensuring freedom of speech and expression.



Participants in the workshop on the role of the media in addressing terrorism and violent extremism in South Asia, Singapore, December 2012

Participants highlighted that although the media can provide a powerful platform to prevent incitement, relay vital information, investigate stories, and help create a compelling counternarrative to violent extremism, it can be effectively leveraged at the same time by terrorist and extremist groups to promote their agenda, which poses professional and ethical challenges in reporting on such groups. Should reporters transcribe and relay speeches and statements that incite violence? Does sharing the words and views of such groups and reporting on their activities risk compelling an audience not only to radicalize but also mobilize to violent extremism? These issues relate to broader challenges faced by media practitioners regarding the maintenance of standards of reporting and codes of conduct.

Another key concern was the quality of reporting during and after terrorist attacks and the lack of guidelines and protocols for ensuring the protection and privacy of victims and their families. Indian media, for example, drew heavy criticism for its coverage of the 2008 Mumbai attacks, which was characterized as jingoistic and inflammatory. To avoid such coverage and prevent unintended consequences, media professionals at the workshop agreed that developing voluntary or self-regulating codes of conduct could improve the quality of

their reporting. For instance, since 2008, Indian media outlets have reflected on existing codes of conduct and on developing new rules and standards when covering terrorist attacks.

The physical danger to journalists was a significant impediment for media practitioners engaging on this issue. Attacks on well-known journalists and bloggers in Bangladesh and Pakistan, for example, illustrate the risks to individuals and their families in investigating extremist groups or voicing opposing perspectives.⁴² Furthermore, because of administrative and political obstacles throughout the region, media personnel often face difficulties in traveling to neighboring countries or interacting with regional counterparts. These pressures and reporting challenges can curb the media's ability to present diverse views and provide fair, quality reporting and in-depth investigative stories.

An outcome report by the Global Center analyzed the media's role in contemporary terrorism and offered a series of recommendations for local, regional, and international policymakers and practitioners.⁴³ Recommendations included the development of training by media associations and journalism schools that take into consideration culturally and regionally appropriate, sensitive issues when reporting on cases related to terrorism and violent extremism. Relatedly, regional media associations such as the South Asia Free Media Association (SAFMA) can offer forums for awareness raising, dialogue, and training to media practitioners on CVE-related issues, such as strengthening strategic communications capacities.

The Roles of Women in Preventing and Countering Violence and Extremism

Regional stakeholders including government officials, UN representatives, and experts broadly agreed on the critical role of women in contributing to a vibrant civil society, a key ingredient to challenging violent extremism. As a result, a second thematic workshop in the civil society process focused on the gender dimension of

violence and extremism and ongoing and potential contributions of women in strengthening community resilience to these challenges in South Asia. Civil society organizations, particularly women-led or women-focused organizations in South Asia, have made notable progress in a number of areas, such as improving access to education and health services, reducing poverty, and promoting social and political mobilization, with support from international donors and organizations such as the United Nations and World Bank.⁴⁴

These experiences offer a valuable body of knowledge and expertise to inform the development of tailored CVE approaches in the region. Moreover, the discussions addressed the roles women play in supporting and facilitating radicalization and inciting violence. It was noted that less attention has been paid to female radicalization and mobilization to violent extremism, resulting in a weak evidence base for programming and neglecting an audience that has garnered specific outreach and attention by ISIL and al-Qaeda, for example.



Participants in a workshop on lessons from multilateral efforts on women, peace, and security in preventing terrorism and violent extremism, Singapore, September 2013

Participants shared insights on women's participation in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka and the People's Liberation Army of Nepal and reflected on the need to tailor prevention strategies to address the "push" and "pull" factors that mobilize women to support or join violent extremist groups. For example, a number of initiatives focused on working with family members, especially mothers, to safeguard

⁴² "Journalist Hamid Mir Injured in Gun Attack in Karachi," Dawn, 21 March 2016, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1100972>; Bob Dietz, "A Year After Raza Rumi Attack, Little Change for Pakistan's Beleaguered Press," Committee to Protect Journalists, 27 March 2015, <https://cpj.org/blog/2015/03/a-year-after-raza-rumi-attack-little-change-for-pa.php>; Ellen Barry, "Bangladesh Killings Send Chilling Message to Secular Bloggers," *New York Times*, 30 March 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/31/world/asia/suspects-held-in-hacking-death-of-bangladeshi-blogger.html?_r=0.

