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Human (In)Security in Southern Africa

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Introduction

The concept of human security has been put on the official international agenda just over a decade ago in 1994. At that time, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) proposed a paradigm shift in the conceptualization of security, and asked for a shift away from the hitherto state-centric nature of security, to a human security paradigm[1]. Such a paradigm should deal with uninhibited population growth; disparities in economic opportunities; excessive international migration; environmental degradation; drug production and trafficking; and international terrorism[2]. For the UNDP, security had to be universalized, and the security made indivisible. Human security also suggests a need for greater preventive strategies and addressing root-causes. Most importantly means people-centredness to security and a rights-based, not regime-based, perspective to security[3].

The Commission on Human Security's report came up with a broad and expansive understanding of human security[4]. The report proposes a human security framework to deal with the threats people face in the 21st Century: people want peace, human rights, democracy and social equity[5]. Human security tackles poverty, diseases, inequality, conflicts and wars. It is anti-discrimination, and wishes to out-root gender-disparities, refugees and internally displaced people[6].

But there are some problems with the concept of human security. To be sure, the greatest contribution of the concept and debate to gate has been the focus on the need to move beyond traditional, regime and state security, and to put people at the centre of security.

However, the concept of human security remains too sketchy and broad. It is nebulous, ill-defined, too all-encompassing, and therefore prone to both abuse and therefore easy to dispense with. We must give substantive meaning to the concept so that it could have utility for research, activism, practice, and policy.

Concretising human security

There are several ways in which the concept of human security could be given greater utility. One way is to value human security not in isolation, but as part of a more comprehensive set of variable and factors.

Thus, human security issues of poverty, disease and the environment are intimately linked to peace and state security. Thus, the security of peoples, and advancing the quality of life of peoples, and ensuring that humans lead fulfilling lives can only meaningfully happen in the absence of aggression, war, and violent conflict. We therefore have to deal with security in a holistic and interconnected fashion. Human insecurity should therefore be assessed within the context of bad governance, lack of democracy, monopolisation of political power by individuals or ethnic groups, issues of exclusion, corruption, violation of basic human rights and ever-deepening poverty.

The African Union (AU), established in 2002, makes bold new security commitments. It commits to taking action against genocide, unconstitutional changes of regime, and regional instability. Indeed, there can be no human security in a context of genocide, gross violations of human rights, and intra- and inter-state wars.

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) sets out norms and standards for collective security, democratic governance and collective security, and parliamentarians must familiarise themselves with these developments and mechanisms and apply it to strengthen their parliamentary diplomacy and peace and security work.

The MDGs, human security, and the insecurity landscape in southern Africa

There is only 10 years to go before the 2015 target of the MDGs, and the region is woefully behind schedule. We made the point earlier that the MDGs is probably the closest we have to an official, international human security framework. It should be pointed out however, that even the MDGs is not a real policy agenda or framework. It is in fact more a wish list and declaration of a vision of human security; the challenge is in fact to turn it into a real human development and human security framework.

SADC's Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) places an important emphasis on aligning SADC's development agenda with the MDGs[7]. Like the MDGs, the RISDP accords top priority to poverty eradication. The RISDP, like the MDGs, is a 15-year plan.

The southern African region presents something of a paradox. On the one hand southern Africa is one of the least violent regions in Africa from the point of view of inter-state and intra-state war. Especially since the end of the civil war

in Angola in 2002 with the death of UNITA's Savimbi, inter-state and intra-state war has seriously dissipated in the region. Southern Africa has also experienced something of a democratization upheaval in terms of multiparty democracy, albeit that these democratization processes are typically weak and fragile.

On the other hand – and here is the rub – southern Africa is one of the regions faced with major levels of inequality and poverty, and these factors makes for great prospects for social dislocation and conflict. Human security and human development are the greatest challenges faced by the region, and unless human insecurity and human underdevelopment is addressed, it could reverse the gains of peace, and bring a return to violence, war and backslides in democracy in governance, as we have seen in Zimbabwe.

The question of historical injustices will continue to surface and create the conditions for conflict, even war.

Former OAU Secretary-General, Salim Ahmed Salim said about southern Africa that "...the region has experienced large-scale insecurity...This insecurity persists because the region has not yet managed effectively human security challenges such as threats to civilians' livelihoods, pandemics such as HIV/AIDS; poverty; natural disasters, conflict in the DRC and Angola; trafficking of drugs and arms; and cross-border crime"[8]. Human security threats such as drug and arms, flows of refugees and migrants, have indeed been regionalized in southern Africa[9]. The national average life expectancy rate of birth for southern Africa's 200 million inhabitants is a paltry 42 years, and the region faces a poverty complex that is spiraling downwards[10].

