
UNIT 12 HUMAN SECURITY

Structure

- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 What is Human Security?
- 12.3 Is Human Security a New Concept?
- 12.4 Characteristic Features of Human Security
- 12.5 Threats to Human Security
 - 12.5.1 Health Security
 - 12.5.2 Food Security
 - 12.5.3 Economic Security
 - 12.5.4 Environmental Security
 - 12.5.5 Political Security
 - 12.5.6 Personal Security
 - 12.5.7 Community Security
- 12.6 Human Security in Sub-Saharan Africa
- 12.7 Summary
- 12.8 Exercises

12.1 INTRODUCTION

For the major part of the 20th Century, the framework of security was based on the primacy of the politico-military components. Historically, it was a period in international affairs when the world had experienced two world wars followed by an intensely competitive Cold War and when security and sheer human survival was considered as nearly co-terminus. The policy-makers and practitioners of public affairs and diplomacy in such a situation largely followed the power-centric approach to security. They strongly believed that the state was the only institution that could be entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring the security of its people.

With the end of the bi-polarity following the end of the Cold War, the traditional military-political approach to security was found inadequate. Peace was the new dividend. But there was also a realisation that peace was not to mean a mere absence of war. To be meaningful, peace had to be translated to include both 'freedom from fear' and 'freedom from want'. Equally important was that the new peace dividend had to be shared by all the people.

Almost overnight, the minimalist state-centric approach to security seemed inadequate. There **was** therefore a need for a broader, maximalist and re-defined understanding of security. The formulation of policies and their implementation had to place at its centre, the human being. Such a framework would have to factor in the well being of men and women, their aspirations and goals. This marked the launch of the human security concept to development that is highly people-centric.

12.2 WHAT IS HUMAN SECURITY?

Human Security, according to Thomas and Wilkin, describes a condition of existence "in which basic material needs are met and in which human dignity, including meaningful participation in the

life of the community can be realised". This is precisely what the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Report had argued when it stated that individuals are weighed down by "worries about daily life than from the dread of a cataclysmic world event. Job securities, income security, health security, environmental security, security from crime are the emerging concerns of human security all over the world.

12.3 IS HUMAN SECURITY A NEW CONCEPT?

Seemingly novel, much of the contents of human security were reiterated time and again in the past. The same sentiments were succinctly captured as far back as June 1945, when the United Nations Security Council declared to a war-weary world that "the battle of peace had to be fought on two fronts. The first is the security front where victory spells freedom from fear. The second is the economic and social, where victory means freedom from want". Security had to mean security of peace both for men and women as also "security in their homes and jobs". In 1976, the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights referred to these ideas as "the new compulsions of global human security".

Social scientists had by the late 1960s and early 1970s begun to discuss the importance of ensuring Basic Human Needs (BHN) for all people. Mahbub-ul Haq and Paul Streeten had argued that the *raison d'être* of development was to treat men, women and children-present and future generations as ends. To develop was to improve the human conditions and to enlarge people's choices. Specifically, the BHN approach reiterates the mandate that every nation ensures minimum average nutrition,, education, health, housing and transport.

By the end of early 1990s, social scientists argued that human security had to include a safe, secure, clean and ecologically balanced environment, assured employment and income security as also being gender sensitive. Human security has had to be security in people's homes as also security within the nation-state and in the world at large. The logic behind such an extended approach was simple. While the problems in the poor countries could *inter alia* be hunger, ill-health, ethnic conflicts, social disintegration, transmutable diseases, natural resources depletion etc., in the advanced countries they could be drug trafficking, refugee influx, terrorism, environmental pollution, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction etc.

Failure to recognise the signs of human insecurity would mean, especially to the under-privileged sections of society, loss of food security, absence of affordable healthcare and decent shelter, lack of educational opportunities, and unemployment leading to income insecurity. None of this is to ignore the several other and related material and non-material aspects of life.

12.4 CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF HUMAN SECURITY

Human security is characterised by some essential features. These are:

- i) Human security is people-centric.
- ii) Human security is universal.
- iii) Human security is interdependent.
- iv) Human security is both quantitative and qualitative in content.
- v) Human security could be best ensured by early corrective measures.

For human security to be successfully secured what is needed is an efficient and sensitive democracy and a vibrant civil society that work in tandem. Both the state and the society have to be responsible and responsive. If they are not, the result will be human insecurity. Human insecurity would essentially mean skewed socio-political and economic structures that translate the concept of entitlement to security. Where human security is ignored it is only a matter of time before the security of the country and the nation-state is compromised. Human insecurity is high where the propensity for conflict is high. The result is that basic human needs remain unmet. The UNDP's Human Development Index highlights precisely this fact when it points out that between the years 1990-1995 only 14 per cent of the countries were ranked high, 34 per cent of countries were ranked medium. Fifty-two per cent of the countries and much of Africa falls into this category, where there is a constant intra-state warfare. The conditions are ranked low on the Human Development Index. The Human Development Index is a composite measure of human development containing indicators representing three equally weighed dimensions of human development — longevity (life expectancy at birth), knowledge (adult literacy and years of schooling) and income (purchasing power parity, dollars per capita).