⁴³ Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Karin Deutsch Karlekar, and Rafia Barakat, "Mightier Than the Sword? The Role of the Media in Addressing Violence and Terrorism in South Asia," CGCC, October 2013, http://globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/2013Oct_CGCC_MightierThanTheSword_Report.pdf.

⁴⁴ See World Bank, "Role of Women: Key to South Asia's Development," n.d., <http://go.worldbank.org/6UJ0TH0830> (accessed 2 December 2016).

their families against violent extremism or help to empower women by enhancing their problem-solving skills through arbitration and different forms of dispute settlements.

Other programs being implemented in the region focus on promoting female education to enhance critical thinking skills and women's employment opportunities, given that improved education and literacy is seen as a key element in efforts to counter the narratives of violent extremists groups and reduce their appeal. In rural and less accessible areas, popular radio programs provide a platform for marginalized voices to discuss sensitive, community-relevant issues, such as women's rights, civic education, and conflict mitigation. It was pointed out that organizations in South Asia also focus specifically on including women in peace initiatives and integrating a gender perspective in peace processes.⁴⁵

Ideas and recommendations from this workshop were captured in a policy brief.⁴⁶ With the emphasis placed via CVE on multi-stakeholder, community-centric approaches, participants called for greater regional collaboration and facilitation of platforms for cooperation on preventive mechanisms, including the development of awareness and training programs to share best practices and formulate localized solutions to the threat of violent extremism. It was suggested that female practitioner networks be developed to harness the skills necessary to recognize early-warning signs of radicalization and respond effectively to violence and violent extremism. Furthermore, it was underscored that a gender perspective should be integrated into all aspects of law enforcement policy and activities to counter terrorism and violent extremism. This includes the recruitment, training, and retention of female officers and gender-sensitive training in handling female perpetrators. The discussions and ideas from this workshop helped to inform the December 2014 workshop, which focused on strengthening rule of law responses to violent extremism but incorporated a focus on gender.

The Role of Civil Society in Strengthening Rule of Law Responses to Violent Extremism

Across South Asia, civil society organizations have contributed significantly to strengthening the rule of law and security efforts through their roles as advocates, monitors, technical experts, trainers, service providers, and information hubs. Furthermore, a vibrant civil society is critical to successful prevention strategies, as civil society organizations often are closely engaged with communities, have greater credibility as interlocutors, and possess specific expertise and capacity on relevant issues.⁴⁷ Therefore, a third workshop, which included Inclusive Security as a co-organizer, specifically explored ways to strengthen and support civil society contributions to rule of law and security efforts as a way of preventing and countering violent extremism in the region.



Participants in a workshop on the role of civil society in strengthening rule of law–based responses to terrorism and violent extremism in South Asia, Singapore, December 2014

Rule of law actors such as judges, attorneys, police, and corrections officers all have roles to play in CVE. For example, research and practice suggest that negative experiences with law enforcement and other state officials may corrode the legitimacy of formal institutions and generate grievances that can contribute to violent radicalization.⁴⁸ These grievances can also affect the willingness of local populations to work with security actors to identify, address, or otherwise mitigate possible security threats. The presence of civil society organizations within local communities and their service of them often position these organizations to contribute to

⁴⁵ See Women and Media Collective, <http://womenandmedia.org> (accessed 2 December 2016); Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace, <http://www.wiscomp.org> (accessed 2 December 2016).

⁴⁶ Naureen Chowdhury Fink and Rafia Barakat, "Strengthening Community Resilience Against Violent Extremism: The Roles of Women in South Asia," *CGCC Policy Brief*, November 2013, http://globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/13Nov27_Women-and-CVE-in-South-Asia_Policy-Brief_Final.pdf.

⁴⁷ See Eric Rosand, "Investing in Prevention: An Ounce of CVE or a Pound of Counterterrorism?" Brookings Institution, 6 May 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2016/05/06/investing-in-prevention-an-ounce-of-cve-or-a-pound-of-counterterrorism/>.

