

ARTICLE

Community-Based Preventive and Remedial Measures to Prevent Violent Extremism: A Human Security Approach to Help Transform Conflicts, Improve Social Cohesion and Improve Local Security

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Abstract

This article, presented as part of a panel on “Community-based preventive and remedial measures” at a conference on Responses to Female Migration to ISIS, is on ways in which local communities are able to strengthen social cohesion and prevent growing polarization, especially in areas where radicalization to violent extremism takes place. The analysis is based on the Human Security Collective (HSC)’s work in Palestine, Libya, Tunisia and the Netherlands where we support local communities and the professionals who work with them on addressing systemic causes that lead to exclusion, alienation and possibly radicalization leading to violent extremism. We have learnt that approaches to prevent the attraction to violent extremism networks require methods and processes akin to those developed for conflict transformation. Some of the characteristics of this approach include the inclusion of different stakeholders, local ownership in defining problems and seeking solutions, the building of trusted relationships, the mentoring of young women and men who take on a peer-model role, and the development of innovative small-scale community activities that can then be taken up by the wider community. HSC and its partners connect these local community initiatives to policymakers at municipal, national and international levels. Through the process of facilitated dialogue we aim to create “safe spaces” where persons from different backgrounds and with different interests are able to meet and exchange practices and policies. In this way, policies are validated by lived realities and citizens become aware of the way that policies that influence local security are developed and executed. This dialogue leads to a mutual understanding of and improvement in security-related policies.

Keywords human security; local security; conflict transformation; youth leadership; social cohesion

INTRODUCTION

The Human Security Collective (HSC)'s contribution to the publication is based on its work as a practitioner and an advocate for the inclusion of youth and their communities in policies and programmes that enhance social inclusion and cohesion through a human security approach to prevent violent extremism. The topical issue of "Female Migration to ISIS", which underlies the research project to which the paper contributes, is thus perceived through this human security lens. The paper draws from ongoing project activities that aim to bring about change, and not from a research project testing certain hypothesis on radicalization leading to violent extremism and ways to prevent this.

Traditional thinking about security is state-centric – whether that be in terms of the locus of risk or in terms of the guarantor of safety. This understanding, however, is inadequate when it comes to ameliorating the security risks we face today. The state alone cannot mitigate risk posed by individual disenfranchisement and inequity. Insecurity felt at an individual level needs to be addressed by a "human security" approach. This approach sees the individual as being the one primarily at risk. And it has to do with securing this individual's welfare in his or her context for the long term. As the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s Human Development Report (United Nations Development Programme 1994) put it:

Human security is a child who did not die, a disease that did not spread, a job that was not cut, an ethnic tension that did not explode in violence, a dissident who was not silenced. Human security is not a concern with weapons – it is a concern with human life and dignity...It is concerned with how people live and breathe in a society, how freely they exercise their many choices, how much access they have to market and social opportunities – and whether they live in conflict or in peace.

The market, the family, the community, and the non-profit sector all play a role, along with the state, in guaranteeing human security. Achieving human security is thus a process characterized by collective and concerted action based on individual vulnerability, risk and threat-related needs and concerns. Addressing these concerns requires that communities are empowered and able to build resilience against growing threats posed by violent extremists and their ideologies and actions, enabling them to overcome the systemic causes that lead to the attraction to terrorism or violent extremism for those in their midst. Clearly this is impossible to achieve without change in terms of geopolitics and national policies, as well as in the actions of authorities and the wider society that help perpetuate radicalization leading to violent extremism.

As an organization, HSC believes that human security is and should be at the core of both the development and security agendas. The organization works with communities in areas affected by conflict in order to prevent growing polarization, build resilience and strengthen social cohesion. HSC is currently working with communities in the Middle East, the Maghreb and the Netherlands on understanding and addressing systemic causes that lead to exclusion, alienation and possibly radicalization leading to violent extremism. HSC does not work exclusively with or on young women in relation to violent extremism, and its contribution to the subject matter of the publication should therefore be read as only one piece of a much larger puzzle which requires the understanding, as set out in the conference for which this paper was written, of the motives of (young) women who migrate to or support Islamic State (IS) and the

development of ways to prevent them from doing so. The entire puzzle has to comprise further psychological and sociological clarifications, including elucidation on the success of violent extremist messaging as well as geopolitical analyses of conditions that give rise to terrorist networks such as IS in the first place. The ways in which these conditions are perpetuated due to short-term and the too often short-sighted political and economic interests also need to be taken into account.

The HSC approach is one based on civil society and community, where youth play a vital role in analysing the root causes of growing polarization and feelings of alienation, as well as in enhancing social cohesion and human security. There are other approaches that aim to prevent radicalization leading to violent extremism and the organization values these too and perceives them as equally valuable. There, however, seems to be growing evidence that the involvement of civil society and communities in contributing to human security and thus preventing violent extremism (PVE) is vital (Cortright et al. 2011; Van Ginkel 2012; Friends of Europe 2016; SIDA 2017). HSC's programmes are implemented in close cooperation with local civil society organizations so as to ensure the scaling up of the approach in local communities.

The HSC approach is not solely dedicated to individual young women or men. It is the interplay among youth and between youth and the larger community and society (including security stakeholders), and the change engendered by these relationships, that is at the core of the organization's work.

The national contexts in which the projects are implemented differ in terms of governance and vulnerabilities, risks and threats to security, which inherently influences the way the projects are executed. The paper will sketch the dilemmas that HSC and its partners face in the execution of community-based preventive work and in the building of measures for resilience, while being cognizant of the fact that the choice that young men and women make to join or support violent extremist networks and ideologies is not merely a national but an international phenomenon, knowing no borders. The national and international political perspective of the projects are mentioned when it is relevant to a better understanding of their applicability as interventions that may contribute to preventing young persons from transitioning to terrorist or criminal networks.

The paper aims to disseminate a better understanding of ways in which policy-makers and practitioners can help further community-based preventive and remedial measures. This is, in essence, a soft approach to the prevention of violent extremism. The approach that HSC is developing together with its partners, youth and other relevant stakeholders does not have a targeted focus on women transitioning or migrating to IS. Instead it includes young women in initiatives that appeal to young men and women alike and the wider social and communal circles to which they belong. The initiatives, however, do show differences in the ways that young women and men analyse the security threats they experience and how they want to address these. Many of the projects on which this paper is based are still being implemented and the paper thus presents the processes and outcomes up to December 2017.

