



The critical roles of civil society and local actors in building partnerships for prevention

There is a critical need today, 20 years after 9/11, to rethink security given that the intervening 'War on Terror' has failed to address the root causes of terrorism and has, instead, negatively affected human security, development, political and civic space, and human rights. Addressing violence, and reversing the social condition that leads to this violence, requires an array of political, economic, social, justice, and security tools. Such tools only work when they are allied (in academic Mary Kaldor's words) to 'civicness'. And this civicness is everywhere – from civil society groups to local municipalities to forms of behaviour embodied by professionals such as judges and doctors and teachers.

Our work at Human Security Collective (HSC) embodies this engagement with 'civicness' on issues around security. From working with communities (including those that are oftentimes hard to reach, such as women and youth) who define what security means to them, to then helping them build on their vision of security by, among other means, facilitating conversations with policymakers at the local and national levels, we have found in and through our work that for security capabilities to be effective for people, they need to be restructured for human security and address issues of inequality, wellbeing, governance, and the erosion of the social contract.

National security discourses, disjointed from this holistic conflict transformation lens, only serve to feed the growing political economy around CT. Framing all conflict as P/CVE is harmful, not least because it is a short-term view. At HSC we have developed a toolkit with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs to better understand the security–development nexus, enabling a more conflict-prevention-sensitive implementation of ODA programmes in regions impacted by violent extremism.

And then there is the downstream impact of the CT agenda, with many States wilfully abusing CT measures, and propelling people towards violent extremism. CT has also been weaponised against civil society (human rights activists, gender activists, eco-warriors, certain faith-based organizations), with CT agendas most often created and carried out in non-inclusive, non-participatory spaces, without the involvement of civil society. HSC, in coordination with UNDP and local partners, is part of a Human Rights Observatory pilot project in Northern Cameroon, e.g., to monitor human rights violations arising from the complex dynamics around the government's engagement with Boko Haram, and to facilitate dialogue with security actors to ensure that human rights are respected when tackling violent extremism.

Finally, there is a need to refocus on the pillars of the founding UN charter, namely **peace and security, human rights, and development**. A better coordination between these three pillars ensures a security discourse that is juxtaposed with development and rights (human security), and not one that is juxtaposed with terrorism. And, on the ground, ubiquitous civic formations (individuals, organizations, communities) play a critical role in helping bolster that vast array of tools required to ensure the security of all.