12.5 THREATS TO HUMAN SECURITY

While threats to human security can be from multiple sources, the most to be expected are in the areas of health, food, economic (income), environment, personal, community and political.

12.5.1 Health Security

The old adage: "[I]f wealth is lost, something is lost... If health is lost everything is lost", is the apt sentiment to capture the essence of health security. This is particularly, though not exclusively, true with regard to the developing world. Part of the reason is that health related fatalities in the developing countries continue to be dominated by communicable diseases such as tuberculosis, typhoid, diarrhoea, acute respiratory infections etc. Unclean and unsafe environments are the primary reasons, as are lack of potable water and poor standards of nutrition. Besides, expenditures on healthcare as percentage of GDP are nearly negligible in the developing countries. Expenditure patterns also continue to be largely urban biased, often at the expense of the rural poor. The non-availability of trained and adequate medical personnel also contributes to health insecurity in most developing economies. The number of doctors is one doctor for 7,000 people in Asia while for sub-Saharan Africa the figure is one doctor for every 36,000 people. And, as for health insurance, while poor people anywhere in the world can ill-afford it—the poor in the developing countries are unaware even of its existence.

To make a bad situation worse is that children and women are victims of health insecurity. In fact, mortality rates take the toll as the high rates of pregnancy and delivery related deaths. Most of these deaths can be prevented if women had access to adequate and nutritious meals, safe and affordable family planning assistance and timely help in the pre- and post-natal stages of pregnancy.

The most recent threat to health insecurity has been the human immuno-deficiency virus/acquired immuno-deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) pandemic. This is particularly so for low-income countries where the victims are usually in the 15 to 49 year age groups—the most productive years of an individual's life. In Africa, the situation is more poignant—well over one million children are AIDS orphans, just as the approximate number of women who suffer from HIV/AIDS total up to several millions. Clearly, contrary to what the UN AIDS Report of 2000 on *The Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic* claims, human security in Africa no longer can be seen as "an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives".

12.5.2 Food Security

Food insecurity can be a major threat to human security. What is surprising is that this is despite the availability of ample supplies of food at the global level as also in many developing countries. It is a matter of concern that even in the age of plenty, there are countries where citizens do not get enough of sustenance to help lead a meaningful and productive life. About 30 per cent of the total population of Africa are undernourished while 30 per cent of infants are born undernourished. Underweight babies are an indication of the would-be-mothers having inadequate access to food.

12.5.3 Economic Security

For societies, economic security is of critical concern. In fact, one could argue that economic security should be given primacy in the construction of human development index. Economic insecurity is experienced by people both, in the developed as also developing world arising essentially out of the mismatch between the job positions available, the quality and the size of the labour force. In such a situation, discrimination is common. People also feel insecure if they hold temporary or part-time jobs as opposed to permanent or full-time jobs or where there are differences in wages for the same job based on gender discrimination. Similarly, insecurity is experienced when individuals perform hazardous tasks. Insecurity of incomes is also translated to mean the erosion of the value of real wages because of rising inflation. While the industrialised economies have, in many instances also experienced a decline in real wages, it is the scale or the magnitude of the same in the developing world that is of serious concern. In Africa, the decline has varied between 40 per cent and 80 per cent. According to the reports of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), only 25 per cent of the world's people may be economically secure. The growing number of people categorised as below-the-poverty line (BPL) i.e. those who survive on less than one dollar a day, is an indication of how fragile economic security can be. Social scientists argue that a possible solution is unemployment insurance. But, given the volume of unemployed people and financial burden such schemes would impose on the fiscal situation, this solution is not a remedy for the developing world.

12.5.4 Environmental Security'

Nations are aware that human security can also be threatened by environmental degradation. No longer is it possible to argue that the damages inflicted wantonly on the earth, atmosphere and water by human misdeeds can be reversed either easily or in totality. The present day dynamics of demography, the intense industrialisation programmes and the accompanied changes in life-styles, land misuse or mismanagement have resulted in drought, desertification and deforestation. This points out how sensitive the ecology-environment nexus is. Clearly, natural disasters are not always 'natural'—they are man-made, chronic and of catastrophic proportions.

12.5.5 Political Security

Political security has always been an important aspect of human security along with socio-economic security. Political security is grounded in the way states are organised, the ideologies that they profess and the systems of government.

