



Civil Society Dialogue Network Geographic Meeting

Civil society perspectives on lessons learned from conflict prevention and peacebuilding approaches to addressing the root causes of (i) forced migration and (ii) violent extremism in the Horn of Africa

Thursday 9 June 2016, Brussels

MEETING REPORT

Background

The overall objective of this Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN) Geographic Meeting was to enable civil society practitioners to provide their analysis of the situation in the Horn of Africa¹ and to make recommendations on how the EU could adopt a conflict-sensitive approach to all of its actions aimed at (i) countering/preventing violent extremism (CVE/PVE) and (ii) tackling the root causes of forced migration in the region.

The meeting brought together approximately 70 participants, including representatives of peacebuilding civil society organisations (CSOs) working in the region, and officials from both the European Commission (EC) and the European External Action Service (EEAS).

This report is a summary of the discussions and the key recommendations² made by individual participants during the meeting. The views expressed may not be attributed to any participating individual or institution nor do they necessarily represent the views of all of the meeting participants, the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO) and its member organisations, or the co-organisers (EEAS and EC).

Introduction

During the introductory session, the EC and the EEAS provided an overview of the policies and instruments which the EU is using to support peace, stability, sustainable growth and prosperity in the Horn of Africa.

The EC stated that the security-development nexus was gaining importance for the institution as the lens for addressing the root causes of conflict and instability in the Horn of Africa. It stressed that the implementation of the [EU Horn of Africa Regional Action Plan 2015-2020](#) would reflect this commitment and would aim to strengthen partner countries' resilience and capacities to tackle push and pull factors in radicalisation and forced migration in a sustainable way.

¹ The Horn of Africa is defined by the EU as the countries belonging to the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) (i.e. Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda).

² The Key Recommendations sent to participants on 16 June 2016 have been incorporated in the present Meeting Report.

The EC further highlighted that the [Research and Evidence Facility \(REF\)](#), which is funded under the Horn of Africa window of the [EU Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa \(EUTF\)](#), would be very important in facilitating the understanding of local contexts and in ensuring that EU interventions have a positive impact.

The EEAS stated that, consistent with its [Comprehensive Approach to External Conflicts and Crises](#), the EU aimed to make the best use of all its collective resources and instruments, including high-level political dialogue and coordinated diplomatic actions, in order to address radicalisation and forced migration in the Horn of Africa, taking into account the political realities and needs in the region.

In their initial comments, civil society participants highlighted the lack of clear terminology on PVE/CVE, the misperceptions attached to religion as an ideological driver of terrorism, and the dangers of short-sighted, security-driven responses to CVE which are often perceived by communities as an extension of the counterterrorism (CT) approach. One participant mentioned justice and accountability as key elements in addressing underlying community grievances and in understanding internal sources of resilience before any EU intervention.

While they acknowledged that VE can itself be a driver of migration and forced displacement, a number of civil society participants cautioned against conflating the two issues. The EC assured them that it was aware of this risk, and that steps were being taken to ensure distinct approaches.

Several civil society participants questioned the EU's engagement with the Sudanese government, including the limited official condemnation of human rights abuses. They also raised concerns about the channelling of EU development assistance through state institutions which only allow for the limited involvement of CSOs and other local actors. The EEAS stated that, despite difficult relations with the Sudanese government given human rights issues, the referral of Sudan's leadership to the International Criminal Court (ICC), and the country's non-ratification of the revised Cotonou Agreement, the EU intended to remain engaged in Sudan and pursue avenues of dialogue, also on migration, in view of the country's key role as a transit route for refugees and other migrants.

The EC added that it was exploring options for doing more upstream conflict prevention work in Sudan, including through the EUTF, and stated that part of EU funding would be channelled through international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), EU Member States' implementing agencies and local CSOs.

A number of civil society participants also questioned the sustainability of the African Union (AU) Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). In response, the EEAS admitted that, despite some success at pushing back Al-Shabaab, the Mission remained extremely fragmented in a context of increased insecurity.

Conflict-sensitive approaches to PVE / countering radicalisation in the Horn of Africa

During this session, civil society participants shared lessons learned from CVE/PVE activities in the Horn of Africa and provided recommendations on how the EU could ensure that its CVE/PVE interventions take into account structural conflict risks and support upstream conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts.