⁴⁸ See Stephen J. Schulhofer, Tom R. Tyler, and Aziz Z. Huq, "American Policing at a Crossroads: Unsustainable Policies and the Procedural Justice Alternative," *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 101, no. 2 (2011): 335–374, <http://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/jclc/vol101/iss2/1/>.

identifying the security concerns and needs of communities and help to facilitate dialogue between community members and law enforcement to enhance responsiveness to those needs.

Furthermore, civil society organizations often advocate for security actors to make institutional changes necessary for addressing underlying conditions conducive to terrorism, including human rights violations, marginalization, and discrimination based on ethnicity, nationality, gender, or religion. They have also been key actors in advocating for the recruitment and retention of female security officers and sensitizing security actors on gender-related issues.

Civil society organizations can provide critical guidance to shape national counterterrorism and CVE strategies, which typically have implications for a wide range of actors in diverse fields but infrequently include these actors in the drafting process. For example, a Bangladeshi civil society organization provided guidance and helped to inform a draft counterterrorism strategy for Bangladesh and supports the government in developing a national counterradicalization policy for the country.⁴⁹ As interlocutors with international donors, civil society organizations can provide state agencies with increased information sharing, expanded access to funds, and a widened base of partners contributing to implementation of holistic CVE strategies.

A policy brief, co-authored with Inclusive Security, reflected on the workshop discussions and explored gaps in strengthening rule of law–based responses to the threat of terrorism and violent extremism.⁵⁰ The brief presented recommendations for national and regional policymakers and international donors on issues related to funding, training, networking, and the inclusion of civil society organizations in CVE efforts. It pointed to

the need for increased funding and technical resources for civil society organizations to raise awareness of CVE, for instance, through training for law enforcement officials to help them develop a more community-centric approach and to better understand and identify violent extremist threats. In addition, given civil society organizations' critical roles as trainers and advocates, support for “train the trainer” initiatives for frontline officials, for instance, could increase their capacity on CVE-related issues and provide a platform for ongoing dialogue that focuses on how civil society could contribute to enhancing CVE policy and programming grounded in rule of law principles.

The Roles of Civil Society in Supporting Rehabilitation and Reintegration Efforts

The prospect of an increasing number of violent extremist detainees and returning FTFs and the need for postrelease support has prompted international actors to further explore the establishment of rehabilitation and reintegration interventions or to support community-led “off-ramp” programs.⁵¹ Drawing on discussions that highlighted interest in this topic, the last thematic workshop in the civil society process explored good practices and the lessons learned from rehabilitation and reintegration efforts in South Asia that might help to inform similar practices for violent extremist offenders. Participants pointed out that although some nascent efforts were taking place in the region, there were greater potential and need for more tailored, formalized, national, government-supported initiatives.

A number of these programs, globally and in the region, have been developed by or implemented with the support of civil society actors, particularly for the reintegration component. In Sri Lanka, for example, civil society organizations play a leading role in facilitating the reintegration of former Tamil Tiger combatants

⁴⁹ Civil society representative, comment at the workshop titled “Strengthening Rule of Law–Based Responses to Terrorism and Violent Extremism in South Asia: What Role for Civil Society?” Singapore, 4–5 December 2014.

⁵⁰ Global Center and Institute for Inclusive Security, “Strengthening Rule of Law Responses to Counter Violent Extremism: What Role for Civil Society in South Asia?” *Global Center on Cooperative Security Policy Brief*, May 2015, <http://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/May-2015-Strengthening-Rule-of-Law-Responses-to-Counter-Violent-Extremism3.pdf>.

⁵¹ See Charles Lister, “Returning Foreign Fighters: Criminalization or Reintegration?” Brookings Doha Center, August 2015, p. 11, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/En-Fighters-Web.pdf>; UN Assistance Mission in Somalia, “Former Al-Shabaab Combatants Graduate From Baidoa Rehabilitation Centre,” 9 August 2016, <https://unsom.unmissions.org/former-al-shabaab-combatants-graduate-baidoa-rehabilitation-centre>; Eric Rosand, “Taking the Off-Ramp: A Path to Preventing Terrorism,” War on the Rocks, 1 July 2016, <http://warontherocks.com/2016/07/taking-the-off-ramp-a-path-to-preventing-terrorism>. Additionally, the GCTF established a working group on detention and reintegration, following the adoption of several memoranda on rehabilitation and reintegration, including the Rome Memorandum on Good Practices for Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Violent Extremist Offenders. GCTF, “Detention and Reintegration,” n.d., <https://www.thegctf.org/Working-Groups/Detention-and-Reintegration> (accessed 2 December 2016).