BACKGROUND

The paper is based on the "Tunisian and Dutch Youth Leaders for Resilience in High-risk Areas" project, the approach of which was based on the "Women and Youth Against Violence" project, implemented in Palestine between 2013 and 2016.

The latter included working with young women and men from Palestine as well as from Libya who were capacitated on human security outside of their country. The “Tunisian and Dutch Youth Leaders for Resilience in High-risk Areas” project, which began in 2015, is being implemented in six municipalities in Tunisia and two neighbourhoods in the city of Delft in the Netherlands. This has also now been extended to neighbourhoods in the Dutch town of Gouda. The Tunisia–Dutch Youth Leadership project is being financed by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs; more specifically, by the Department for Security Policy, which is tasked with policy development on counter-terrorism and the prevention of violent extremism, among other matters. It is managed by HSC.

The paper draws its main findings from the Tunisia and Delft project. The activities undertaken in relation to Palestine and Libya helped in the design of a capacity-building methodology for youth and civil society organizations that work with them. The methodology encompasses exercises to understand ways in which youth experience and give meaning to insecurity and instability within their families, communities and societies, to analyse these experiences and perceptions and a system that helps self-monitor the changes brought about by participants in the course of the project. The methodology is based on earlier curricula, “Care for Common Cause”, developed by HSC and which adapted theories around human security, Appreciative Inquiry (AI), complexity, future search and common ground into an approach focused on youth leadership to strengthen resilience in communities. Some of these approaches are set out in more detail later on in the paper.

Focus of the Projects

The project in Tunisia and Delft was designed with the aim of preventing radicalization leading to violent extremism among teenagers in neighbourhoods where recruitment and sympathy for IS and its ideology occur. The approach, particularly in the Delft component of the project, is different from other prevention projects in the Netherlands as it takes into account the experiences and perceptions of young people, community members and professionals active in the communities as the starting point to describe and analyse insecurity. It is the youth who formulate possible solutions for the improvement of human security within their peer group and the wider community. Together with youth workers and mentors, they select a number of projects for implementation based on feasibility and contribution to their own security and that of others in the community. The approach is participatory in nature and starts from the assumption that youth are capable of bringing about positive change.

Most prevention projects in the Netherlands, as elsewhere in Europe, have a targeted approach to detect young people susceptible to violent radicalization. Representatives from higher educational institutes, mosques and the local municipality are trained by so-called de-radicalization experts in early warning signals and in the implementation of voluntary guidelines on reporting to law enforcement. This training is developed based on expert concepts of de-radicalization and much less on the knowledge, perceptions and needs emanating from trainees (Radicalization and Awareness Network (RAN) 2016). HSC envisages that the methodology that it is developing and implementing in Delft, Gouda and Tunisia could complement this type of de-radicalization training.

The projects are designed and implemented with the aim of enhancing social cohesion among different communities and sociocultural groups, of enhancing a peaceful and secure environment, and thereby preventing conditions that could lead to violent extremism among youth. They are objective driven and, in that respect, meant to contribute to the implementation and improvement of current policies of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs concerning the involvement of women and youth in peace building and security. HSC realizes that the instrumentality of the projects and the complexity of the reality where these are implemented require a fine balance in terms of building and fostering relationships, addressing various interests and adjusting planned activities to what is feasible.

Selection of Mentors and Mentees

While young persons are the focus of both projects, the Tunisia and Delft projects explicitly aim to include teenagers in the 12–16 years age group. In both projects the methodology is founded on building mentors' capacities on human security and strengthening peer-to-peer networking to address local insecurity, vulnerabilities and threats. Mentors fall in the 18–27 years age range. They in turn capacitate mentees on a human security approach to build resilience, social cohesion and thereby prevent violent extremism. The mentees in the Tunisia, Delft and Gouda projects are teenagers.

HSC's local partners play an essential role in the selection of mentors and mentees, in the implementation of the project and in further adapting and possibly scaling up the approach. HSC works with known partners or those who have come recommended via its broad network of civil society organizations in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and Maghreb regions. One of the partners in Tunisia, for example, is active in developing youth leadership for peace and justice in connection with building a democratic and secular country. The local partner in Delft is a social welfare organization focused on the inclusion of youth and teenagers in social and sports activities in disenfranchised neighbourhoods. The majority of the mentors and mentees are Muslims and from different social, cultural and economic backgrounds.

The partners appoint a coordinator to guide the implementation of the project and liaise with HSC on its progress. The choice to work with both young women and men as mentors and mentees is deliberate as we believe that the interaction between young women and men contributes to a better understanding of and empathy with each other's thinking, including with challenges the other faces, while at the same time fostering creativity in finding solutions. Gender disparity is a cultural phenomenon in which the exclusion of girls and young women from decision making within the family and community and the obligation of boys and young men to be tough and in control are manifested as norms in terms of behaviour that is socially acceptable. The projects give girls and young women a platform to voice their concerns in terms of their human security vulnerabilities and threats, and help them come up with ways to solve these. Besides age group and gender, the belief system of participants is a selection criterion for joining the projects. HSC always urges local partners to select a diversity of participants and sees, for instance, the interaction between different belief systems as an opportunity to discuss disparities and identify commonalities.

Youth already active in their community as volunteers or otherwise involved in community-related initiatives are selected as mentors. These mentors then select mentees with the help of the local partner organization and based on broad criteria

which include age, gender and denomination/belief system. The methodology is founded on building mentors' capacities on human security and strengthening peer-to-peer networking to address local insecurity, vulnerabilities and threats. The approach takes into account, as a starting point, the experiences and perceptions of young people on security. Men and women active in their communities describe and analyse the insecurity they are faced with. The international, national and local dynamics which have an impact on a community are taken into consideration when capacitating youth to further develop context-specific initiatives which aim to counter these problems.

In the Tunisia–Delft–Gouda project, exchange visits between youth from Tunisia, Delft and Gouda, scheduled as part of the project, provide the opportunity for in-person sharing, exchange and learning not only among the youth themselves but also among those that engage with them personally or professionally. HSC organizes these regional exchanges between young persons from the MENA region, the Maghreb and the Netherlands in order to strengthen networking and peer-to-peer learning. This enables comparison of individual and collective analyses of insecurity in their own environments, as well as the solutions that they have started developing to address these problems. This type of activity increases the understanding of ways in which resilience, social cohesion and thereby de-radicalization can be supported by community members and policymakers.

