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NEWSLETTER FROM THE CENTRE FOR RESEARCH IN SOCIAL SCIENCES AND EDUCATION

THE WORLD PERSPECTIVE
The Relevance of Human Security in Policy-Making

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The idea that the security of individuals living in a state is more important than national security emerged in the post-cold war era. Scholars began to see emancipation of the individual as real security. In his seminal article "Security and Emancipation" Ken Booth (1991) defines emancipation as the removal of physical and human constraints on people (as individuals and groups) so as to free them to do things that they want to do. Such constraints he further argued arise not from a neighbouring state that showcases military might but more importantly from other challenges, such as economic depression, human rights violations, ethnic tensions, water scarcity, overpopulation, environmental degradation, acts of terrorism as well as disease. Hence, people should be treated as ends and not means as they become the primary referent object of security.

One cannot talk about the concept of Human Security without giving due recognition to the contribution of United Nations (UN). The concept of human security was brought to life in UNDP's landmark 1994 Human Development Report, entitled, "New Dimensions of Human Security". The report introduced a new concept of human security, which equates security with people rather than territories, with development rather than arms. It recognized that measuring income is simply not enough to gauge the wellbeing of people. The 1994 report stressed that human security is people-centered and, "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 concept, thus, revolves around the importance of affording people "freedom from fear" and "freedom from want".

The 1994 Human Development report identified seven major threats to security which are summarized in the table below:

TYPE OF INSECURITY	ROOT CAUSES
Economic insecurity	Persistent poverty, unemployment, lack of access to credit and other economic opportunities
Food insecurity	Hunger, famine, sudden rise in food prices
Health insecurity	Epidemics, malnutrition, poor sanitation, lack of access to basic health care
Environmental insecurity	Environmental degradation, resource depletion, natural disasters
Personal insecurity	Physical violence in all its forms, human trafficking, child labour
Community insecurity	Inter-ethnic, religious and other identity-based tensions, crime, terrorism
Political insecurity	Political repression, human rights violations, lack of rule of law and justice

*(Source: UNDP Human Development Report, 1994)*

In 1999, another report by UNDP recognised that Globalisation had accentuated the existing patterns of inequality and that there was a need for Globalisation that emphasised on Ethics, Equity, Sustainability and Development. The next major milestone came in 2004 when the Human Security Unit (HSU) was established with the principal objective of placing human security in the mainstream of UN activities and managing the UN Trust Fund for Human Security (UNTFHS). A year later in 2005, in his final proposal for UN reforms, then Secretary-General Kofi Annan introduced the three components of human security – freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom to live in dignity – as the main thematic principles of his report in larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all. The third component that is freedom from indignity that is people having the freedom to make choices and take advantage of

opportunities available was recognized finally by the UN General Assembly in 2012. Since 2017 the UN has been making efforts such as by releasing a Human Security Handbook prepared as a guide for policymakers to integrate the human security approach to especially advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Despite gaining traction in international organisations such as the UN, Human Security as a concept has been criticized by both practitioners and ac academicians alike. On one hand, scholars argue that the concept has a vague definition, lacks analytical rigour, and has an ambiguous scope. On the other hand, policymakers argue that the concept is so broad and elusive that it is difficult to measure it with precision. However, Newman (2017) argues that the Covid-19 pandemic has reinforced the message of the human security. By surveying different countries, he contends that countries with lower military expenditure as a proportion of their GDP like some Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and New Zealand were more resilient than those with higher military expenditure rooted in a conventional national security mindset.

Whether or not human security is taken seriously by policy makers is something that only time will tell. However, the latest report by UN (2022) on "New Threats to Human Security in the Anthropocene" is pertinent here. The report explains how human activities have impacted the earth's biosphere exacerbating threats from pandemics, digital technology, climate change, and biodiversity loss. The report introduces a new Index of Perceived Human Insecurity and concludes that fewer than 1 in 7 people at the global level feel secure or relatively secure even in countries having a high Human Development Index. Perhaps this paradox of human development with human insecurity is a way of nature getting back at humans.

Figure 1.1 Even in very high Human Development Index countries, less than a quarter of people feel secure
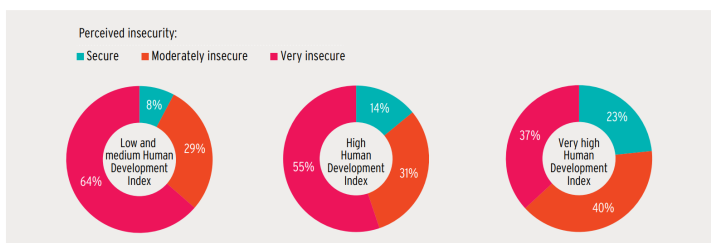
(Source: UNDP 2022 Report: New Threats to Human Security in the Anthropocene)

Another emphasis in the report is also regarding the threats emerging in this digital technology era such as rising digital inequality, cyberattacks, data fraud and theft, and concentrated digital power. Social media platforms can facilitate online child sexual exploitation, cyber-dependent crime and online radicalization. Furthermore, widespread use of facial recognition technology raises privacy questions as it also allows more avenues for political repression. The Anthropocene has, thus,

only put a renewed attention on Human Security. Despite its shortcomings as a concept, human security can no longer be neglected by policy makers across the world.

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