through psychosocial and spiritual counseling, peer networking, and vocational training.⁵² Moreover, civil society organizations facilitate platforms for interaction among community and religious leaders, prison officers, teachers, parents, and others on topics related to radicalization to violent extremism and, in some cases, work directly with recipients in an attempt to reduce their risk of violent activity. Other efforts by civil society organizations include promoting women's critical roles not only in building societal resilience but in improving women's skills to identify risks and early signs of radicalization in family and community members. One such program in Pakistan works directly with mothers of radicalized or at-risk youths to help reintegrate the youths back into their communities as peace activists through religious teachings, skills building, job training, and education.⁵³



Participants in a workshop on the role of civil society in rehabilitation and reintegration efforts in South Asia, Singapore, October 2015

Across South Asia, the scope of such programming is highly variable, although extensive initiatives were developed in Nepal and Sri Lanka to deal with large numbers of demobilized combatants. Smaller-scale programs and initiatives undertaken by civil society actors with varying degrees of engagement with security and government officials, such as the Sabaoon school in Pakistan, were also presented and discussed.⁵⁴ Beyond the opportunity to learn about such programming, the workshop linked practitioners with other regional ef-

forts in regions neighboring Southeast Asia or from Europe, where nongovernmental organizations such as Fryshuset in Sweden have played a critical role in facilitating the exit of young people from far-right groups and are now undertaking programming that can help other types of violent extremists.

Challenges in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism in South Asia

Overall, the civil society and experts process provided an opportunity to explore ways of strengthening regional cooperation in addressing terrorism and violent extremism in South Asia. Each thematic workshop focused on different topics, but a number of common challenges and concerns were elicited from participants throughout the process.

Definitional Challenges

The lack of universally agreed definitions of terrorism and violent extremism have posed a critical challenge to developing a collective regional response. UN frameworks have repeatedly underscored that implementation of counterterrorism measures is primarily the responsibility of member states, and so each state has shaped its own definition of the term and the development of its counterterrorism instruments. In South Asia and in many other regions, strained political relationships can often prove a critical impediment to enhanced collective regional efforts. Some states have been accused of fostering or supporting militant groups to fight proxy battles, and regional practitioners explained that some governmental actors were perceived to be more inclined to capitalize on militant groups and use them for domestic or regional policy purposes and to exert influence.

Civil society actors and practitioners in several forums raised concerns that overly broad definitions of terrorism and accompanying legal instruments in many states

⁵² Malkanthi Hettiarachchi, "Sri Lanka's Rehabilitation Program: A New Frontier in Counter Terrorism and Counter Insurgency," *Prism* 4, no. 2 (2013): 105–122.

⁵³ "Women's Participation in Transforming Conflict and Violent Extremism," *UN Chronicle* 52, no. 4 (April 2016), <https://unchronicle.un.org/article/womens-participation-transforming-conflict-and-violent-extremism>.

⁵⁴ Feriha N. Peracha, Rafia R. Khan, and Sara Savage, "Sabaoon: Educational Methods Successfully Countering and Preventing Violent Extremism," in *Expanding Research on Countering Violent Extremism*, ed. Sara Zeiger, 2016, pp. 85–104, <http://www.hedayahcenter.org/Admin/Content/File-410201685227.pdf>.

in the region could contribute to human rights abuses.⁵⁵ These laws can and have been used to restrict political dissent and infringe human rights and civil liberties.⁵⁶ For instance, the Anti-Terrorism Act in Pakistan allows the government to circumvent basic due process and has been used to detain individuals on charges unrelated to terrorism.⁵⁷ India's Armed Forces Special Powers Act has been criticized and protested for giving the armed forces sweeping powers in regions the government deems to be "disturbed."⁵⁸ Additionally, the Prevention of Terrorism Act in the Maldives was given as an example of counterterrorism laws that offer an overly broad definition of terrorism that may be prone to abuse.⁵⁹

Impact of External Factors

Civil society members expressed concern about the impact of extraregional factors and geopolitical dynamics on regional political and security approaches and the challenges they pose in shaping public perceptions about terrorism and violent extremism. Drone strikes, for example, were noted as contributing to anti-Western sentiments and fueling violent extremist narratives in the region, particularly in countries such as Pakistan. Several participants noted that international foreign policy decisions, perceptions of double standards or marginalization, and opposition to ongoing conflicts can shape extremist recruitment narratives or individual grievances.