Domestic political security mirrors the sentiment that the state that enables its people to live a life of dignity, honour and where people's basic human rights are secure irrespective of social stratification is an efficient and a good state. Such an understanding of political security clearly implies that states will spend less on their military and more on the BHN. Also, as reported by the Amnesty International, more than a hundred countries have been guilty of human rights violations, political

detention and uninvestigated imprisonment. The least 'free' areas according to the UNESCO's index of a free press were in North Africa, West and South Asia. Clearly, elections, periodically held and multi-party based have not enhanced the political security aspect of human security.

12.5.6 Personal Security

The United Nations Development Programme Report of 1994, which specifically highlighted the theory and praxis of human security also discussed in terms of personal and community security. Indicative of the expression, personal security is the valid argument, that at the base of human security is the security of each and every human being irrespective of his station in life or the state of the economy in which he lives. Human life is sacred everywhere and any abuse to human beings lowers human security. Age, gender, privileged or underprivileged should not, in an ideal world, make for difference to one's personal security. But the reality is otherwise.

Child abuse is prevalent around the world: the difference is in the nature and degree of such abuse. In the developing economies given the high poverty levels, unpaid child labour common and is being made to work in hazardous jobs. Similarly child prostitution has been found to be rampant in several countries or societies in South East Asia, while the girl child in Africa is also subject to cruel physical mutilation. In the developed countries the individual security of the child could be threatened because of broken homes, physical violence and avoidable psychosomatic stress factors. All these make children more vulnerable and highly insecure. Similarly, women too have been victims of discrimination. Dowry-related deaths and victims of abhorrent sexual violence are just as common as the fact that women are the last to benefit from the fruits of education, while they are the first to be fired from jobs. Personal security of people is also threatened by the state itself when it needlessly declares war or refuses to engage itself in diplomacy. Similarly states are guilty of violating human rights by way of torture, custodial deaths or engaged in escalation of ethnic cleansing activities.

12.5.7 Community Security

Human beings have always lived in the midst of a community—they, more often than not, are integral members of a family, a race or ethnicity based community, an organisation like a trade union, a social/religious/professional organisation. Such memberships enable them to enjoy a sense of security based on numbers. But such membership can also entail loss of privacy or can even be oppressive. The trade in slaves, bonded labour, the trade in immoral practices, especially, when it is forced on under-aged girls, are examples of oppression. It has been pointed out that in nearly 50 per cent of the world's nations, ethnic tensions are on the rise. To a large extent this has been so because of the diminishing access to life enhancing opportunities. Sri Lanka, former Yugoslavia and several African countries have witnessed such conflicts impacting both human and personal security.

Apart from these seven specific threats to human security, social scientists argue that given the huge disparities between nations threats to human security could also emanate from the very nature of the world we live in. Put differently, one should not underestimate the dangers inherent in the global system. Often, these are heightened by the policies pursued by the strong and powerful economies and/or by the inability of those in power to stem the disasters from spreading across national borders.

Threats to environment constitute the first category—everyone is now aware that the pollution of the environment anywhere is pollution everywhere, as pollution does not respect national boundaries.

The emission of huge quantities of sulphur dioxide into the atmosphere by one country falls as acid rain elsewhere. Such sulphur deposition is not good for vegetation and water supply systems. Similarly the emission of chlorofluorocarbons affects the ozone layer that in turn affects human health, giving rise especially to skin cancer. For that matter the accumulation of green house gases—carbon dioxide and methane in particular, leads to global warming. Sea levels would then rise forcing land to recede and the concomitant shrinking of national territories. Bangladesh which produces only 0.3 per cent of global emission could see its land area shrink by 17 per cent if the sea level rise by a mere meter. Human insecurity in fact has been heightened in the course of the last two decades because ecosystems are now fragile. While all countries will experience the ill-effects of such an accumulation of a weakened environment, it is the poor and the least developed economies that will suffer more. The solution to this would be to exercise on a continued basis the biological diversity of the environment, regeneration of soil, protection of the watershed areas, purification of the water supply systems, regulating the temperature, improved waste management systems and a clean green atmosphere.

Global insecurity with its attendant implication for human security is also due to the major changes in the population profile, especially in the case of the developing or low-income economies. The immediate impact is on the already diminishing non-renewable resources apart from major consequences for the country's already stretched social services, and employment opportunities and the viability of market institutions. In the medium to long term timeframe as population expands beyond the optimum—i.e. beyond what the resource endowments of the country can support, there could be ethnicity clashes, social traumas, environmental degradation and also a political danger to the very survival of the state. Equally real is the phenomenon of migration, displaced persons and refugee influx from the poor to the rich and from the disturbed to the stable countries. With the industrialised countries enjoying nearly 80 per cent of the global income and other developmental opportunities, much migration would be inevitable. Nearly 35 million people from the South have migrated to the North between 1960 and 1990, with more than one million joining each year. The number of illegal international migrants is also estimated to be in the range of 115 to 130 million. These are all apart from the millions of refugees or internally displaced people. Such a mass movement of people is often fuelled by the lack of employment opportunities in their home countries in contrast to the demand for workers—both skilled and unskilled in the industrialised countries. The problem, however, is that even in the industrialised countries, economic growth is stagnating resulting in high unemployment and 'jobless growth'. This of course creates serious problems for human security.