The Context of the Projects

National Contexts

The socio-economic and political characteristics of the contexts in which these projects are implemented are very different. With regard to the Tunisia–Delft–Gouda project, it should be noted that HSC, its partners and the Ministry are aware that these differences prevent the project from making any overt generalization in relation to conditions that contribute to violent extremism among youth. Tunisia is going through a difficult transition towards a democratic state based on the principles of the rule of law within a region where violent extremist groups, including IS, Al Qaeda and affiliated groups, are active and have established themselves firmly on the ground. The Netherlands is a mature democratic state and like other countries in Europe is increasingly being confronted with young men and women who openly sympathize with the ideology of a violent and political Islam. Both countries are confronted with out-migration to Syria and Iraq of young men and women who want to contribute to the building of an IS caliphate, though this has seen a decline in numbers lately. And after the attacks in France, Belgium and Germany, the Netherlands remains on high alert to potential attacks by IS supporters or those inspired by other violent extremist groups while Tunisia has, unfortunately, already experienced such attacks.

Rather than delving into contextual differences, the paper will instead focus on the commonalities: that even in politically, socially and economically quite diverse contexts, youth (male and female) are able to play a key role in working towards a culture of peace and security for themselves, their families and their communities.

Communities

The communities in Tunisia that the mentors and mentees belong to can, in general terms, be characterized as facing social, economic and political vulnerabilities caused

by compounding factors such as structural unemployment, inadequate social welfare services manifested by poor educational and housing facilities among others, weak integration of sub-cultures, social problems at the family level, structural violence against girls and women, the presence of criminal and terrorist networks/recruiters active in motivating the youth to join them, a high incidence of everyday crime and violence, the inadequate or intrusive presence and actions of security actors, and general neglect.

In Delft and Gouda the mentors and mentees belong to neighbourhoods where the majority of the inhabitants are from migrant and refugee communities, and where unemployment rates for youth in particular are above the municipal and national average (Eurostat 2017). Social fragmentation between different cultural, ethnic and religious groups is considered to be a huge problem by the municipality. This same municipality also seems to have neglected investing in housing and public facilities in the particular neighbourhoods where the project is being implemented. The presence of recruiters for IS, which used to be considered a security problem, seems to be in decline. Mentors and mentees view the presence of community police in their neighbourhoods both positively and negatively. The Netherlands is a permissive society, with enshrined political and civil liberties for its citizens – ideas which jar with certain youth and groups in Delft who have difficulty accepting equal rights for each individual in the country irrespective of gender, creed, belief system or sexual orientation. Both Tunisia and the Netherlands have seen a relatively high out-migration of youth to IS areas. According to a 2015 report from the Soufan group, there are 5,000 foreign terrorist fighters in Syria and Iraq from Tunisia, of which the majority are youth. And according to a 2016 report from the International Center for Counter Terrorism, 220 under-25-year-olds from the Netherlands went to fight for IS and other Islamists groups in Iraq and Syria (Gurcan 2016; Van Ginkel and Entenmann 2016).

HSC acknowledges that the commonalities between youth from different countries and regions are not self-evident. Yet there are a number of characteristics that are shared by the youth and the communities that HSC works with in the different countries, including socio-economic deprivation, insufficient inclusion in decision-making processes affecting them, and the feelings of marginalization and alienation from society. The way that youth perceive the role of local security officers and community in relation to the prevention of violence is often another common feature, as is the proximity of persons within (extended) family and neighbourhoods who are in favour of violent radical ideologies such as those espoused by IS and other terrorist groups. With regard to young women and men, we find that participation in our programmes varies – there are more women in the Tunisian programme while, counter-intuitively, HSC is finding it difficult to have women participating in the Netherlands. In general terms, the projects have so far shown that young women are more concerned than men about the paternalistic culture and its influence on the freedoms of girls, youth and women in general and the violations inflicted by local security actors on the integrity and dignity of women. Both young women and men in Tunisia say that communities can act against the growing influence of terrorist groups like IS or those affiliated to IS through better upbringing and education. Social media, they say, is an important factor in drawing young women and men into the IS circle of influence. However, in-person contact by recruiters is much more significant in influencing decisions to join the Caliphate and armed struggle. In Delft, the youth

stress that with the growing knowledge of life in the Caliphate and the losses sustained by IS, the motivation to join the group is quickly declining. The recruiters that are still around and approaching young women and men are far less successful than they were a few years ago. They are not too concerned about returned foreign fighters and the risk that they pose in terms of terrorist attacks or the influence they have in winning others over to commit terrorist acts in Europe. Community police officers in Delft, however, think otherwise and express their concern about the growing influence of foreign fighters on youth in urban areas in the Netherlands.

Mirroring the problems as experienced in the communities are voluntary initiatives by community members, often women, to improve living conditions and create a sense of togetherness, including initiatives by community-based and civil society organizations around sports, theatre and music, and income-generating initiatives by local entrepreneurs to help create employment. However, these activities may be too small and fragmented to ultimately make a sustained difference and seldom reach policymakers who would benefit from learning from them and thus incorporating them in policies and programmes.

A HUMAN SECURITY APPROACH TO PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

A human security approach to addressing violent extremism is a novelty and requires more practice to enable a better understanding of ways that this approach can meaningfully contribute to community-based preventive and remedial measures in order to prevent violent extremism among youth (NWO 2016).¹

The Development of a Body of Practice and Knowledge

HSC derives much of the methodology it applies from practices developed by conflict transformation experts and peacebuilding practitioners. The organization contributed to a paper by the United Institute of Peace that aimed to highlight the interface between countering violent extremism and peacebuilding (Holmer 2015). It should be noted that notions on and practices of countering violent extremism are evolving. The current body of knowledge is based primarily on fragmented and scattered projects and initiatives designed mainly in Western countries by research institutions and think tanks established with the aim of countering violent extremism through preventive measures and initiatives, and supported by countries that have a stake in recalibrating repressive counter-terrorism approaches which have failed to succeed. For instance, the Obama administration set up the Global Counter Terrorism Forum (GCTF) in 2011 – an overarching architecture consisting of 29 member countries and the European Union, working together to address counter-terrorism challenges multilaterally and as they arise. The GCTF has, in turn, launched three independent organizations:

- Hedayah, the international centre for “expertise and excellence” in countering violent extremism (CVE) in Abu Dhabi.

¹In March 2016 the Dutch Knowledge Platform on Security and Rule of Law and NWO/WOTRO (Dutch Scientific Research for Global Development Programmes) commissioned five research projects on a Comprehensive Approach to Human Security. HSC and consortium members will conduct further research on a human security approach to violent extremism under this research programme (NWO 2016).