Research and Information Gaps

Despite the growing international focus on violent extremism, the scope of research and analysis on local and regional drivers and dynamics remains limited. Although participants acknowledged a growing body of resources at the global level, there was little information available about the grievances and incentives

that contribute to the support for violent extremist ideas and groups in South Asia. There is also limited information about the impact of international and local efforts or about the structures and methods of groups operating in the region. Field research in this area is undeniably difficult, and participants noted that political sensitivities, security concerns, and capacity challenges play a key role in explaining this gap.

Moreover, much of the relevant information is largely in the hands of security services or highly specialized actors. Without access to field data, sites, and intelligence, it is difficult to undertake research. Not unrelatedly, participants highlighted the lack of access to research and information, making it difficult to develop baselines for projects or to identify research and programming gaps that they might be able to address. This may be due to the cost of access to information, unknown platforms and sources, language barriers, or physical or technological limitations.

Limited Counterterrorism or CVE Expertise and Capacity

Many civil society actors reflected on the resource and capacity challenges that constrain their engagement in counterterrorism and CVE efforts, despite the fact that their work may address some of the underlying drivers of violent extremism in the region. Many groups are caught between a rock and a hard place as they try to balance counterterrorism or CVE interests with sometimes draconian antiterrorism financing and regulatory restrictions.⁶⁰ For example, many civil society organizations, particularly those working at the grassroots level and with direct engagement with communities, lack the technical capacity to meet many anti-money laundering regulations, placing an additional burden on their limited resources and forcing some to scale down or close their operations.

⁵⁵ See Naz Modirzadeh, "If It's Broke, Don't Make it Worse: A Critique of the U.N. Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism," *Lawfare*, 23 January 2016, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/if-its-broke-dont-make-it-worse-critique-un-secretary-generals-plan-action-prevent-violent-extremism>; Richard Atwood, "The Dangers Lurking in the UN's New Plan to Prevent Violent Extremism," *Reuters*, 8 February 2016, <http://blogs.reuters.com/great-debate/2016/02/07/why-is-the-wolf-so-big-and-bad/>.

⁵⁶ Martin Scheinin, "Back to Post-9/11 Panic? Security Council Resolution on Foreign Terrorist Fighters," *Just Security*, 23 September 2014, <https://www.justsecurity.org/15407/post-911-panic-security-council-resolution-foreign-terrorist-fighters-scheinin/>.

⁵⁷ Tariq Parvez and Mehwish Rani, "An Appraisal of Pakistan's Anti-Terrorism Act," *USIP Special Report*, no. 377 (August 2015), <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR377-An-Appraisal-of-Pakistan%E2%80%99s-Anti-Terrorism-Act.pdf>.

⁵⁸ Sudha Ramachandran, "India's Controversial Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act," *Diplomat*, 2 July 2015, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/07/indias-controversial-armed-forces-special-powers-act/>.

⁵⁹ "Maldives Opposition Critical of 'Draconian' Anti-Islamic State Law," *Associated Press*, 29 October 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/29/maldives-opposition-critical-of-draconian-anti-terror-law>.

⁶⁰ See Center for Human Rights and Global Justice, "A Decade Lost: Locating Gender in U.S. Counter-Terrorism," 2011, <http://chrgj.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/locatinggender.pdf>; CGCC et al., "To Protect and Prevent: Outcomes of a Global Dialogue to Counter Terrorist Abuse of the Nonprofit Sector," June 2013, http://globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/CGCC_Prevent-Protect-Report_pgs.pdf.

Furthermore, many civil society organizations already have existing programming that may not have a primary CVE objective but may nonetheless have attendant CVE benefits. There were concerns that, in some instances, governments and international actors are requesting that organizations expand the scope of their programming to include CVE objectives and activities but with little or no additional support or resources. Beyond the administrative challenges was a concern among groups that their work might be instrumentalized to serve agencies and objectives that are otherwise at odds with their advocacy efforts.