12.6 HUMAN SECURITY IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

The continent of Africa is today a challenge to the global humanity and global conscience. The problems that plague this continent seem to render the continent in a state of continuous crisis and constantly at war with itself. David Penant Rea in his *The African Burden* made the point that the continued impoverishment of the continent had made it an almost permanent economic laggard that would hardly be missed if it were to be bumped off the world map.

Africa's problems to the layman are difficult to understand for it is the continent that is universally acknowledged as the storehouse of every known mineral, substantial agricultural—especially cash crop produce. In such a situation, the unending erosion of its rich natural base appears to echo Kwame Nkrumah's sentiment that "Africa is a paradox... it is poor because it is rich" and Obasanjo's observation that Africa is "the third world of the Third World". Both the statements indicate the heavy degree of marginalisation that the continent is subject to.

Such a profile of penury in Africa is bound to impact an already unstable political and socially fragmented continent. This could cause a further economic decline superimposed by greater political disintegration. Politically, African states range from military dictatorships to ineptly functioning democracies. The concentration of power and privilege is in the hands of a select few. There are few alternative or credible second line of leadership. Popular participation on the lines of an effective civil society is absent in nearly two thirds of the African countries. And where it exists, it leaves much to be desired. The performance of the media—print as well as electronic—is also below par. Authority, legitimacy and accountability are conspicuous by their absence.

Also, a common feature across almost the entire continent is that states are patrimonial, predatory, rentier and kleptocratic in nature. While the degree of these pathological manifestations does vary, most African states are 'soft' states. They are riddled by massive and uninhibited corruption. The close collusion between an unprincipled bureaucracy and unscrupulous politicians is now of legendary proportions. Direct access to the huge quantum of public funds renders it difficult to separate the 'public' from the 'private'. These 'soft states' characterised by power-based relationships have led to the enlargement of the personal rule syndrome. They also epitomise Africa's economic incompetence as also the total mismanagement of policies.

This is where the issue of governance—specifically the lack of it assumes centrality in the overall context of human security. For, it is the governance that determines 'who gets what, when and how'. Given the preponderance of the state, it is seen by even the layman well over forty years into freedom that security in Africa continues to be largely state-centric, militaristic and male-dominated in nature and content. The continent of Africa is threatened by the series of insecurities discussed earlier. Human security in Africa is a pipe dream.

Top on the list of insecurities is health insecurity. Given the poor health-care facilities and with most governments continuing to spend enormous amounts of money as military expenditures, little is left to take care of the budgetary needs for a healthy populace. In addition to the traditional communicable disease, the I-IIV-AIDS pandemic is likely to strike at the very roots of society's existence viz. the people. According to the latest available information it is quite possible that South Africa in the span of four generations will be back to where it was in 1910.

Similarly, insecurity of income is also experienced because of the constantly widening gap between the 'haves' and 'have-nots'. Africa's inability to integrate itself with the global economy has meant that neither aid nor trade nor investment has paid the dividends they were expected to. Even if the poor have not gotten really poor because of the almost invisible turn around of the economies in view of the stabilisation and structural adjustment programmes now in place in most of Africa, income disparities do worry the policy makers of Africa.

Environmental insecurity in Africa is also a matter of serious concern given the fragile nature of the geographical determinants to development. Individuals and societies are handicapped by severe insecurities. It is but natural that human security in Africa has long been a casualty.

12.7 SUMMARY

As a concept and in its practical application, human security is rooted in the daily concerns of people. Human security is security of people, not only of territory: it is the security of individuals, societies, states and nations; it is the security achieved through sustainable development and is intergenerational in nature. It is also equity based in content. In the final analysis, human security is

security of all the people everywhere—in their homes, on the streets, in their jobs, in their communities and in their environment. Human security is a choice, not a chance. It is more than a mere idea whose time has come. As Barbara Ward argued, "Ideas are the prime movers of history. Revolutions usually begin with ideas." Human security is here to stay as it has always been, because the bottom line is that it is human security, which empowers the ordinary man, woman and child everywhere.

12.8 EXERCISES

- 1) What do you understand by the term "Human Security"?
- 2) Which are the areas in which human security can easily become human insecurity?
- 3) Which threat to human security is greater than the others in Africa? Why?
- 4) Discuss the problems of human security in Africa.