- The Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund, established to support local, community-led initiatives to build resilience against violent extremist agendas. Set up as a public–private partnership, HSC is on its board.
- The International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law in Malta, which is a platform set up to deliver innovative and sustainable training to implement rule of law-based good practices related to counter-terrorism.

Each institution has its own unique mission and, in practical terms, supports a pillar of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Together, these three organizations complement one another and work to address identified needs within the global counter-terrorism landscape.

Countering and Preventing Violent Extremism: A Short Overview

Knowledge on CVE bears a debt to radicalization theories developed by social scientists. These theories explain ways in which individuals radicalize through an interplay between so-called push and pull drivers. Drivers that push individuals to ultimately join violent extremist or terrorist groups include: structural conditions, such as poverty; grievances, such as lack of access to justice or political processes; individual psychological and emotional characteristics, such as the need for belonging, dignity, meaning or revenge; or the continuation of cycles of violence brought on by chronic conflict and the absence or failure of the state in addressing the underlying causes of conflict. Pull factors include the influence of socialization and the group dynamics of family, peers, schools and religious institutions and leaders, and active recruitment including extremist messaging which inspires violence.

Although the radicalization process is highly contextual, many of the push factors leading to participation in violent extremist and terrorist groups relate to psychological motivations that can be universally understood, such as the need for belonging and the validation of one's identity. Others have pointed to emotional drivers such as the desire for revenge and responses to perceived humiliation. A sense of thrill-seeking and adventure can also play a part in being pushed towards violent and terrorist groups. However, explanations for the actions of lone wolves are not part of the paper (Alonso et al. 2008). Additionally, criminologists have, for years, worked on analysing the push and pull drivers leading to the joining of criminal networks. While this may provide meaningful insights into understanding countering violent extremism (CVE) push and pull factors, and its attendant attraction to youth, this body of research does not form part of the paper.

Human psychology thus plays a role in understanding the dynamics of radicalization. Some scholars point out that there is no direct causal relationship between radical ideas and extremist violence and that not all violent extremists are radical in their belief systems. Some have only a superficial understanding of the ideology believed to “inspire” violent acts. The United States Institute of Peace paper stresses that this is an important perspective, and suggests that focusing on “countering the narrative of extremists” is only part of the solution (Holmer 2015). What is needed is an approach that encompasses a broader perspective, which is manifested in the development and security-nexus debate, for example, and is contributing to a shift from countering violent extremism to PVE.

The different schools of thought and practices underpinning development in fragile and at-risk communities and contexts, and those associated with countering violent

extremism have gradually been connected through the efforts of development, human security and countering and preventing of violent extremism (C/PVE) practitioners and thinkers. While until a few years ago, the discussion was on the mission creep of C/PVE into development thinking, now bodies such as UNDP and the counter-terrorism units at the UN are open to coordinating their efforts on tackling radicalization leading to violent extremism. In 2016, UNDP produced a report titled “Preventing Violent Extremism Through Promoting Inclusive Development, Tolerance and Respect for Diversity: A Development Response to Addressing Radicalization and Violent Extremism” (United Nations Development Programme 2016). However, in our opinion, a balanced approach that takes into account both push and pull factors is a prerequisite for success in preventing radicalization leading to violent extremism. A human security approach may be applied that takes these two fields of expertise and practice into account. Development thinkers and practitioners may continue to underplay the importance of psychological, cultural and religious dimensions in the inclination to join extremist groups, while CVE experts may underestimate socio-economic push factors that could contribute to youth joining extremist groups.

This paper will not go into the current debate which criticizes the mission-creep of PVE into development thinking and practice. It suffices to take note that CVE practice has expanded to include a spectrum of interventions that range from working to counter the narrative of terrorist recruitment messaging to development projects designed to mitigate the more structural causes that make an individual vulnerable to recruitment. CVE can now be best characterized as a rapidly growing and evolving international community of practice. However, the translation of CVE policy, as currently conceptualized, into effective practice continues to face several significant interrelated challenges.

Connecting Local Initiatives with Policymakers

Interventions, such as those that HSC employs, are meant to achieve tangible results in terms of increased cohesion between young persons, their peers and extended families, neighbourhoods and communities, increased integration into the wider society, and increased involvement in decision making on local and human security issues. The process of achieving this is as important as the activities developed and implemented and the self-monitoring of the change that takes place.

Some of the characteristics of this process include: the inclusion of different stakeholders, local ownership in defining vulnerabilities, risks and threats based on a push and pull factor analysis, and the formulation of solutions; the building of trusted relationships; the mentoring of young women and men who then take on a peer-model role; and the development of innovative small-scale activities that are subsequently taken up by the wider community.

HSC connects these local initiatives to policymakers at the municipal, national and international levels. Regional exchanges are organized between young persons from the Maghreb and MENA regions and the Netherlands, as outlined earlier, in order to strengthen networking and peer-to-peer learning, and to compare individual and collective analyses of security-related problems in their own environments, as well as the solutions developed to address these problems.

HSC shares with youth and others involved in the projects strategies, policies and programmes developed by international and regional organizations, such as the UN,

on countering terrorism and the prevention of violent extremism, and facilitates their access onto panels and working conferences that these organizations conduct. Examples of these are the United Nations Security Council Resolutions (SCR) 1325 (United Nations Security Council 2000)² and 2242 (United Nations Security Council 2015a)³ on Women, Peace and Security, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1624 (United Nations Security Council 2005)⁴ on Preventing Incitement to Terrorism or the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 68/276 (United Nations General Assembly 2014) underpinning the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (United Nations General Assembly 2006, 2016). Where possible, HSC works under the auspices of the UN Counter Terrorism Executive Directorate, e.g. through regional and national workshops on “The Prevention of Incitement to Terrorism” as stipulated in United Nations Security Council Resolution 1624, or in collaboration with the relevant Dutch Embassy and national research institutions or universities to connect youth and their projects with local and national security officials. Another example is the work conducted in partnership with the Organization for Security and Collaboration in Europe (OSCE) on Youth and the Prevention of Violent Extremism, part of their United CVE programme (OSCE 2012).⁵

The extent to which this is feasible depends largely on the security and governance context of a country. Often, getting a dialogue going with the local or community police is an important step in forging a constructive relationship with security actors most significant for local and human security. A further step is making a connection with security policymakers at municipal and national levels, the latter often located in the Home, Justice or Security Ministries, and oftentimes posing a genuine challenge in the projects.