Security Threats

A common challenge voiced by civil society actors across a number of sectors is that association with counterterrorism and CVE activities may endanger their staff and operations. Participants in several workshops shared stories of themselves or colleagues being threatened, targeted, or attacked by violent extremist groups in the region or, in some cases, by governmental actors if their work was perceived as compromising national security. This is particularly the case with civil society organizations that are perceived to be associated with or supported by foreign, particularly Western, governments. Participants acknowledged that these security concerns make it difficult to have positive and meaningful interactions with government officials and law enforcement practitioners even though this is often critical to their work. Moreover, security concerns often impeded access to sites of conflict or terrorism or participants or victims of attacks, making it difficult for civil society organizations to develop responsive initiatives.

Limited Trust and Dialogue

Participants acknowledged intraregional political tensions and disputes as an obstacle to regional cooperation, but many also noted that strained relationships at the national level between governments and civil society actors pose a challenge to counterterrorism and CVE engagement. To an extent, the sometimes repressive counterterrorism frameworks in many countries were associated with the history of colonial administration in the region. Participants pointed out that these counterterrorism instruments could be used by governments against the opposition or civil society. They noted that governmental actors were often wary of civil society organizations that are perceived as working

with communities or populations that may have grievances against the state or whose work might be seen as compromising national security. On the other hand, civil society organizations are cautious about their own association with government as it might undermine their credibility and legitimacy with certain constituencies, partners, and stakeholders.

Challenges in Engaging With Nontraditional Security Actors

CVE is a policy dimension new to many practitioners and civil society organizations, although their work on development, governance, education, and media was often critical to addressing many of the grievances and drivers that can give rise to and support for violent extremism. CVE efforts promote engagement with civil society actors, the private sector, and other line ministries that focus on enhancing community resilience, but many nontraditional security actors in South Asia remain wary of cooperating with or even being linked to the securitized, or “hard,” responses to terrorism that have often restricted their operational space and limited their ability to continue existing work.

Moreover, many civil society organizations highlighted that this chasm and the bureaucratic silos between development and security professionals inhibit the exchange of knowledge and an integrated approach to the development of tailored and multidimensional CVE policies and programs. Additionally, development actors in South Asia remain cautious about engaging on counterterrorism or CVE issues due to the negative association with the “global war on terror,” which has fueled resentment among local populations and has been exploited by terrorist organizations in promoting their violent narratives as a challenge to what they perceive as the social, cultural, and political domination of the West.

Lack of a Gender Dimension in Counterterrorism and CVE Policies and Programming

Participants in several workshops underscored that counterterrorism and CVE policies and programming do not adequately reflect a gender perspective, despite greater recognition for inclusive policies among many governments and international organizations. Women and girls often bear the brunt of extremist violence, and their access to education, economic opportunity, and sociopolitical expression is often constrained by these

groups.⁶¹ These effects are illustrated all too clearly by attacks on girls' education, sexual and gender-based violence, and threats to limit women's participation in the public sphere. Civil society practitioners voiced concern that such ideologies and actions could roll back gains and hard-won achievements made by women in South Asia, particularly in the areas of education, health care, economic well-being, and social and political mobilization.

It was noted that CVE also suffers from a lack of understanding of the different roles of women in violence and conflict. Policies, strategies, and programs should reflect the different roles of women, including as active sympathizers and supporters of terrorist causes and violent extremist ideologies or powerful preventers and agents of change. Yet, civil society practitioners voiced concern that operating in conflict-affected or otherwise sensitive environments could imperil women's groups and their supporters and that the women's rights agenda could become co-opted and instrumentalized by counterterrorism and CVE actors.⁶² On the other hand, others have acknowledged that many women's groups and civil society actors had been involved in challenging extremist groups by promoting gender equality, women's rights, and improved governance and that these efforts should inform regional CVE efforts.⁶³

Outcomes and Recommendations

The workshops and consultations yielded a number of notable achievements in terms of promoting civil society's efforts to strengthen regional cooperation and capacities on counterterrorism and CVE in South Asia.

Perhaps the most significant of these achievements has been the process itself, which facilitated regular dialogue and interaction among civil society representatives, experts, and practitioners from all eight SAARC member states. It should be noted that the South Asia civil society workshops were developed against the background of a number of regional complexities that

were highlighted by local partners. These included long-standing political tensions, high walls of sovereignty, and a reluctance to be seen as interventionist in security matters, ongoing conflicts, and numerous development challenges.

