

# The First Decade of the Global Counterterrorism Forum: *Monitoring, Evaluating and Looking Forward*

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# Executive summary

The tenth anniversary (2011-2021) of the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) is an appropriate occasion to reflect upon and assess the Forum's work. Such an evaluation can help improve the implementation of GCTF practices, enhance the relevance, impact and efficiency of the GCTF, and contribute to its sustainability.

This evaluation is built around three main objectives, which are based on input from the GCTF Co-Chairs, Working Group Co-Chairs, Initiative Co-Leads, its Administrative Unit and the T.M.C. Asser Instituut.<sup>1</sup> These three main objectives are:

- 1. Provide a systematic overview of the activities and outcomes of the GCTF over the last ten years, “to tell the GCTF story”;**
- 2. Contribute reflections on the way forward for the GCTF as it enters its second decade;**
- 3. Propose a monitoring and evaluation system (including the necessary preconditions, e.g. resources, tools, frameworks), which the GCTF can adopt and implement for future events and activities to ensure monitoring and evaluation of the GCTF on a more structural basis.**

This evaluation makes use of two forms of evaluation to gain insight into the abovementioned objectives: a process evaluation and an outcome evaluation. The process evaluation monitors the GCTF's activities (outputs). The outcome evaluation looks at the actual effect of activities and seeks to monitor whether and to what degree the activities have met their objectives. In the course of its activities, the GCTF has not developed a standardized methodology for maintaining, analyzing, and publicizing inputs or outcomes of its activities which makes monitoring and evaluation more challenging. We used a mixed-method approach with the following forms of data-collection: document analysis, observations during the *GCTF Strategic Vision for the Next Decade* consultation rounds, a questionnaire (N=35) and interviews (N=31) with a mixture of GCTF Members, Inspired Institutions, the Administrative Unit, United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact (UN Global CT Compact) entities, civil society organizations and non-government organizations (CSO/NGOs), organizations that act as GCTF implementers, academic institutions/think tanks, international/regional organizations and individuals involved in the early years of the GCTF.

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This is the first time the GCTF as a whole is monitored and evaluated. The most important conclusions and recommendations are presented in this chapter.

## The GCTF story – output of a decade

The GCTF is a multilateral platform of 30 Members. The GCTF works to support and catalyze the implementation of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, the UN Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism and relevant UN Security Council Resolutions and is committed to promoting the involvement of partners, such as non-GCTF member countries, international organizations, members of civil society, the academia and the private sector in the Forum's various activities to encourage greater collaboration and to share expertise, experiences and good practices across regions. The practical use and implementation of GCTF framework documents, tools and manuals is the result of efforts by the Forum as well as the engagement of international, regional and sub-regional partners, including the Inspired Institutions: the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF), *Hedayah* and the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law (IIJ).

Over the past decade, the GCTF held 232 meetings, on average 23 per year, with the participation of GCTF Members, as well as over 160 non-member countries and organizations. These non-member countries and or-

1. The project was granted by the Governments of Canada and the United States to the T.M.C. Asser Instituut. The team carrying out the evaluation was the main liaison between the funders of this evaluation, the GCTF Co-Chairs, and the GCTF Administrative Unit. The team coordinated communications amongst those involved, managed the timeline for the project and provided substantive and technical support for various aspects of the evaluation (e.g. via the development of the tri-lingual M&E questionnaire and the interviews). The research team consisted of M&E expert Dr. Amy-Jane Gielen, an independent researcher and consultant at Evidence Based Work (EBW), Dr. Christophe Paulussen, senior researcher at the T.M.C. Asser Instituut and Zsófia Baumann MA, a junior researcher at the T.M.C. Asser Instituut.

organizations include the GCTF Inspired Institutions, several bodies of the United Nations system, international and regional organizations, civil society organizations, academia, as well as representatives of the private sector. While the Forum has a fixed number of members, its apolitical nature and regional priorities encourage a wide participation of non-member countries and organizations to make sure GCTF framework documents are developed taking regional and local priorities into consideration.