In a country like Tunisia, civil society and civic space are relatively new phenomena in an erstwhile autocratic context, and government authorities, especially those mandated with security and counter-terrorism, are a long way from accepting the need for dialogue with civil society, including youth organizations, tending to display instead an attitude of hostility to this type of engagement. In the municipality of Delft in the Netherlands, from where the largest number of foreign terrorist fighters come, the Dutch National Coordinator for Security and Counter-Terrorism (NCTV) implements a de-radicalization programme to support the integration of returned foreign terrorist fighters and prevent them and their peers from travelling (again) to Syria. HSC is careful to safeguard the fine balance between an open dialogue with the NCTV on their interest in patterns and profiles of “youth at risk” and the confidentiality of information from mentors and mentees that informs the implementation of the project.

Through facilitating this dialogue, HSC aims to create “safe spaces” where people from different backgrounds and with different interests are able to meet and exchange practices and policies. In this way, policies are validated by lived realities and citizens become aware of the way that policies that influence local security are developed and executed. These dialogues lead to mutual understanding and improvement of security-related policies.

²United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security.

³United Nations Security Council resolution 2242 (2015) on women, peace and security.

⁴United Nations Security Council Resolution 1624 (2005) on the prevention of incitement to terrorism.

⁵<http://www.osce.org/unitedCVE>

BUILDING NATURAL RESILIENCE AT INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY LEVELS AND AMONG PEERS

For the small number of young women and men who become radicalized and turn to violent extremism, there is a vast majority who are resilient to the lure of extremist or criminal messaging. What can we learn from this majority? And, conversely, how do we build the natural resilience and critical awareness of those vulnerable? Detailed below is the work that HSC is doing in vulnerable communities around the world and portrayed in this paper by the “Tunisian and Dutch Youth Leaders for Resilience in High-risk Areas” project. The methodology used by the HSC team will be explained first.

The Methodology: Theoretical Underpinnings Behind the Human Security Approach – Appreciative Inquiry, Future Search, Complexity, Common Ground, Deep Democracy and Non-Violent Communication

HSC applies and adapts methodologies inspired by the work of organizational and community change experts and practitioners, which places individual knowledge, practices, reflections and learnings within their own context, and the exchange of this between individuals, at the centre of change. It is in essence a bottom-up way of facilitating and guiding change. The key assumption is that people are capable of contributing to meaningful changes for themselves and others in their community and society and are able to reach out and work with other relevant actors, including the “not like-minded” to bring about such change.

AI, a methodology originally developed as part of academic Organizational Behaviour programmes, was gradually incorporated into the thinking and practice of organizational and development change experts in the eighties and nineties (Bushe 2012). It is currently gaining renewed interest as a methodology for engendering change in highly complex and conflict-sensitive environments (Cooperrider and Whitney 1999):

AI seeks, fundamentally, to build a constructive union between what people experience and perceive and talk about as past and present capacities: achievements, assets, unexplored potentials, innovations, strengths, elevated thoughts, opportunities, benchmarks, high point moments, lived values, traditions, strategic competencies, stories, expressions of wisdom, insights and visions of valued and possible futures. AI deliberately, in everything it does, seeks to work from accounts of this “positive change core”—and it assumes that every living system has many untapped and rich and inspiring accounts of the positive. Link the energy of this core directly to any change agenda and changes never thought possible are suddenly and democratically mobilized.

In practice, HSC brings the AI methodology to life by using methods like mind-mapping (see Figure 1), role play and board games such as the Challenge, developed by the organization and which motivates players to strategically and tactically develop hard or soft security approaches to achieve both local and global peace and safety. Using these methods provides insights into the issues within the remit of the projects that the partners and youth want to address. The outcome of mind-mapping, role playing and the Challenge are used for “Future Search”.⁶

⁶The Challenge (<http://www.hscollective.org/the-challenge/>).

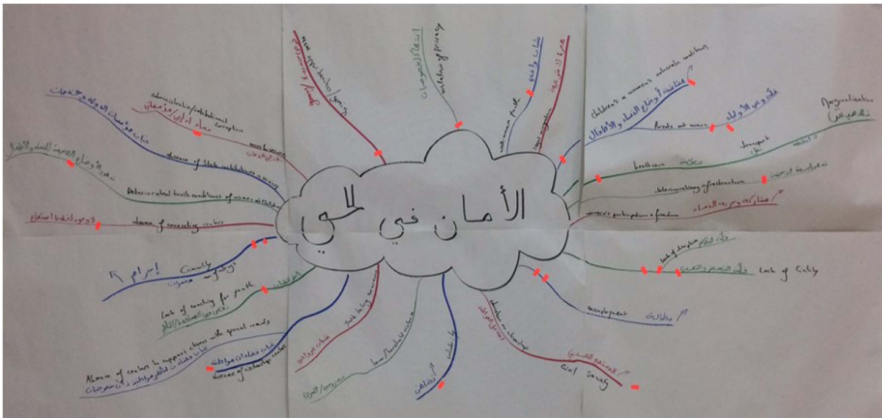


Figure 1. Mind-map drawn by youth on safety in the community, Tunis, August 2017

Future Search is a planning method that enables people to transform their capability for action in a straightforward yet participatory way. The well-tested idea behind Future Search is that diverse persons and groups of people operating in complex situations and in situations of conflict are able to plan and collaborate if the appropriate conditions are created. Future Search is based on four principles: (1) relevant persons from all parts of the organization and community are involved; (2) the practices, ideas and perceptions on the issue of each of the participants are valued and validated through the exchange between participants. In this way everyone gains (new) insights in the issue; (3) differences and conflicting interests are discussed so that they can be dealt with. Often this is the critical part of the planning process; and, (4) each participant shows the others the way he or she wants to contribute to the plan and its outcomes (ANP Pers Support 2013).

Complexity Theory is pertinent to realizing that problem solving is not a “one-size-fits-all” process, and that tackling issues such as the prevention of violent extremism requires an understanding of the whole and requires being able to bring different parts of the whole system together. Additionally, it also requires exploring common ground in order to work on solutions to tackle violent extremism. The latter, based on the Common Ground theory of communication proposed by Herbert Clark and Susan Brennan refers to “mutual knowledge, mutual beliefs, and mutual assumptions” that are believed to be essential for successful communication between people (Clark and Brennan 1991).

Non-Violent Communication (NVC) is a theory and tool that helps consider conflict and how to avoid or resolve it. Also known as Compassionate Communication or Collaborative Communication, it focuses on three aspects of communication: self-empathy, empathy and honest self-expression. NVC considers that all human beings have the capacity for compassion, that violence or harmful behaviour occurs without effective strategies for meeting needs, that universal human needs are never in conflict, that conflict arises when strategies for meeting needs clash, and that by identifying our own needs, the needs of others, and the feelings that surround these needs, humans can avoid conflict.