Second, the process contributed to narrowing the knowledge gap about CVE in South Asia by providing substantive training and resources to an expanding pool of civil society experts and practitioners. A number of important lessons and good practices emerged from these discussions that could help to inform national and regional CVE approaches, whether in South Asia or other regions facing similar challenges.

Third, the process helped to inform analysis and advance a number of resolutions adopted by the UN Security Council. For instance, the process contributed to advancing Resolution 2129 by promoting engagement between CTED and civil society actors, experts, academics, and practitioners to identify emerging trends, needs, and priorities in South Asia, which helped inform CTED's analysis and information gathering on the region. Notably, in adopting Resolution 2253, the Security Council requested strategic analysis of the threat posed by ISIL; and the discussions and policy documents from this process helped to inform CTED's understanding of the dynamics and concerns in the region on this threat from the perspective of civil society, experts, and practitioners. Furthermore, the process helped to inform policy-level discussions around Resolution 2242 on women, peace, and security, which among other things addressed women's roles in CVE and terrorism.

Fourth, the process facilitated the establishment of an informal network of nongovernmental experts and practitioners on CVE in South Asia that subsequently has increasingly influenced national and regional debates, including through participation in a regional follow-up workshop to the White House CVE summit, which explored ways civil society can contribute to CVE efforts in South and Central Asia. Building on

⁶¹ UN Women, *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325*, 2015, pp. 79, 110, and 168, <http://wps.unwomen.org/~media/files/un%20women/wps/highlights/unw-global-study-1325-2015.pdf>.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 222.

⁶³ See Rafia Bhulai, Allison Peters, and Christina Nemr, "From Policy to Action: Advancing an Integrated Approach to Women and Countering Violent Extremism," Global Center and Inclusive Security, June 2016, <http://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/From-Policy-to-Action-Women-and-PCVE-Policy-Brief-Global-Center-Inclusive-Security.pdf>; Sanam Naraghi Anderlini et al., "Uncomfortable Truths, Unconventional Wisdoms: Women's Perspectives on Violent Extremism and Security Interventions," Women's Alliance for Security Leadership, March 2016, <http://static1.squarespace.com/static/56706b861c121098acf6e2e8/t/56f1c3a786db43ca1c9b6cb1/1458684919130/WASL+Brief+No.1+Full.pdf>.

this, since early 2016, the Global Center has deepened its partnership with a number of these South Asian civil society actors through a series of innovative pilot CVE initiatives in the region.⁶⁴

The key ideas and recommendations that emerged during this civil society and experts process are based on the gaps and needs identified by civil society actors, as well as counterterrorism and CVE practitioners and experts in South Asia. These recommendations are intended to help national, regional, and international policymakers and practitioners develop more contextually tailored, locally driven, and sustainable approaches to addressing violent extremism and terrorism in the region.

1. *Strengthen regional and international CVE and counterterrorism cooperation.* These efforts could include facilitating a sustained SAARC dialogue for policymakers and civil society organizations on implementation of national, regional, and international CVE and counterterrorism strategies and programs, including the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Such a platform could also help to deepen engagement on counterterrorism and CVE between SAARC and other multilateral and regional bodies, such as the United Nations, GCTF, European Union, and Commonwealth Secretariat. These efforts could include workshops for governmental technical experts and civil society practitioners to share CVE good practices and knowledge with neighboring regions, including Central and Southeast Asia.
2. *Adopt a multisectoral, multidisciplinary, and inclusive approach to terrorism and violent extremism.* For instance, national CVE strategies and programs should be developed in consultation with nontraditional security actors, such as practitioners from the education, development, and human rights sectors, and with a variety of civil society actors, including faith and community leaders, women, and youth, to help identify potential sources of violent extremism and grievances and ways of addressing these. National and local policymakers and practitioners who focus on CVE or related work should also consult with civil society organizations to keep up to date on community needs and priorities and work with and support civil society organizations to respond to those needs. This could include expanding the pathways and mechanisms for governmental and law enforcement actors and community members to discuss concerns and insecurity issues. Additionally, efforts should be made to strengthen partnerships with private sector and educational institutions to develop locally resonant communications strategies to challenge violent extremist narratives and to promote unity and social cohesion through, for example, the use of sport, arts, and culture.
3. *Promote the counterterrorism and CVE awareness and capacity building of media practitioners.* This could include professional development opportunities and training courses for media practitioners, including vernacular practitioners. Trainings could focus on topics such as improving reporting standards to help avoid incitement or developing voluntary media guidelines for engaging with victims. Additionally, platforms could be facilitated through existing regional media associations such as SAFMA for media practitioners to share expertise and experience in reporting on counterterrorism and CVE issues. Such a platform could contribute to a roster of regional media experts and practitioners who can speak on CVE-related issues and draw on their expertise to raise awareness about recruitment methods and extremist narratives and to help inform the development of culturally and regionally appropriate, sensitive counternarratives.
4. *Support evidence-based research to inform and improve the effectiveness of CVE strategies and programs.* For instance, local researchers could be commissioned to produce studies that investigate local perceptions of violent extremist narratives, particularly elements of support or