The GCTF takes pride in being a flexible and nimble organization that, due to its informal nature and consensus-based decision-making, is able to react swiftly to newly emerging challenges. This is clearly illustrated by the number of initiatives that were launched over the past decade. While in the first years of the GCTF an average of one initiative was running per year, this number has grown to four in recent years. Initiatives can, for example, reflect priorities agreed by working groups, elaborate on an already existing GCTF framework document or address an emerging trend, offering an effective mechanism to provide practical recommendations and guidance. As a result, GCTF working groups and initiatives produced 36 framework documents and four practical toolkits and manuals with over 400 good practices developed to aid practitioners in their work in countering terrorism (CT) and preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). The framework documents are considered one of the biggest achievements of the Forum, due to their topical nature and the consensus-based process through which they were developed.

- **The framework documents that are deemed most relevant and most often used by both Members and non-members are: *The Hague-Marrakech Memorandum, Rome Memorandum, Neuchâtel Memorandum, Rabat Memorandum, Abuja Recommendations, Glicion Recommendations and the Good Practices on Addressing the Challenge of Returning Families of Foreign Terrorist Fighters.***

### **GCTF structure: set-up, added value, funding and online visibility**

The relevance of the GCTF is largely due to its ability to identify emerging global CT threats while retaining its apolitical and informal nature and providing a platform for timely multi-stakeholder discussions. Members feel it is important that the nimbleness, and most importantly the apolitical nature of the GCTF, is protected, as this is what makes the GCTF unique. The majority of respondents of the questionnaire feel that it is also important to protect the informal structure, non-binding nature and consensus-based decision making. They have also indicated that there seems to be room for improvement in terms of the action-orientation of the GCTF. Among a selection of Members there is a strong desire to focus on the practical use of existing framework documents.

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In general, respondents are satisfied with the GCTF's bodies, but they do have suggestions for improvement. To (further) improve satisfaction levels with GCTF bodies, we suggest the following based on the input of our respondents:

- **Formulate and communicate a Terms of Reference for the Administrative Unit.**
- **Extend the role of the Administrative Unit for more quality assurance, knowledge management and alignment between working groups and encourage sufficient funding.**
- **Consider a more enhanced and coordinating role for the GCTF Co-Chairs in close cooperation with the Working Group Co-Chairs and the Administrative Unit to signal overlap and duplication between working groups.**
- **Allocate time at the Coordination Committee Meetings for more substantive discussions on issues such as funding, monitoring and evaluation and more integration of human rights in the GCTF's output.**
- **Consider adjusting the format of the Ministerial Plenary Meeting to ensure more political buy-in (e.g. ministers sharing success stories).**
- **Consider implementing more (interactive) meeting formats.**
- **Provide more clarity on the aim and purpose of the regional working groups.**
- **Focus on more practical use of the existing framework documents.**

Respondents feel that the GCTF has added value in comparison to other similar organizations in the field. Its core values, flexibility, the speed with which it reacts to new trends, the relevancy of its documents and its informal nature were most mentioned. For the future of the GCTF they see the most added value in implementing ex-

isting framework documents. This however, brings a set of questions and challenges. The GCTF was not created to carry out implementation, nor does it develop documents that are legally binding. Implementation of existing GCTF framework documents therefore should be balanced with further document development and it should not prevent the GCTF from taking on new topics as Members see fit. A number of issues were suggested that the Forum can take on in the upcoming years which are further discussed in *Chapters 3 and 9*.

In terms of funding, this evaluation has made clear that most Members and respondents do not know how the GCTF is currently funded, whether the GCTF is financially sustainable and able to address new emerging threats. Nor is it clear what type of possible alternatives there are to funding (e.g. in-kind contributions). There is, however, a strong consensus that GCTF Members should be encouraged to contribute to the Forum's financial sustainability. This brings us to the following recommendations:

- **Provide an overview on an annual basis of what it costs to run the GCTF, Administrative Unit, Working Groups and Initiatives and what is currently funded by whom.**
- **Make the financial reporting a structural part of the GCTF agenda at the Coordination Committee Meetings.**

Since 2017, detailed website statistics are available on the use of the GCTF website. The GCTF website attracts an average of 94,785 views on an annual basis by on average between about 20,000 – 30,000 users. These users tend to be mainly from western countries. There is currently no benchmark for how many views and visitors the GCTF should attract. Most of the questionnaire respondents consider the usability, the general quality and the communicative value of the previous website average. During this evaluation and as the GCTF approached its 10-year anniversary, the GCTF website undergone modernization. Not all our interview respondents had visited the revised website, but those that have (mainly Members) were enthusiastic about the new look and feel, the adding of GCTF success stories and find that framework documents are better accessible. They were also enthusiastic about the GCTF's social media presence on Twitter.