HSC also attempts to implement Deep Democracy in and through its programmes. Deep Democracy privileges all voices, states of awareness and frameworks of reality, and

in that sense differs from “classical” democracy, which focuses on majority rule. All voices (central and marginal), states of awareness and frameworks of awareness are important, as is the information carried within these, which is needed to understand the complete and complex system. Listening to seemingly unimportant events/feelings is often found to present unexpected solutions to conflict.

Story Collection and Analysing: An Innovative Way of Monitoring and Evaluation

In line with the participatory way that the projects are implemented, HSC uses a monitoring and evaluation tool that is interactive. While it is next to impossible to prove the counter-factual (how many youth did not turn to violent extremism because of our interventions), HSC has devised ways in which it monitors perception and change of perception over the course of a given project. In this regard, HSC has partnered with a Dutch organization, *Perspectivity*,⁷ which has developed a methodology known as *SPROCKLER*, which is especially designed to provide learning and measurements in socially complex settings. Digital means are used to collect data in order to visualize patterns and identify deviants from these patterns. The three elements that *SPROCKLER* is based on for the projects include:

- The qualitative tool of gathering stories (including through pictures, music and other creative means) from both the mentors and mentees.
- The storytellers providing meaning to the stories along a pre-defined set of questions. These questions, which are meant to garner perceptions, can be answered along a bipole slider or anywhere on or in a tripole triangle, depending on where the storyteller feels their story sits. This creates room for complexity and intuitiveness in answers/perceptions.
- Making sense of the information: The larger patterns and insights garnered mean that all project stakeholders can learn from the information and adapt the programme based on need and perception coming from the bottom-up.

This is a continuous process taking place at many points during the project. Perceptions garnered at the start of the project can then be measured for change with perceptions garnered during the middle and at the end. What can be measured and evaluated then, depending on the stories and questions, are things such as motivation, influence, perceptions and feelings (both individual and community).⁸

Building Resilience with Tunisian and Dutch Youth in High-Risk Areas

The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs evinced interest in supporting the project as it is looking for an approach that prevents violent extremism “on the ground” and can be sustained by communities and community-based organizations. Dutch policy-makers on counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism are not alone in their conviction that the soft approach of community engagement, including with youth, is vital to addressing violent extremism and terrorism. The geographic interest in Tunisia stems from the growing instability of Libya and its neighbouring countries, which gives terrorist networks like IS ample opportunity to flourish, recruit and

⁷www.perspectivity.org

⁸<http://www.sprockler.com/>

attract youth from Tunisia, e.g. to join their *jihad* and cross-over to mainland Europe. The interest in a parallel project in the Netherlands emanated from the relatively large number of foreign fighters from the city of Delft to Syria and from looking for ways to prevent teenagers, young girls and boys, from glorifying or even following these role models.

This is a pilot project, in its third year now, and innovative in its approach in that it identifies teenagers as actors able to withstand the lure of violent–extremist ideas and behaviour and contribute to positive change in their own communities. Two sub-projects are being conducted in parallel in the municipalities of Tunis, le Kef, Siliani, Kasserine, Medenine and Nabeul in Tunisia, and in the neighbourhoods Voorhof and Buitenhof in Delft as well as in the town of Gouda. The sub-projects are closely related and reinforce each other.

The objective of the Tunisia project in the 2015 HSC project proposal is “to empower teenagers (age 12 to 16) in 6 high risk areas of Tunisia to create a sustained dialogue with others, including government representatives and (security) stakeholders on the push and pull factors of radicalization that lead to violent extremism resulting in improved levels of trust and greater civic engagement to prevent radicalization that leads to violent extremism.” The objective of the project in Delft in the 2015 HSC project proposal is “to design a preventive approach for and with teenagers (age 12 to 16) which withholds them from being drawn to the ideology and behavior of youth (age 18 to 26) in their circle of influence that have been partially radicalized.”

In the Delft context, the implementation of activities to prevent violent radicalization among teenagers (12–16 years) in collaboration with the local partner and with mentors (18–24 years) is new. With the Tunisian partner, there is no previous experience in having teenagers collectively analyse the push and pull factors of violent extremism and in providing them with the guidance and means to develop initiatives that enhance resilience against radicalization that may lead to violent extremism. Conducting the programmes in parallel has given the teenagers the opportunity to facilitate both online and face-to-face exchanges during the project period. The essence of these exchanges is that these young citizens will be exposed to the practices and realities of different contexts in which they can then envision and employ their own capacities to create resilience against radicalization that leads to violent extremism.

During one such exchange, a selected group of Tunisian youth came to Delft to meet their peers. Discussed were various issues around security in their communities, with the focus being on learning from each other’s contexts and experiences of working on youth resilience in their respective communities. An important recurring theme in discussions with youth is the current Dutch Foreign Affairs policy concerning the Middle East more generally, and on C/PVE more specifically. Studies point out that second-generation youth in the Netherlands and Belgium have been, for instance, angry at the West’s indifference to the plight of the Syrian population (Coolsaet 2015). Such discussions are woven into the sessions with the teenagers in order to create a platform to explain and discuss the position of the Netherlands and create feedback loops to develop further understanding and a more constructive dialogue with regard to this topic. The programme during the exchange included meetings with Dutch policymakers and practitioners at the local, regional and national levels. The then Dutch Foreign Minister, Bert Koenders, spent a few hours listening to and talking with the young leaders from Tunisia and Delft.

In Delft, the activities are being complemented by in-depth research which will focus primarily on understanding rather than explaining, with the aim of asking young people how they themselves understand and interpret radicalization and violent extremism – something which seems to be under-represented in the current debate on radicalization. Some of the questions that have been posed include: What do the young people, especially from communities where other young people have left to join IS, think of this phenomenon? What, according to them, are the important personal and social issues and topics that are at play in their (social) environments? How do the youth experience radicalization and violent extremism in their immediate surroundings and in general? What, according to them, is needed to create resilience against radicalization and violent extremism in their neighbourhoods?

During the project implementation, the changes in perception and understanding of the teenagers in relation to the push and pull factors towards radicalization that leads to violent extremism are monitored and evaluated in order to improve the effectiveness of the methodology put in place. It is foreseen that this approach has the potential of being adapted in similar contexts. A continuous cycle of action with teenagers in the context of preventing radicalization that leads to violent extremism is foreseen well beyond the life of the current projects, as the aim is to capacitate both the mentors and the coordinators of the local partners. Also, the relationships established between the mentors and youth coordinators, local community members, nuclear and extended families and local government are expected to contribute to the sustainability of the approach developed under the project.

