

We proudly present Human Security Collective (HSC)'s first online newsletter. It is just over two years ago now that we started our foundation. HSC grew out of a programme initiated by and the ambition of a small group of colleagues coming from the development sector to enable civil society space in an ever-expanding securitised context. We have been involved, since 2008, in looking into the effects of anti-terrorism measures initiated by governments and multilateral organisations post 9/11 on the operational and political space of civil society. Together with civil society colleagues in high risk and conflict areas, we have engaged governments and such organisations on the negative impact of counter-terrorism measures and on the importance of involving civil society in the prevention and mitigation of terrorism and violent extremism. The issue remains not only of our participation in the implementation of such projects, but more importantly in the design of meaningful policy and programming. And all this without necessarily having civil society labelled as 'counter terrorism'- or 'countering violent extremism'- entities but by enshrining and propagating our development, human rights, youth advocacy and peace building identity. The involvement of communities and civil society in this area remains important, if not the most important factor, in the current context where violent extremism and measures to prevent and counter it make almost daily headlines and are destabilising entire countries and communities. The challenge we and our civil society colleagues constantly face is to show that a human security approach to violent extremism will indeed make a difference when addressing the underlying dimensions and drivers of violent extremism and its manifestations.

A few months ago a conflict researcher asked me, 'So what does human security mean to you?' She then added: 'I am puzzled by the concept'. In trying to explain what we understand by it, it struck me that there must be many different interpretations of the concept. For us, human security means security as defined and experienced by individual people and by the communities they are part of. It is not security as defined by states, the security sector or private companies. To understand human security we pose a number of questions: what poses a serious threat to you and your community?, what do you think you can do to enhance security for yourself and your community?, what can others do to enhance your security?, what can you influence and what can you control to address the threat and enhance security?. Context does matter here. A young woman in Gaza may define security as freedom from harassment by men while walking to school. A woman in a tribal village in North East India may define security as the absence of military-, police- and insurgent- violence, and for men or woman living in Northern Mali it may be the ability to travel by road without being at risk of violence or crime from local bandits or violent extremists. And civil society organisations in Kenya may want their freedom to assemble, associate and mobilise funds protected by law and respected by government and society alike.

Determining what security means is a first step in figuring out what one can do to individually and collectively shape conditions that make human security possible. The more volatile, violent, corrupt and lawless the context is, the more challenging it becomes to create such conditions. HSC works mainly in high risk contexts where violent extremism is present or on the rise, such as Mali, Nigeria, Kenya and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. In all these places violent extremism is an acute, complex and multifaceted problem. Together with organisations and individuals, we are developing a human security approach to help address threats and insecurity, and to prevent repeated violence, knowing full well that we have to be modest about what can be achieved. Our work abroad has triggered us to think about ways to bring persons, practices and perspectives from these high risk areas to the relatively safe and secure context of our own country. We believe that

current public discussions and political measures on radicalisation and foreign fighters in the Netherlands would benefit from practices elsewhere.

In this and subsequent newsletters we would like to share with you how we go about our work. We would also like to challenge our own thinking, and hopefully at times yours too, through articles and blog posts. We hope that through this newsletter you will get to know more about the people and communities we work with and care about, and also a little about us. You can also follow our work and the ways we reach out to colleagues, the general public and policy makers on our website (<http://www.hscollective.org>), on the Civil Society Platform on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) website that we host (<http://www.fatfplatform.org>), on Twitter (@hscollective @fatfplatform) and Facebook. In this, our first newsletter, we will showcase the work we do in Africa, there is an update on our FATF work, our colleague Siebrich Visser reviews the movie 'Timbuktu', and we have an interview with one of our board members, Lex Oostendorp, who discusses what human security means to him.