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HUMAN SECURITY AS A *SINE QUA NON* FOR POVERTY REDUCTION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

by Ojijo Odhiambo and Fatima Umar
    UNDP Nigeria Country Office

Background and Context

Across the globe, many people remain vulnerable and are at risk of sliding back into poverty despite the commendable efforts made in reducing absolute poverty over the past three decades. In Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), for instance, despite the reversal in economic stagnation over the past 25 years, wealth has not been distributed among the most vulnerable populations, and the number of people classified as extremely poor has risen steadily from 276 million in 1990 to 389 million in 2013 (World Bank, 2017). Inequality in the region is evident not just in income distribution, but also in access to health, education and assets, with wide inter-regional and inter-state variations. It is against this background that member states of the United Nations in 2015 adopted the Agenda 2030 and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with the overarching objective of *"ending poverty in all its forms everywhere"*. In 2013, at a regional level, the African Union Commission (AUC) adopted its own Agenda 2063, which aims to achieve a *"prosperous Africa that is people driven, peaceful and secure"*.

To accelerate poverty reduction and achieve an integrated, prosperous and secure Africa, there is a need to explore new ways of measuring and tracking progress in order to identify the most vulnerable groups and the root causal factors of vulnerability. In this paper, we discuss the concept of human security, measured by the Human Security Index (HSI), as a useful addition to the family of measures of development that African countries could adopt in their pursuit of the SDGs and Agenda 2063 aspirations. We posit that African countries should consider adopting the HSI as a conceptual, analytical and operational framework in their efforts to address the region's persistent social and economic development challenges.

Key Points

- Across the globe, many people remain vulnerable and are at risk of sliding back into poverty despite the commendable efforts made by the international community in reducing absolute poverty over the past three decades.

- The concept of human security, measured by the Human Security Index (HSI), can provide a useful measure of development that African countries could adopt in their pursuit of the SDGs and Agenda 2063 aspirations.

- Human security focuses on socioeconomic issues affecting individuals and societies rather than extra-territorial threats affecting national borders and sovereignty.

- The HSI, appropriately contextualised at the regional level, would allow for cross-country comparisons and monitoring of progress towards poverty reduction, regional economic integration as well as Agenda 2063 and the SDGs.

- Security is key to the aspirations of and commitments made by African leaders in the context of Agenda 2063 and the SDGs, and it may be an opportune moment to begin measuring and assessing progress towards the realisation of human security in the continent.

Measuring human security and computing the HSI for African countries is critical for a number of reasons. Firstly, measurement of human security can help broaden the understanding of the notion of security and highlight the inter-relationships between security, poverty reduction, regional integration and sustainable development. Secondly, it helps identify the underlying causal factors and patterns that could expose several other sources of insecurity such as primordial poverty and want. Thirdly, measurement can help reveal interactions between the various dimensions of security and thus identify correlative impacts previously unknown or less understood. Lastly, measurement of human security can provide evidence of trends useful for policy and decision-making as well as a method for monitoring progress towards achieving national development goals, the SDGs and Agenda 2063.

What is Human Security?

The concept of human security started to gain prominence in the immediate post-Cold War era[1] when it became evident that focussing only on state and territorial security and national sovereignty was not sufficient to guarantee the safety, security and prosperity of people. At that time, it became evident that it was necessary to explore a new developmental concept represented by a paradigm shift from the narrow focus on territorial and physical security to an interrogation of the broader social, economic, environmental and governance issues affecting the security and wellbeing of individuals.

Whereas the general notion of security addresses territorial threats, human security is more nuanced and presents a much broader measure of security incorporating non-territorial factors. It addresses the root causal factors of conflicts ranging from poverty, deprivation and food insecurity to environmental degradation and political factors. It focuses on socioeconomic issues affecting individuals and societies rather than extra-territorial threats affecting national borders and sovereignty.

There is, however, no universally accepted definition of human security. Indeed, human security means different things to different people in different contexts. The Commission on Human Security's 2003 report[2] provided some useful insights into the concept of human security when it stated that human security is:

"…to protect the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfillment. Human security means protecting fundamental freedoms—freedoms that are the essence of life. It means protecting people from critical (severe) and pervasive (widespread) threats and situations. It means using processes that build on people's strengths and aspirations. It means creating political, social, environmental, economic, military and cultural systems that together give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood and dignity."

Human security, in essence, brings together the human elements of security, human rights and development. Human security complements state or territorial security; it strengthens human development and enhances human rights[3]. Human security is thus people-centred, multi-sectoral, comprehensive and context-specific.

Conceptual and Computational Issues and Linkages to Agenda 2063 and the SDGs

Critical questions arise, however, with respect to the conceptualisation and computation of measures of human security in different societal, geographic and temporal contexts. More specifically, questions abound as to whether human security can and should be measured in the first place. Does there exist a causal relationship or correlation between human security and sustainable development? What is the extent of overlap between measures of human security and sustainable development? Should measurement of human security be concept-led or data-led; or alternatively, how does one strike a balance between these two? In measuring human security, which domains should be included? How does one balance between the parsimony of domains and the comprehensiveness of coverage of the critical elements of human security and sustainable development?

In its 1994 Human Development Report[4], the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conceptualised human security as comprising two elements - freedom from fear and freedom from want: freedom from fear involving physical violence, sexual and psychological abuse, persecution and death; and freedom from want involving employment, food security and access to healthcare. The report identified seven dimensions or domains of human security:

- *economic security* – measuring assured basic income (employment), social safety nets, income levels;
- *food security* – measuring food production, availability, calorie intake;
- *health security* – measuring diseases, access to health services, maternal and infant mortality;
- *environmental security* – measuring water pollution, land use, air quality, natural disasters;
- *community security* – measuring demographic composition, stability;
- *personal security* – measuring physical violence (war, crime, rape, child abuse, drug abuse, accidents); and
- *political security* – measuring democratic freedom, strength of civil society, priority on military spending.