At the kick-off meeting in Tunisia in the first week of March 2016, the mentors decided to call themselves “human security leaders” and re-named the project “Tunisian Leaders for Human Security”. They found it too risky to go public with the “prevention of violent extremism” project label, as they thought it might lead to a securitization of the initiative from the outset. The concept of human security, which the youth themselves defined based on discussions around individual, communal and political security, was preferred as a notion that needed further exploration in their own neighbourhoods and communities. At the time of the meeting, a clash between IS-affiliated jihadists and security forces near the Libyan border left dozens of people dead and was the reason the participants at the meeting organized a silent candle-lit gathering in one of the capital’s squares calling for human security and dignity and an end to violence.

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

While the projects illustrated in the paper do not specifically target young women migrating to IS or other *jihadi*-affiliated groups, the approach developed and applied in the projects is able to meaningfully contribute to preventive measures at the community level. HSC believes that such an approach would be more effective than an approach targeted solely at young girls and women.

A combination of the capacity building of youth on human security and the push and pull factors of violent extremism, the designing and implementing of local initiatives to further human security and self-monitoring progress through storytelling, peer-to-peer learning and dissemination, local and international networking through social media and workshops, exchange visits and providing of access to policymakers and meetings on prevention of/countering violent extremism helps provide young women and men with the necessary skills and capacities to become

even more resilient to the lure of the ideology of IS or other terrorist networks and their extremist messaging. The approach developed by HSC (Human Security Collective 2014), its partners and the youth involved is being disseminated through networks like the United Organization of Young Peacebuilders⁹ and others. In 2015, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution on Youth, Peace and Security which, for the first time in its history, focuses entirely on the role of young men and women in peacebuilding and countering violent extremism. The resolution comes at a time when an estimated 600 million young people live in fragile and conflict-affected settings and is set against the rise of radicalization and violent extremism, especially among young women and men (United Nations Security Council 2015b).¹⁰ Since the adoption of the resolution, a Youth for Peace portal has been launched, which provides a platform for linking, learning and advocating for the work of youth on peacebuilding across the world. Youth initiatives contributing to the prevention of violent extremism through efforts in their communities and in policy discourses are presented on this platform.¹¹

Overall, sensible decision making on ways to prevent and counter terrorism is needed given that terrorists prove every day that they do not think in terms of borders and nation states, as policymakers, politicians and the large numbers of the citizens they represent do, but in global and fluid coalitions and cross-border networking. This gives them a vantage point compared with nations that continue to resort to national identities and solutions to address terrorism, and are therefore incapable of effectively “defeating” networks like IS or the ideas and ideologies that they espouse. In this light, it seems like a worthwhile effort to accelerate human security approaches to preventing and countering violent extremism and to support networks on human security by and for youth. While doing so, it is vital to merit the importance of youth and their networks as a soft approach to engaging communities in the prevention of radicalization leading to violent extremism and to avoid the securitization and essentialization of youth or women and initiatives they develop on human security as the solution to all ills perpetrated by groups like IS (Dharmपुरi 2016).

The topical issue of “Female Migration to ISIS” which underlies the research project to which the paper contributes may thus have to be looked at from a different perspective in light of the above. With the growing territorial losses of IS in Syria, the question of the research project may need to be reformulated to: “Female support to the ideology of IS and its consequences world-wide”. However, from the perspective of HSC more knowledge and research on the backgrounds and motives behind the decisions of youth, and of young women in particular, to actively want to belong to an ideology that according to our perspective is not conducive to their dignity, well-being and welfare and, moreover, to actively want to take part in terrorist attacks triggered by this belief system and its leadership, would be very welcome. As research has indicated, the supporters of IS that have gone to the Caliphate have one thing in common, which is that they do not fit any profile (Cottee 2015).

HSC is hopeful that the work it is developing with its partners and youth may be one of a number of interventions that could contribute to social cohesion at the community level led by female and male youth and youth leaders able to contribute

⁹<http://unoy.org/en/>

¹⁰United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) on youth, peace and security.

¹¹<https://www.youth4peace.info/>

to the prevention of radicalization leading to violent extremism amongst their peers, and the creation of better conditions in their communities.

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Abstracto

Este documento, presentado como parte de un panel sobre "medidas preventivas y correctoras basadas en la Comunidad" en una conferencia sobre respuestas a la migración femenina a ISIS, es sobre las formas en que las comunidades locales son capaces de fortalecer la cohesión social y evitar la creciente polarización, especialmente en áreas donde la radicalización de extremismo violento tiene lugar. El análisis se basa en el trabajo

de la Colectiva para la seguridad humana (HSC) en Palestina, Libia, Túnez y los Países Bajos, donde la Colectiva apoya a las comunidades locales y a los profesionales que trabajan con ellos en abordar las causas sistémicas que conducen a la exclusión, la alienación y la posible radicalización que conduce al extremismo violento. Hemos aprendido que los enfoques para prevenir la atracción hacia redes de extremismo violento requieren métodos y procesos similares a los desarrollados para la transformación de conflictos. Algunas de las características de este enfoque incluyen la inclusión de los diferentes interesados; la apropiación local en la definición de los problemas y la búsqueda de soluciones; la construcción de relaciones de confianza; la tutoría de jóvenes, mujeres y hombres que asumen un papel de modelo entre pares y el desarrollo de nuevas actividades comunitarias en pequeña escala, que luego pueden ser asumidas por la comunidad. La Colectiva para la seguridad humana (HSC) y sus socios conectan estas iniciativas comunitarias locales para los formuladores de políticas a nivel municipal, nacional e internacional. Mediante el proceso de facilitar el diálogo tenemos el objetivo de crear “espacios seguros”, donde personas de diferentes procedencias y con diferentes intereses pueden reunirse e intercambiar prácticas y políticas. De esta manera las políticas son validadas por realidades vividas y los ciudadanos son conscientes de la forma en que las políticas que influyen en la seguridad local son desarrolladas y ejecutadas. Este diálogo conduce a un entendimiento mutuo y a la mejora de las políticas relacionadas con la seguridad

Palabras clave: la seguridad humana; la seguridad local; transformación de conflictos; liderazgo juvenil; la cohesión social; basada en la comunidad; la confianza; el diálogo; la participación; la tutoría; modelo de pares; la resiliencia de las comunidades; la propiedad local.