Several civil society participants stressed that all EU actions aimed at CVE/PVE/countering radicalisation in the Horn of Africa should be underpinned by an overarching strategy, rather than by government-led, security-driven CT measures, and should seek to involve the moderate

Muslim community. They urged the EU to engage in constructive and inclusive dialogue with opposition parties and civil society actors. They also asked the EU to put greater emphasis on holding partner governments accountable for human rights violations.

A number of civil society participants also highlighted that addressing economic factors alone was insufficient to tackle the issue of home-grown terrorism. They stated that engaging with both individual violent extremists and the groups to which they belong was an important step towards a holistic approach to CVE/PVE which could help to address less tangible issues such as identity and belonging, and the historical grievances underlying them. They suggested that the EU should give particular consideration to amplifying existing communal capacities, including through harnessing traditional mechanisms for conflict resolution.

With the lines between state-building and humanitarian actions becoming increasingly blurred, some civil society participants asked the EU to create spaces for principled action so that those NGOs which do not want to be implicated in devising political solutions would be able to decide for themselves which elements of CVE they wish to address.

A number of civil society participants stated that the relationship between VE and other forms of violence needed to be explored more deeply and due consideration be given to the specificity of each context. They highlighted local context analysis as decisive in understanding local risk factors and the interplay between the key drivers of radicalisation, and they called for highly contextualised, innovative and proactive responses to VE. They also emphasised the need for better rehabilitation and reintegration processes for demobilised fighters in order to ensure that they do not become radicalised and/or recruited by extremist groups.

Regarding programming, several civil society participants warned the EU that using the CVE/PVE label when it was not strictly necessary could be counterproductive. They advised the EU to avoid explicitly directing funding at CVE activities and to support actors which are working on issues such as building community cohesion and facilitating religious dialogue instead.

Some civil society participants stated that significant EU funding in the region was going into what local people often perceived as negative counter-messaging. They recommended that the EU focused on positive messaging instead, both to avoid fuelling hatred and to give young people a sense of belonging.

The EEAS explained that the role of youth in CVE/PVE was one of the key topics addressed by the [Global Counter Terrorism Forum's Horn of Africa Working Group](#) meeting co-chaired by the EU and Turkey in late May in Djibouti. Concerns raised in Djibouti included issues of identity and belonging, religious grievances and ethnic tensions, lack of social and economic opportunities. The EEAS stated that it was taking steps to incorporate this feedback into its future action.

A number of civil society participants stated that many EU-funded CVE initiatives were focused on certain countries (e.g. Kenya and Somalia) at the expense of others. Given that VE has a transnational dimension, they recommended that the EU should also fund projects in Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Sudan where the issue had not been sufficiently addressed. They also advised the EU to map its existing CVE/PVE activities, to assess what had been (un-)successful and to capitalise on lessons learned when developing future actions.

Conflict-sensitive approaches to tackling the root causes of forced migration in the Horn of Africa

During this session, civil society participants were invited to provide their analysis of the situation in the Horn of Africa and to make recommendations on how the EU could adopt a conflict-

sensitive approach to addressing the causes and drivers of instability, including violent conflict, leading to forced migration and forced displacement at regional, national and local levels.

They repeatedly highlighted the need for system-wide, multi-stakeholder conflict analysis in order to further understand the push and pull factors in forced migration in the Horn of Africa, and they stressed its particular importance for conflicts in border areas in which participatory and inclusive approaches, involving local people, through intra- and inter-community dialogue and trust-building mechanisms are required.

Some civil society participants recommended that the EU should place more emphasis on analysing the conflict sensitivity of the policies and partnership agreements on which its relationships with the countries in the Horn of Africa are based. They urged the EU to be more vocal in expressing concern and criticism regarding human rights violations committed by governments in the region, and to pay particular attention to the issue of good governance which was crucial to ensuring that subsequent actions would address the root causes of migration. They also asked the EU to assess in detail partner governments' handling of the migration-development nexus in order to identify and minimise the unintended negative impacts of their policies.

Regarding EU programming in the Horn of Africa, several civil society participants urged the EU to ensure that its long-term development aid perspective for the region would not be overshadowed by the current pressure to manage the migration crisis in Europe or by short-term interventions such as those related to the [Khartoum Process](#).

The EC highlighted the EUTF as an important instrument for the implementation of the [Action Plan](#) which was adopted at the Valletta summit on migration in November 2015. In this context, participants called for more transparency in the decision-making procedures on priority-setting and funding allocation.

