

## Module : Human & Social Sciences

### Lesson 06 Human security

**Human security** is an emerging paradigm for understanding global vulnerabilities whose proponents challenge the traditional notion of national security by arguing that the proper referent for security should be the individual rather than the state. Human security holds that a people-centered view of security is necessary for national, regional and global stability.

The concept emerged from a post-Cold War, multi-disciplinary understanding of security involving a number of research fields, including development studies, international relations, strategic studies, and human rights. The United Nation Development Program's 1994 Human Development Report is considered a milestone publication in the field of human security, with its argument that insuring "freedom from want" and "freedom from fear" for all persons is the best path to tackle the problem of global insecurity.

Critics of the concept argue that its vagueness undermines its effectiveness, that it has become little more than a vehicle for activists wishing to promote certain causes, and that it does not help the research community understand what security means or help decision makers to formulate good policies. In order for human security to challenge global inequalities, there has to be cooperation between a country's foreign policy and its approach to global health. However, the interest of the state has continued to overshadow the interest of the people.

#### Origins

The emergence of the human security discourse was the product of a convergence of factors at the end of the Cold War. These challenged the dominance of the neorealist paradigm's focus on states, "mutually assured destruction" and military security and briefly enabled a broader concept of security to emerge. The increasingly rapid pace of globalization; the failure of liberal state building, the reduced threat of nuclear war between the superpowers, the exponential rise in the spread and consolidation of democratisation and international human rights norms opened a space in which both 'development' and concepts of 'security' could be reconsidered.

At the same time the increasing number of internal violent conflicts in Africa, Asia and Europe (Balkans) resulted in concepts of national and international security failing to reflect the challenges of the post Cold War security environment whilst the failure of neoliberal development models to generate growth, particularly in Africa, or to deal with the consequences of complex new threats (such as HIV and climate change) reinforced the sense that international institutions and states were not organised to address such problems in an integrated way.

- **Economic security** — Economic security requires an assured basic income for individuals, usually from productive and remunerative (lucrative) work or, as a last resort, from a **publicly financed safety net**. In this sense, only about a quarter of the world's people are presently economically secure. While the economic security problem may be more serious in developing countries, concern also arises in developed countries as well. Unemployment problems constitute an important factor underlying political tensions and ethnic violence.
- **Food security** — Food security requires that all people at all times have both physical and economic access to basic food. According to the United Nations, the overall

availability of food is not a problem, rather the problem often is the poor distribution of food and a lack of purchasing power. In the past, food security problems have been dealt with at both national and global levels. However, their impacts are limited. According to UN, the key is to tackle the problems relating to access to assets, work and assured income (related to economic security).

- **Health security** — Health Security aims to guarantee a minimum protection from diseases and unhealthy lifestyles. In developing countries, the major causes of death traditionally were infectious and parasitic diseases, whereas in industrialized countries, the major killers were diseases of the circulatory system. Today, lifestyle-related chronic diseases are leading killers worldwide, with 80 percent of deaths from chronic diseases occurring in low- and middle-income countries. According to the United Nations, in both developing and industrial countries, threats to health security are usually greater for poor people in rural areas, particularly children. This is due to malnutrition and insufficient access to health services, clean water and other basic necessities.
- **Environmental security** — Environmental security aims to protect people from the short- and long-term ravages (devastation) of nature, man-made threats in nature, and deterioration of the natural environment. In developing countries, lack of access to clean water resources is one of the greatest environmental threats. In industrial countries, one of the major threats is air pollution. Global warming, caused by the emission of greenhouse gases, is another environmental security issue.
- **Personal security** — Personal security aims to protect people from physical violence, whether from the state or external states, from violent individuals and sub-state actors, from domestic abuse, or from predatory adults. For many people, the greatest source of anxiety is crime, particularly violent crime.
- **Community security** — Community security aims to protect people from the loss of traditional relationships and values and from sectarian and ethnic violence. Traditional communities, particularly minority ethnic groups are often threatened. About half of the world's states have experienced some inter-ethnic strife. The United Nations declared 1993 the Year of Indigenous People to highlight the continuing vulnerability of the 300 million aboriginal people in 70 countries as they face a widening spiral of violence.
- **Political security** — Political security is concerned with whether people live in a society that honors their basic human rights. According to a survey conducted by Amnesty International, political repression, systematic torture, ill treatment or disappearance was still practised in 110 countries. Human rights violations are most frequent during periods of political unrest. Along with repressing individuals and groups, governments may try to exercise control over ideas and information.

### **Freedom from Fear vs. Freedom from Want and beyond.**

In an ideal world, each of the UNDP's seven categories of threats (and perhaps others as a broader discussion might prioritize) would receive adequate global attention and resources. Yet attempts to implement this human security agenda have led to the emergence of two major schools of thought on how to best practice human security — "***Freedom from Fear***" and "***Freedom from Want***". While the UNDP 1994 report originally argued that human security requires attention to both *freedom from fear* and *freedom from want*, divisions have gradually emerged over the proper scope of that protection (e.g. over what threats individuals should be protected from) and over the appropriate mechanisms for responding to these threats.

- **Freedom from Fear** — This school seeks to limit the practice of Human Security to protecting individuals from violent conflicts while recognizing that these violent threats are strongly associated with poverty, lack of state capacity and other forms of inequities. This approach argues that limiting the focus to violence is a realistic and manageable approach towards Human Security. Emergency assistance, conflict prevention and resolution, peace-building are the main concerns of this approach.
- **Freedom from Want** — The school advocates a holistic approach in achieving human security and argues that the threat agenda should be broadened to include hunger, disease and natural disasters because they are inseparable concepts in addressing the root of human insecurity and they kill far more people than war, genocide and terrorism combined. Different from "Freedom from Fear", it expands the focus beyond violence with emphasis on development and security goals.