Abstrait

Cet article, présenté dans le cadre d'un panel sur les « mesures préventives et correctives communautaires » lors d'une conférence sur les réponses à la migration féminine à ISIS, est sur la façon dans laquelle les communautés locales sont capables de renforcer la cohésion sociale et prévenir une polarisation croissante, en particulier dans les zones où la radicalisation à l'extrémisme violent a lieu. L'analyse est basée sur le travail de la Human Security Collective (HSC) en Palestine, Libye, Tunisie et aux Pays-Bas où nous soutenons les communautés locales et les professionnels qui travaillent avec elles pour lutter contre les causes systémiques qui conduisent à l'exclusion, à l'aliénation et éventuellement à la radicalisation, les poussant à l'extrémisme violent. Nous avons appris que les approches visant à prévenir les réseaux extrémistes nécessitent des méthodes et des processus pour développer la transformation des conflits. Certaines des caractéristiques de cette approche comprennent l'inclusion des différentes parties prenantes, l'appropriation locale dans la définition des problèmes et la recherche de solutions; l'établissement des relations de confiance; le mentorat des jeunes femmes et hommes qui prennent un rôle de modèle de pair; et le développement d'activités communautaires innovantes à petite échelle qui peuvent ensuite être prises en charge par la communauté au sens large.

HSC et ses partenaires relient les initiatives communautaires locales aux décideurs municipaux, nationaux et internationaux. À travers du processus de dialogue facilité, le HSC vise à créer des « espaces sûrs » dans lesquels les gens peuvent appliquer et échanger des pratiques et des politiques. De cette façon, les politiques sont développées et exécutées. Ce dialogue conduit à la compréhension mutuelle et à l'amélioration des politiques liées à la sécurité.

Mots-clés: sécurité humaine; sécurité locale; transformation des conflits; leadership des jeunes; cohésion sociale; basé sur la communauté; confiance; dialogue; engagement; mentorat; modèle de pair; résilience des communautés; propriété locale

摘要:

本文作为“应对女性向伊斯兰国迁移”的会议中之“基于社区的预防性和补救措施”小组的一部分提出的，是关于如何使当地社区能够加强社会凝聚力并防止两极分化，特别是针对激进的暴力极端主义发生的地区。该分析基于在巴勒斯坦、利比亚、突尼斯和荷兰的人类安全集体 (HSC) 工作，我们支持当地社区和与他们合作的专业人员致力于解决排斥、疏远和可能激进化从而导致暴力极端主义的系统性问题。我们已经认识到，防止暴力极端主义网络吸引的方法需要类似于为冲突转化而发展的方法和过程。这种方法的一些特点包括：包含不同的利益相关者、定义问题和寻求解决方案的本地所有者、建立信任关系、指导年轻女性和男性建立同伴模式、以及开发被社区广泛采用的创新型小规模社区活动。

HSC和她的合作伙伴将这些当地的社区举措与市政、国家和国际层面的决策者联系起来。通过对话，我们致力于创造“安全空间”，让不同背景、不同兴趣的人能够见面并交流实践和政策。通过这种方式，政策被现实生活验证，公民也认识到影响当地安全的政策的制定和执行方式。这种对话能够促进对安全相关政策的相互理解和改进。

关键词: 人类安全、地方安全、冲突转化、青年领导力、社会凝聚力、基于社区、信任、对话、参与、指导、同伴模式、社区复原力、地方所有权

الملخص

تعالج هذه المقالة، التي تم تقديمها كجزء من قائمة حول "إجراءات وقائية وعلاجية مجتمعية" في مؤتمر حول "الزود على هجرة الإناث إلى داعش"، الطرق التي تستطيع بها المجتمعات المحلية تعزيز التماسك الاجتماعي ومنع الاستقطاب المتزايد، خاصة في المناطق التي يحدث فيها التطرف إلى Human Security Collective (HSC) إلى التطرف العنيف. ويستند التحليل إلى العمل الجماعي للأمن البشري في فلسطين وليبيا وتونس وهولندا حيث ندعم المجتمعات المحلية والمهنيين (HSC) الذين يعملون معهم في معالجة الأسباب النظامية التي تؤدي إلى الاستبعاد، والاعتراق، وربما التطرف المؤدّي إلى التطرف العنيف. لقد تعلمنا أن مناهج منع الانجذاب إلى شبكات التطرف العنيف تتطلب أساليب وعمليات مشابهة لتلك التي تطوّرت من أجل تحويل الصراع. وتشمل بعض خصائص هذا النهج إدراج مختلف أصحاب المصلحة، والملكية المحلية في تحديد المشاكل، والسعي إلى إيجاد حلول، وبناء علاقات موثوقة، وتوجيه الشباب والشباب الذين يتبنون الدور النموذجي بين الأقران، وتطوير أنشطة مجتمعية مبتكرة وصغيرة الحجم التي يمكن للمجتمع الأوسع القيام بها وشركاؤها مبادرات المجتمعات المحلية هذه بصانعي السياسات على المستويات HSC تربط البلدية والوطنية والدولية. ويهدف، من خلال عملية الحوار الميسر، إلى إنشاء "مساحات آمنة" تمكن الأشخاص ذوي خلفيات ومصالح مختلفة من مقابلة الممارسات والسياسات وتبادلها. وبهذه الطريقة يتم التحقق من صحة السياسات من خلال الحقائق الحية، ويبيح المواطنون الطريقة التي يتم بها تطوير وتنفيذ السياسات التي تؤثر على الأمن المحلي. يؤدي هذا الحوار إلى فهم متبادل في السياسات المتعلقة بالأمن وتطويرها.

الكلمات الرئيسية:

أمن البشري، الأمن المحلي، تحويل الصراع، قيادة الشباب، التماسك الاجتماعي، مجتمعي، الثقة، الحوار، المشاركة، التوجيه، نموذج الأقران، مرونة المجتمع، الملكية المحلية

The Human Security Collective (HSC) is a foundation based in The Hague working on issues of development, security and the involvement of citizens in their communities. We believe that the idea of human security, which is a holistic, people-centred approach rooted in human rights, provides an organizing frame for action. In our work, we address the current asymmetric character of decision making in the domain of security by ensuring multi-stakeholder dialogue and engagement, and protecting and expanding the operational and political space of civil society. HSC's youth leadership programmes take an approach which, with its elements of local ownership, trust creation and empowering of agents for positive change within communities, strengthen a new generation of leadership that promotes critical thinking, gender parity, collective action and engagement with the security sector to strengthen social cohesion.

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