Southern Africa faces a major problem with small arms and light weapons, which are typically used in organized crime operations ands by gangs. Small arms and light weapons are used in efforts such as grog trafficking, car hijackings, diamond smuggling. Small weapons are used as `convertible currency'[11].

Interestingly, even senior southern African officials agree that human security is a major challenge in the region. On the eve of the 2005 SADC summit, SADC Executive Secretary, Prega Ramsany provided something of a template of the human security dilemmas in the region[12]. Ramsamy elucidated on the economic, political and social developments in the region.

Far from moving out of poverty as per the MDGs, the region's general poverty seems to be deepening as a result of widening inequality, weak political, social and economic governance structures, and a burgeoning health crisis. Poverty and inequality are no doubt the overarching challenges facing the region.

The poverty situation is marked by low levels of income, and high levels of human deprivation, and an average GDP per capita for the region stood at $932 in 2000, with massive variations between and within countries[13]. Poverty is particularly acute amongst households headed up by the elderly, women and children.

Socio-economic gains are constantly being set back by the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the region; southern Africa is the worst affected region hit by HIV/AIDS.

Ramsamy also explained some of the major social development challenges faced by the region. He said that the region continues to experience a high burden of major communicable diseases, particularly HIV and AIDS, TB and Malaria. These challenges, said Ramsamy, poses serious health concerns in the region, and is slowing down developmental processes.

Some southern African statistics estimate that as much as 25% of the age cohort 15-49 – the productive and skilled age group – is infected in 15 African Countries. Nine out of these twelve countries are in southern Africa[14]. This makes southern Africa the most HIV/AIDS affected sub-region in the world. Fifty five percent of all the infected people in southern Africa are women.

Human security challenges play themselves out against the backdrop of continued economic difficulty. The region is confronted with a plethora of enormous development challenges, which have not been resolved since the 1980s[15]. While over the past five years or so, economic growth rates have reached the 2-8% levels, the promise of great economic prospects in the region have been clearly overstated. Since the early 1990s, we have seen positive growth rates in the region. In 2001, the growth rate was a mere 1, 95%.

Food insecurity

Food insecurity is a major problem in the region. By 2002, some 14 million southern Africans required food aid[16]. The long period 1980 and 1995 saw negative per capita food production growth of –1, 0% against a population growth of 3% per annum[17]. The region has seen an increase in the number of malnourished persons up to 42% between 1997 and 1999. The statistics made for grim reading: 49% in Zimbabwe; 29% in Malawi; 30% in Lesotho; 26% in Zambia; and 49% in Swaziland[18].

The reasons for food insecurity in the region are numerous. General reasons include climatic variability such as droughts and floods. Since the 1980s, the region has witnessed at least three major droughts[19]: 1981-82; 1991-92; and 2001-2002. HIV/AIDs have worsened the food insecurity situation. Botswana experienced poor rains and reduced planting; in Zambia maize production declined by 29% in 2004 due to poor rains; and in Zimbabwe, production dropped by 75% due to a combination of poor rains and the Fast Track Land Reform programme[20].

In terms of conflict and war, there is little doubting that SADC has made tremendous advances in the political and governance spheres. Prega Ramsamy is correct to remind us that in broad terms, "SADC continues to be on track of peace and stability"[21]. He stated: "we continue to witness the consolidation of

democracy and the rule of law in our region"[22]. SADC now boasts Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections, adopted at the Mauritius summit in 2004[23]. A majority of SADC has gone to the polls in past 18 months, albeit that a lot of these elections have been highly contested.

However, in a country like the DRC, there are no legitimate political institutions, and certainly no democratically rooted constitutional process[24]. The country has a recent history of warlordism, and even after an election, the problem of rebels, spoilers and warlords will continue to haunt the country for a considerable period into the future. Indeed, there is an ongoing militarisation of society in spite of the ongoing peace process underway in the country.

In Swaziland, there continues to be a serious standoff between the monarchy and civil society movements, notably the labour aristocracy, who wants to democratize their country and introduce democratic governance, not monarchical rule. Political parties remain banned in Swaziland. Civil society opposition forces are not only excluded from governance processes, they are being harassed for their political believes and positions; many of them are in fact driven into exile.