King and Murray (2000), however, averred that the wide range of dimensions of human security included in the 1994 UNDP report render measurement and policy-making problematic. They proposed that human security should be measured on the basis of only those

things that are vital for individual survival - health, education, income, political freedom and democracy. In other words, they defined human security as a state of *Generalised Poverty*. They proposed the following three measures of human security:

- Years of Individual Human Security (YIHS) – expected years an individual will spend outside a state of generalised poverty.
- Individual Human Security (IHS) – proportion of an individual's lifespan that s/he could expect to spend outside a state of generalised poverty.
- Population Years of Human Security (PYHS) – aggregating YIHS and IHS for a particular population.

From the foregoing, it is apparent that human security is an evolving concept that is still plagued with conceptual and measurement challenges. The first set of challenges relates to a determination of what individuals and societies perceive as the critical elements of human security and thus merit inclusion in the computation process. The second set of challenges relates to the relationship between human security and other well established and widely used development concepts and frameworks such as human development and the SDGs. The third set of challenges relates to the availability or lack of identical or comparable quality data necessary for making cross-country and temporal comparisons, while the fourth set relates to the range of dimensions that can be realistically included in the computation process to make meaningful aggregation and subsequently, policy decisions.

The aforementioned conceptual and computational challenges notwithstanding, attempts should always be made to agree on a parsimonious set of dimensions, which capture the theoretical, scientific and perceptive understandings, and allow for an objective interpretation of human security in any given context. In other words, the computation of a measure of human security – in this case, the Human Security Index (HSI) – should be based on sound theory and proven science.

Human Security Index (HSI) for Africa?

For many African countries, the period following the Cold War was characterised by a heightened threat to security and national sovereignty. In an attempt to maintain territorial integrity and presence, as well as relevance in regional and global arenas, many African leaders focused their attention on strengthening armed forces and exercising control over the military. For a number of these countries, this increased focus on territorial and state-centric security came at a cost – the failure to pay adequate attention to the root causal factors of internal conflict and strife. The security challenges facing the region at that time were not necessarily external, but rather the consequence of worsening

economic conditions and erosion of livelihoods, including deepening inequalities in wealth and access to basic social services, deteriorating social development indicators, environmental degradation, and political instability.

It is perhaps against this backdrop that more recently, African leaders have identified security as a key pillar of the regional integration and sustainable development agenda. As stated earlier, the African Union Commission's Agenda 2063 has as one of its seven aspirations *"A peaceful and secure Africa"*[5]. Agenda 2063 emphasises the important role of good governance, democracy, social inclusion, economic prosperity, respect for human rights and the rule of law in promoting peace and socioeconomic development in the region. It recognises that good governance, democracy, social inclusion and respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law are all necessary pre-conditions for a peaceful and conflict free continent.[6] It envisions an Africa free from conflict, poverty, exclusion, organised crime and other threats to human security through responsive and responsible institutions geared towards a people-centred development. African countries have also adopted Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, which emphasise human security across all domains as a prerequisite for the achievement of long-term development. SDG 16 specifically commits all countries to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, to provide access to justice for all and to build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Since security in its broader sense is key to the aspirations of and commitments made by African leaders within the context of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, it may be an opportune moment to begin measuring and assessing progress towards the realisation of human security in the continent – across geographic space and over time. The HSI, appropriately contextualised at the regional level, but computed at national and sub-national levels would allow for cross-country comparisons and monitoring of progress towards poverty reduction, Agenda 2063 and the SDGs.

Conclusions

The incessant development challenges plaguing the African continent call for continuous re-examination of the approaches and mechanisms for the measuring and tracking of progress towards global, regional and national development aspirations. The human security approach, as discussed above, presents one useful addition to the measurement and tracking of progress towards continental and national development aspirations as outlined in Agenda 2063 and the SDGs. The approach does not seek to undermine the importance of security from a military perspective in relation to possible threats to territorial integrity and national sovereignty, but it encourages nation states to address the totality of pertinent socioeconomic

challenges. These include poverty, unemployment, lack of education, food insecurity, lack of access to health services, and environmental degradation, all of which are root causal factors of the security and development challenges currently bedevilling the continent.

In sum, increased attention to human security, as measured by the HSI, could lead to faster progress in regional integration, poverty reduction and sustainable development. This could be achieved by:

- propagating a paradigm shift in the security discourse from a state-based approach to one directly focusing on individuals and societies;
- identifying the root causal factors of conflicts and vulnerability, their consequences, and preventing them before they occur;
- re-emphasising the critical role of the state in protecting and empowering individuals by

providing stability, education, employment, and social safety nets, fostering economic growth, and allowing individuals the opportunity to actively take part in decision making;
- promoting a multidimensional approach to the security problem by identifying and delineating context-specific dimensions of security and establishing their inter-relationships, thus providing a multiplicity of policy levers for effective decision making;
- guiding states in striking a balance between military and development spending in the knowledge that development spending can negate the need for military expenditures; and
- enabling states to work synergistically, progressively, and systematically, as well as track progress towards the Agenda 2030 aspirations and the SDGs.

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Notes

1. A period of time spanning 1947 – 1991 characterised by nonviolent state of hostility between the Soviet Union and the United States of America.
2. CHS/Commission on Human Security (2003). *Human Security Now,* New York. UN Secretary-General's Commission on Human Security.
3. *Ibid.*
4. See *http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/255/hdr_1994_en_complete_nostats.pdf*
5. African Union Commission (2015). *Agenda 2063, the Africa we want*. Addis Ababa: African Union Commission. *http://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/agenda2063.pdf*
6. *Ibid.*

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