East Africa Civil Society Organizations Hub

BACKGROUND
Civil society organizations (CSOs) play a key role in addressing conditions conducive to conflict, violence, and violent extremism. CSOs help to give voice to marginalized and vulnerable groups, provide a constructive outlet for the redress of grievances, and advance development and governance initiatives. They work at the community level on issues relevant to preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE), including by facilitating inter- and intra-religious dialogue, empowering youth and women, and bolstering peace building and peace maintenance mechanisms. CSOs are also increasingly working on P/CVE-specific issues, such as research on the drivers of violent extremism, developing and credibly delivering counter-narratives, and supporting the rehabilitation and reintegration of terrorist offenders, victims, and radicalized individuals.

The importance of CSO involvement in P/CVE programs and policies was recognized by the United Nations Secretary-General in his 2016 Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism. In East Africa, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Center of Excellence for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (ICEPCVE) has been established to provide dedicated support, training, and research related to P/CVE and counter-messaging, and serve as a resource for governments and civil society from across the region.

Yet numerous challenges remain for CSOs and other community actors working to effectively engage on P/CVE policies and programming, particularly in East Africa. There is a trust deficit between government and civil society in many countries that undermines efforts to establish collaborative partnerships on P/CVE, particularly for CSOs engaging with marginalized groups or communities perceived as at risk for violent extremism by the state. The large number of CSOs also present a challenge, with governments and donors often engaging only a small set of known actors who may not fully represent the diversity of perspectives, priorities, and experiences. Further, there are few platforms for sustained information sharing and dialogue among CSOs and between CSOs and governments, regional bodies, and international actors and forums.

ABOUT THIS PROJECT
To address these challenges, the East Africa Civil Society Organizations Hub (CSO Hub) was established to support and deepen a “network of networks” for national and regional CSOs and other independent actors such as academics, religious leaders, and community representatives. Facilitated by the Global Center on Cooperative Security with initial support from the Government of the Netherlands, the CSO Hub is an independent network of civil society organizations and leaders engaged in P/CVE in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda.
The primary objectives of the East Africa CSO Hub are to:

- support and deepen national and regional networks of CSOs engaged in P/CVE in East Africa;

- support CSOs in developing a representative mechanism that facilitates effective engagement and collaboration with governments and regional and international bodies on the development and implementation of P/CVE strategies, policies, and programs; and

- strengthen the capacities of CSOs to develop effective and efficient P/CVE programming, including through peer-to-peer experience sharing.

The East Africa CSO Hub provides a mechanism for CSOs across the region to share expertise and best practices on P/CVE, discuss national and regional priorities and challenges, and ensure that a broad range of voices and priorities are reflected in local, national, regional, and international policy and donor assistance platforms. The CSO Hub provides capacity-building assistance for smaller or emerging CSOs to help strengthen their program development, outreach, and evaluation capacities, as well as expand their role in P/CVE policy development and discourse.

In order to strengthen mechanisms for engagement with national governments and regional bodies, the East Africa CSO Hub includes a rotating body of “National Conveners,” CSO Hub members who are regularly nominated by the wider membership to serve in a representative and convening function. National Conveners help navigate the political complexities regarding CSO representation on P/CVE issues, gathering and voicing the concerns and priorities of the membership at national and regional meetings and in communication with a broader range of stakeholders.

The East Africa CSO Hub works in regular and close collaboration with IGAD, ICEP CVE, and other intergovernmental stakeholders to support community resilience and capacity development on P/CVE in the region. This includes partnering with ICEP CVE to support local organizations in conducting research and capacity needs assessments, developing a virtual resource library and digital connectivity platform, and supporting sensitization and expanded engagement on P/CVE-related themes with government officials. The CSO Hub and ICEP CVE work together to ensure a sustained platform for civil society voices in P/CVE discourse, including through engaging the National Conveners to reflect CSO perspectives and priorities in ICEP CVE’s structures and policy forums.

About the Global Center on Cooperative Security
For over a decade, the Global Center’s policy analysis, context-sensitive research, and capacity development programming have supported comprehensive and sustainable responses to complex international security challenges. In collaboration with governments, regional and international bodies, civil society partners, and a global network of expert practitioners, the Global Center fosters stronger multilateral partnerships in support of inclusive security policies and programming in East, North, and West Africa, the Middle East, and South and Southeast Asia. In East Africa and the Horn of Africa, the Global Center has been engaged in a diverse portfolio of projects to support community-driven efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism, human rights and rule of law-based criminal justice policies and practices, and more inclusive and context-sensitive anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism regimes.