In Angola, a formal peace process started with the death of UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi in 2002. But, now that formal attempts at peace-making are underway, the gains of the past two years could be reversed unless the legacy of war is addressed through democratic peace-building. Democratic peace-building would involve the strengthening of democratic institutions and a democratic culture. Unless this form of peace-building is addressed, peace could prove short lived.

Lesotho is a young and fragile democracy, one that is also impoverished and brittle. Like in Malawi, for example, a seat in parliament is often seen as a source of income, and a job. The stakes are therefore very high in a poor democracy like Lesotho, and over the past few years we there have been a proliferation of parties to the extent that there is today 19 parties all vying for seats in parliament.

In Zimbabwe meanwhile, tensions between government and opposition forces over the state of democracy continue. While Zanu-Pf has for more than half a decade now behaved like a disguised monarchy, and also turned the country into a virtual and de facto one party state, the opposition MDC is riddled with divisions[25].

Under the banner of "Operation Murambatsvina" ("throw the trash out"), and "Operation Restore Order", more than 700 000 have been rendered homeless and left destitute[26]. We have witnessed a complete breakdown of the rule of law, many cases of human rights abuses, denial of access to justice, a political culture of fear, a collapse of the social sector, a chronic shortage of foreign currency, and fuel and other imports[27]. This has come about in part as a direct

result of a backsliding in governance and democratization in Zimbabwe. It is now estimated that some 70% of Zimbabweans living below the poverty line, and more than 40% cannot access clean water[28]. In Zimbabwe, there are interlinkages between the crises of governance, rule of law, social justice and the land question. Zimbabwe is the world's fastest declining economy, and such a scenario is not conducive for human security Zimbabwe demolitions[29].

Conclusion: Human Security as the Social Question

Earlier in this paper we made the case for human security debate to become more grounded. The human security question could be seen in real terms as the social policy issue. Thus, even in the case of impressive macro-economic performance and economic growth, unless southern African and African states have the capacity to pursue progressive social policies that are pro-poor and people-centred, human insecurity will persist. The major challenges facing the region are the weakness of the state and state institutions, coupled with poverty, inequality, underdevelopment: it is from these that the human insecurity problem stem. The governance institutions put in place nationally and regionally in the SADC region are weak. They typically fail to resolve differences within and amongst states. Also, states are jealous of their sovereignty and are reluctant to surrender some of their sovereignty, and are even unwilling to pool some in favour of greater integration. Democratic governance in southern Africa is under stresses and strains. The potential for conflict are therefore evident.

The capacities of the state should be addressed so as to become more developmental by playing a redress and redistributive role in society with the singular aim of addressing the legacies of social injustices, racism, colonial and white minority domination. Southern African states, as many African states, have paid little attention to the challenges of social injustice, which have compounded the human security challenges in the region. The sovereignty and authority of the state to make effective social policy should be restored. But the sovereignty can only be restored through a well-resourced, capable state that can redress and reconstruct society through effective social policies.

If human security is all about "freedom from fear" and "freedom from want" than the concept should be developed as an operational tool for policy formulation and implementation. If people are to be placed at the centre of security promotion efforts, than governmental policies and institutions should be redirected. The policies, institutions and priorities of governments are not in line with this requirement however. Governments appear obsessed with market driven solutions as opposed to people-centred approaches. Human security cannot come about through notions of the minimalist state; strong, capable developmental states are required to address the human security challenge. The state, the market, the legal system and other public institutions, and civil

society, are all actors and factors needed to advance a human security paradigm.

It may be folly to promote human security as an end in itself. Maybe the way to go is to promote the idea of sustainable human development in Africa, in which human security, state security, peace, governance, democratization and economic development all form salient parts and elements to be pursued.

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[5] Ibid.

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[7] SADC Barometer, South African Institute of International Affairs, Issue 7, December 2004.

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[12] Prega Ramsamy, Pre-Summit briefing by the SADC Executive Secretary, Gabarone, 8 August 2005.

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[21] Prega Ramsamy, Pre-Summit briefing by the SADC Executive Secretary, op. cit.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ernest Wamba dia Wamba, Prospects for sustained peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo, presentation at the Ford Special Initiative for Africa meeting, Dakar, Senegal, October 2003, p. 5.

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[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.