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In sum, some of the respondents feel the GCTF could benefit from an overall communications strategy of which the website and social media presence are an integrated part. This has been developed (but only very recently) and tackles most of the issues addressed by respondents. Based on the feedback we propose the following:

- **Ensure the accessibility of the website (and GCTF outputs) for different target audiences in the three working languages (English, French and Arabic) of the GCTF.**
- **Set a benchmark for views and downloaded documents of the GCTF website based on this evaluation report.**
- **Ensure that the Administrative Unit has the means to regularly access and adequately evaluate the statistics of the GCTF website.**
- **Establish an active presence on LinkedIn to promote further social media presence of the GCTF.**

### **Size, membership, representation and participation**

The GCTF consists of 30 Members. Members were selected based on their experience in countering terrorism, resources and expertise in CT and P/CVE, while ensuring regional diversity. Although the Terms of Reference would allow for the GCTF to take on new members, there has been no changes to its size since the Forum was launched in 2011, despite interest from some countries in joining. It is commonly viewed that the limited size of the GCTF contributes to its nimble and flexible nature, as well as allowing for discussions to remain apolitical. These attributes are considered important GCTF values by Members. Many of the Members feel that these GCTF values could be jeopardized if new members join. Others question whether the current efficacy would really be endangered with adding a limited number of new members. They feel that new members can bring new perspectives to the table, potentially also additional funding and would give the GCTF better global representation and more relevance. It does not seem likely that the GCTF will reach consensus on this topic any time soon. However, based on

suggestions from respondents, the GCTF can become more inclusive and relevant without adding new members. Though data on participation in GCTF meetings is limited, it can be said that generally, almost all GCTF Members are present at the yearly Ministerial Plenary Meetings and biannual Coordination Committee Meetings. GCTF Members' participation is lower in working group and initiative meetings, with only half of the Members taking part regularly. Whether these are the same countries or different groups of GCTF Members can be further analyzed. With regards to the participation of partners (non-member countries and organizations), it can be noted that while they make up half of the participants in thematic working group and initiative meetings, there seems to be a higher representation of partners in the meetings of regional working groups, focusing on capacity-building in the East and West Africa regions. The inclusion of local and regional stakeholders in the work of the GCTF is a priority for the Forum in general, but with regards to the regional working groups it is even more prominent given their role in bringing together different stakeholders in their respective regions.

An important task of the GCTF is reaching out to and cooperating with other organizations. Most Members feel that the GCTF undertakes sufficient efforts to contact and cooperate with a wider range of actors. In fact, they praise the GCTF for reaching and engaging a broad array of stakeholders. However, they feel more can be done to engage human rights organizations, the private sector, civil society organizations and academia.

Non-members (e.g. CSOs, academia, partner organizations that act as GCTF implementers<sup>2</sup>) have made some very concrete recommendations to promote more inclusivity at GCTF events. Based on their input, we recommend the following:

- **Partner with regional organizations.**
- **Encourage that Members reach out to other bodies of government for potential participants.**
- **Make use of the networks of the Inspired Institutions.**
- **Communicate and implement clear(er) vetting procedures to include participants that are suggested by non-members.**
- **Provide standard reimbursement of travel and accommodation expenses to non-members and include this in the invitation to GCTF events.**
- **Maintain some virtual meetings post-pandemic.**

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### Inspired Institutions

The three Inspired Institutions – the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF), *Hedayah* and the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law (IIJ) – were established to carry out the implementation of the GCTF's framework documents. Several GCTF Members are on the boards of one or more of the Inspired Institutions, and indeed the answers given to the questionnaire show a general familiarity with them within the GCTF. However, there are Members and partners who, though familiar with who the Inspired Institutions are, do not know what they do and have not used their products. Several others outside of the GCTF, though familiar with the Inspired Institutions, do not connect them to the GCTF.