A number of civil society participants proposed the establishment of conflict-sensitive funding standards in all sectors. These could require funding applicants to conduct analysis as an integral part of their proposed intervention and to reflect conflict-sensitive practices in their monitoring and evaluation. Some civil society participants also recommended conditioning EU development assistance for addressing the root causes of forced migration through the use of specific benchmarks and criteria for measuring progress towards implementation.

They also recommended that the EU should provide funding for building the capacities of CSOs and other actors in its partner countries on integrating conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding into their activities. One civil society participant highlighted the need to support communities living in border areas which are often neglected by national governments and which often suffer from protracted under-development, marginalisation and a lack of essential services. Another civil society participant suggested that the EU should focus on reducing the barriers to mobility at the intra-regional level in the Horn of Africa as a means of contributing to a reduction in migration flows to the EU.

A number of civil society participants raised the issue of the planned closure of the Dadaab refugee camp in the north of Kenya and they called on the EU to ensure that the process of repatriation would be conflict-sensitive, giving particular attention to vulnerable groups, including women and children. In this context, they asked the EU to help to build bridges between returnees and their communities in order to address land and other justice-related issues, and to facilitate the voluntary repatriation and integration of displaced people back to Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan.

Recalling the recent EU Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) conclusions on the [EU approach to forced displacement and development](#) and on the [external aspects of migration](#), the EEAS stressed its

commitment to working with civil society in the region to help strengthen the resilience of both host and return communities, and to increase the capacities of national and regional authorities to better manage forced migration in a conflict-sensitive manner.

The EEAS also highlighted two specific examples of projects funded under the EUTF's Regional Development and Protection Programme (RDPP) for the Horn of Africa: RDPP Kenya's flagship initiative '[Support to the Kalobeyei Development Programme](#)' and [RDPP Ethiopia](#). The EEAS mentioned that the EU Delegation (EUD) to Ethiopia had consulted with civil society in the region and was currently preparing guidelines for an open call for proposals for the implementation of the RDPP Ethiopia to be launched shortly.

Finally, some civil society participants asked the EU to try to address the linkages between forced migration and VE as part of its Comprehensive Approach to External Conflicts and Crises. In this context, they suggested that the EU should try to devise actions aimed at empowering young people and at increasing their economic and social self-reliance as a means of helping to prevent migration and to increase resilience against recruitment by extremist groups.

Closing remarks

In its concluding remarks, the EC acknowledged the key role of civil society working in the Horn of Africa in informing the EU's approach to addressing VE and forced migration. It reiterated the need to mainstream conflict-sensitivity throughout policy and programming processes, and the importance of understanding local contexts and underlying grievances before deciding on EU responses.

The EC also highlighted the EUTF-funded REF project as an example of a mechanism which could facilitate a more evidence-based approach to inform the EU's analysis on CVE and forced migration. It stressed its commitment to involving CSOs in the REF and stated that lessons learned from piloting it in the Horn of Africa could potentially enable its replication in the other regions covered by the EUTF.

Referring to participants' comments about the EU's engagement with problematic governments, the EC emphasised its commitment to trying to ensure that its actions would not legitimise poor governance or predatory behaviour. It also stated that it would remain very cautious when supporting actions in the area of security enforcement, applying the 'Do No Harm' principle, while endeavouring to take a conflict-sensitive approach to all interventions and placing good governance and human rights at the top of its agenda.

While enumerating the challenges which the EU is currently facing in dealing with the refugee crisis, the EC highlighted civil society's essential role as part of the solution. In this context, it reiterated its aim to remain engaged with CSOs both in Brussels and in the Horn of Africa as it reflects on theories of change in the context of EU approaches to migration, VE and radicalisation in the region.

The EC thanked the civil society participants for their contributions to the meeting and assured them that their recommendations would be communicated to the relevant EU delegations (EUDs).

Civil Society Dialogue Network

The Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN) is a mechanism for dialogue between civil society and EU policy-makers on issues related to peace and conflict. It is co-financed by the European Union (Instrument for Stability). It is managed by the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO), a civil society network, in co-operation with the European Commission (EC) and the European External Action Service (EEAS). The second phase of the CSDN will last from 2014 to 2016. For more information, please visit the [EPLO website](#).