⁶⁴ See Global Center, “Preventing and Responding to Violent Extremism in South and Central Asia: Strengthening Regional Civil Society Capacities: Project Description,” November 2015, <http://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/11-Nov-2015-1510-SCA-Small-Grants-project-description.pdf>; Global Center, “Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism in South and Central Asia: The Role of Civil Society,” n.d., <http://www.globalcenter.org/events/preventing-and-countering-violent-extremism-in-south-and-central-asia-the-role-of-civil-society/> (accessed 2 December 2016).

rejection of violent extremist and terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda, ISIL, and the Taliban, and identify resources that can credibly challenge violent extremist narratives through traditional and social media. Support should also be given to researchers and organizations to disseminate and archive their work, for instance, by facilitating connections with relevant research institutions and networks, such as Hedayah and the RESOLVE Network, that can publish their work and make it available to wider audiences.

5. *Provide tailored and coordinated support to civil society to strengthen their involvement in and impact on CVE efforts.* Training and technical assistance should be provided for civil society or organizations interested in deepening engagement on CVE issues, including increasing understanding of current UN and GCTF frameworks, resources, grant management, and financial administration. Support should be prioritized for grassroots initiatives, including those led by women and youth, for instance, through the provision of small grants to test pilot projects or by ensuring bilateral and multilateral funding streams through mechanisms such as the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund. Donors should also utilize ongoing coordination efforts and established donor working groups to map CVE initiatives in the region to avoid duplication and establish an institutionalized monitoring and evaluation system to measure the effectiveness of programs.
6. *Advance women's participation and gender inclusivity in counterterrorism and CVE policy and programming.* For instance, facilitating regular regional dialogues would not only expand networking opportunities for women in the civil society and security sectors, but also generate gender-sensitive research, programming ideas, and policy recommendations to address the issues that have inhibited women's participation in the design, implementation, and evaluation of CVE policies and programs in the region. At the national level, CVE policymakers should consult with representatives working on Resolution 1325 national action plans on women, peace, and security to ensure women's participation in the development and implementation of CVE national strategies.
7. *Facilitate counterterrorism and CVE training for frontline officials with a follow-up mentorship program.* This could be achieved through a series of CVE trainings for frontline officials, including government, law enforcement, and military officials, to emphasize preventive approaches in countering terrorism and violent extremism, including gender-sensitive and community-oriented policing and engagement and the disengagement, rehabilitation, and reintegration of violent extremists. A mentorship program focused specifically on CVE issues could be established within existing regional institutions so that participants in CVE training can share the materials and outcomes with colleagues. Furthermore, virtual programs and web-based training, including follow-up training and refresher courses, for officials could be provided where feasible and appropriate to keep them updated on emerging issues and appropriate responses.
8. *Develop national rehabilitation and reintegration strategies, interventions, and programs for violent extremist offenders and returning FTFs.* These programs should be developed in consultation with prison staff; civil society actors, including volunteers; community leaders; health care professionals; former violent extremists; and private sector individuals. Additionally, interventions and programs should be based on individual risk assessments and should consider the focus (e.g., at the individual or group level) and location of the program (e.g., prison, halfway house, or community). Additionally, civil society organizations could be resourced and equipped to provide a range of program components, such as psychological counseling; faith-based counseling; education; vocational training; the utilization of sports, arts, and culture; and the provision of aftercare support, mentorship programs, and continued monitoring.

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