In general, it is clear from the interviews that the Inspired Institutions suffer from the lack of branding that affects the GCTF as a whole. Though they were set up in the early years of the Forum, the Inspired Institutions' relationship with the GCTF seems to lack strategic thinking. In collaboration with the Inspired Institutions themselves the GCTF should aim to define what the purpose of the Inspired Institutions is in relation to the GCTF, identify what it means to be 'inspired' and define what the 'privileged relationship' between the Forum and the three institutions entail. A clear definition of roles and responsibilities from both sides could also result in more visibility for the Inspired Institutions within the GCTF. This enhanced visibility could then, in turn, also contribute to the financial sustainability of the Inspired Institutions.

2. GCTF Working Group Co-Chairs or Initiative Leads may choose to draw on the support of expert organizations to contribute to the development of GCTF outputs. The unique expertise and diverse networks of implementing partners reinforce the work of Forum and contribute to addressing new and emerging terrorist threats.

Our respondents made several suggestions for both the Inspired Institutions and the GCTF on how they could do better in their interactions with each other. Based on these suggestions, we recommend the following:

- **Collectively define what ‘inspired’ means and what role the GCTF wants for these institutions, and how this is aligned with the role the Inspired Institutions see for themselves, as branding is essential.**
- **Increase the visibility of the Inspired Institutions in GCTF documents and newsletters.**
- **Involve the Inspired Institutions in document development and launch joint initiatives with them that builds on their expertise.**
- **Organize a biannual coordination meeting between the Inspired Institutions, and members of the UN Global CT Compact, where GCTF Members can also participate and can also gain a better understanding of the different roles and activities of each organization.**
- **Focus more on success stories during Coordinating Committee Meetings, enabling the Inspired Institutions to share more of their work.**
- **Include a session at the Ministerial Plenary Meetings on how GCTF Members contribute to and engage with the Inspired Institutions and present (via the Administrative Unit) opportunities for the ways they could.**
- **Create a community brand, for example a ‘GCTF Alliance’ that could include close partners, non-member countries, as well as the Inspired Institutions to encourage communications and a spread of ideas, while being informal and loosely aligned with the GCTF.**

## United Nations

In recent years, there has been a strong focus within the GCTF on building a “mutually reinforcing relationship” with the UN, as set forth in the Forum’s founding [Political Declaration](#). The GCTF outlined joint priorities with the UN in the *GCTF Analytical Report – Global and United: Towards an Enhanced GCTF and UN Cooperation* (2018) and have had regular coordination meetings on these priorities dating back to 2017. Though UN representatives have always been invited to participate in GCTF meetings, practical aspects of the cooperation between the two organizations has significantly intensified in the past five years: the number of jointly led initiatives have risen and the regular coordination meetings have become an important pillar of the UN-GCTF relationship. Participation in these coordination meetings have also gone up significantly over the course of the past couple of years.

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The importance of the relationship between the GCTF and the UN was acknowledged and highlighted by almost all respondents of the interviews, from both sides. The GCTF’s flexible and nimble nature, as well as the apolitical environment of its meetings, provide for a good working relationship. This is reflected by the fact that multiple UN agencies have expressed a desire for more cooperation, in addition to what the questionnaires also revealed. Responses given to the questionnaire indicate an overall satisfaction with the current working relationship, while there also seems to be an appetite for more cooperation, in the form of enhanced information sharing between the two organizations, or externally through more joint engagement with others, including civil society organizations and the private sector. However, this is while keeping in mind that more cooperation with the highly bureaucratic UN system could endanger the nimble and flexible nature of the GCTF. Challenges due to the size and set up of the UN, as well as the unbalanced relationship between the two organizations, have also been mentioned. Conversely, more visible and streamlined processes within the GCTF would also benefit the cooperation. To enhance future cooperation, UN Global CT Compact entities suggested a number of areas for collaboration where the GCTF can take the lead. These are listed in *Chapters 5 and 9*.

## Outcomes

Measuring the outcomes of the GCTF has proven difficult. This would have required the development of an M&E framework, with concrete goals and a standardized set of indicators, when the GCTF was set-up a decade ago, which then could have been monitored and evaluated throughout the years. Despite the lack of such a framework, it has been possible to gain insight into some important outcomes of the GCTF in terms of increased skills, knowledge and implementation of GCTF outputs. GCTF Members and partners consider the knowledge developed by the Forum useful. Their utility has been reflected in the questionnaires as respondents have indi-

cated that both their knowledge and skills have improved on many CT and P/CVE topics thanks to the GCTF. Respondents also highlighted some very concrete examples of how GCTF outputs have been implemented:

- *The Hague Memorandum on Good Practices for the Judiciary in Adjudicating Terrorism Offences* was used to train judges and prosecutors in the Western Balkans, the Middle East, the Czech Republic and Malta.
- *The Hague Memorandum on Good Practices for the Judiciary in Adjudicating Terrorism Offences* was also used as a basis curriculum to train Indian trial court level judges by the National Judicial Academy in Bhopal, India.
- Several GCTF good practices on risk assessment for deradicalization programs were used to improve a GCTF Member's risk assessment in correctional centers for detainees incarcerated for terrorism offences.
- The same Member also used the *Abuja Recommendations on the Collection, Use, and Sharing of Evidence for Purposes of Criminal Prosecution of Terrorist Suspects* to aid the military in capturing suspects and collecting evidence needed for the prosecution of terrorist cases, the *Rabat Memorandum on Good Practices for Effective Counterterrorism Practice in the Criminal Justice Sector* to channel suspects into the criminal justice system and the *Neuchâtel Memorandum on Good Practices for Juvenile Justice in a Counterterrorism Context* for integrating considerations for minors into the criminal justice system.
- A UN agency used the *Policy Toolkit for the Nexus between Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorism* to train a group of law enforcement officials and CSOs in Albania and another similar group online in Kenya.
- A different UN agency also used the *Policy Toolkit for the Nexus between Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorism* as part of their training in the Sahel region (in Burkina Faso, Chad and Niger).
- The *Rabat Memorandum on Good Practices for Effective Counterterrorism Practice in the Criminal Justice Sector* and the *Neuchâtel Memorandum on Good Practices for Juvenile Justice in a Counterterrorism Context* were also used by the UN in different trainings.

However, this insight is only limited and a systematic follow-up on what happens with the GCTF documents after they are endorsed is called for. Providing a feedback loop on the practical use of the framework documents would enable the GCTF to elaborate on topics where it is needed and adequately supplement already existing good practices to make sure the Forum's guidelines remain topical.

It is important to not only focus on the positive effects in outcome evaluation but also on (potential) side effects. We paid specific attention to the lack of integration of human rights and gender considerations as these points has been flagged by different organizations, e.g. the UN Special Rapporteur. In the first years of the GCTF both of these topics received little attention. There has been an improvement in the second half of the past decade on both aspects, but many of our respondents have stressed that more could and should be done. Our respondents provided very detailed suggestions to promote the further integration of human rights considerations. Based on those suggestions, we recommend the following:

- Invite (more) human rights CSOs and NGOs.
- Provide clarity and expectation management on the document development and review process.
- Make use of existing human rights capacities in partner organizations.
- Check all document development processes and outputs to ensure that they are human rights compliant.
- Include guidance in each framework document on how to ensure human rights compliance in a standardized way.

Concrete suggestions were also made by our respondents for taking into account gender (and other identity factors) considerations in the work of the GCTF. Based on their input, we recommend the following:

- Systematically include a gender lens on all CT and P/CVE topics of the GCTF.
- Invite participants who are specialized in human rights and gender (e.g. via the GARVE Network) as opposed to (only) specialists in security and gender.

- **Ensure more diversity (gender as well as other identity factors) in participants and speakers invited to GCTF meetings.**

### **Future monitoring and evaluation**

There is a general consensus among GCTF Members that monitoring and evaluation is important for the future of the GCTF. It is important to recognize that the GCTF is an informal, multilateral platform that produces non-binding outputs. The question is to what extent the GCTF would be able to achieve certain outcomes and impact, let alone evaluate them. Taking this into consideration the following recommendations can be made:

- **Start a conversation on the objectives of future M&E among Members.**
- **Make use of the language, terminology, topics, indicators and examples that are presented in *Chapter 8* of this report to help start the conversation.**
- **Add language on M&E to the GCTF Terms of Reference.**
- **Realize that everybody has a part to play when it comes to future M&E: the GCTF Co-Chairs, Working Group Co-Chairs, Initiative Co-Leads, Members more broadly, the Administrative Unit, potentially the Inspired Institutions and a possible independent organization for external evaluation.**
- **Bear in mind that the effectiveness of a future M&E effort will be commensurate with the GCTF's capacity (principally administrative and financial), as well as Members and non-Members capacity and willingness to provide input.**