

What is human security?

Summer Academy on Human
Rights and Human Security

European Training and Research Centre
for Human Rights and Democracy

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UNDP Human Development Report 1994

- „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 into violence.“
- Economic / food / health / environmental / personal / community / political security

Why then; still now?

- End of Cold War / new threats
 - Nuclear (military) confrontation gives way to new transnational threats (diseases, terrorism, small arms proliferation, human trafficking,...) in a globalized world
 - New roles for middle powers
- Asian financial crisis 1997
- Rebalancing sovereignty and intervention
- Rise of civil society
- Rise of non-state actors as threat to security

Proponents

- UNDP (inter-governmental / development)
 - Mahbub ul-Haq
- Middle power foreign policy
 - Canada / Lloyd Axworthy
 - Norway
 - Human Security Network (HSN) 1999
 - Japan
 - Friends of Human Security (UN; Japan/Mexico)
- Commission on Human Security (experts)
 - *Human Security Now* 2001

Proponents

- United Nations
 - UN SG, *Millenium Report, In Larger Freedom 2005*
 - UN Trust Fund for Human Security 1999
 - OCHA / Human Security Unit 2004
 - Advisory Board for Human Security 2003
 - UNESCO Division of Human Rights, Human Security and Philosophy
 - Friends of Human Security 2005
- European Union
 - ‚Barcelona‘ (2004) and ‚Madrid‘ (2007) reports – „A Human Security Doctrine for Europe“

14 years later

- Moved from the margins of the development debate to global political discourse
- Penetrates multilateral global (UN) and regional (EU) organisations
- Largely appreciated by NGOs
- Consistently used and referred to by a number of governments
- Disputed for its definition, scope, content, analytical ambiguity, political appropriateness

Characteristics

- No exclusive ‚ownership‘ or interpretation
- Horizontal: broadening security
 - New non-military threats (terrorism, natural disaster, financial crisis)
- Vertical: deepening security
 - Beyond state security: individual is ultimate referent of security
 - Individual not as ‚citizens‘ but ‚person‘

Security from what - definitions

- „Narrow“: freedom from fear (Canada)
 - „pervasive threats to rights, safety and lives“
 - e.g. protection of civilians in armed conflicts, conflict prevention, crime, political accountability, peace operations...
- „Broad“ (UNDP, Japan)
 - freedom from want, e.g. human rights, health care, education, empowerment, livelihood, disaster, environment, economic downturn...
 - Japan: „freedom from fear, freedom from want, and the freedom of future generations ...“

Canada

- „... human security is a people-centered approach to foreign policy which recognizes that lasting stability cannot be achieved until people are protected from violent threats to their rights, safety or lives“ (www.gv.ca)
- “... in essence, an effort to construct a global society where the safety of the individual is at the centre of the international priorities and a motivating force for international action; where international human rights standards and the rule of law are advanced and woven into a coherent web protecting the individual; where those who violate these standards are held fully accountable; and where our global, regional and bilateral institutions – present and future – are built and equipped to enhance and enforce these standards.” (Lloyd Axworthy)

Narrow approach

■ Advantages

- Conceptual and analytical clarity
- Operational tool
- „the key to a powerful agenda, if properly delimited“

■ Critique

- Does not capture multidimensional threats
- Does not respond to peoples actual fears in everyday life
- Treats effects rather than root causes

Commission on Human Security

- *Human Security Now*: „...means protecting the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfilment“
- *Ogata/Cels*: “...means protecting vital freedoms – fundamental to human existence and development. Human security means protecting people from severe and pervasive threats, both natural and societal, and empowering individuals and communities to develop the capabilities for making informed choices and acting on their own behalf.”

Broad approach

■ Advantages

- Allows multi-faceted response to multi-dimensional threats
- Sacrifices precision for inclusiveness
- Allows for integrated and interdisciplinary analysis and policy design and coordinated approach

■ Critique

- „a shopping list of all bad things that can happen“
- „a concept that aspires to explain anything explains almost nothing“
- „diluting the concept diminishes its political salience“
- lacks analytical clarity and descriptive power
- inoperational

Threshold-based approach

- Bridges broad and narrow definitions
- Allows for flexibility and operability
- No accepted threshold beyond which threats to survival, livelihood and dignity must trigger a human security response
 - ,critical and life threatening dangers‘
 - ,dangers to vital core of lifes‘
 - ,extreme vulnerability‘
 - ,crisis situations‘

Definition

- „...the objective of human security is to safeguard the vital core of all human lives from critical and pervasive threats, in a way that is consistent with long-term human fulfilment“ (Sabina Alkire)

Perceptions

- Foreign policy agenda
 - „an idea that works in practice“
 - Framework for coordination, complementation and cohesion of governmental policies
- Political leitmotif
 - Shape attitudes and performance; provide explanation and orientation, coordination and decision guidance; motivation and mobilisation; „signifier of shared values“
- Bridge connecting challenges and responses
- Organising principle / normative framework

Critique

- No value added
 - „a reductionist, idealistic notion that adds little analytical value“ (Barry Buzan)
 - „new wine in old bottles“ (Tomuschat)
- „Securitizing“
 - „is giving a priority tag to everyone’s luggage“
 - in the absence of criteria, prioritizing reflects ideology
 - conveys false sense of hope to victims
- Imposing ideology
 - ambiguity lends itself to ideological exploitation
 - based on ‚Western‘ human rights and Western development paradigm
- Pretext for humanitarian intervention