

**Human Security and Public Participation: Positive Forces for
Change or Fuel for Further Violence – *exploring the links between
policy formulation and implementation mechanisms and their impact
on conflict***

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This short paper forms part of a research and information dissemination project entitled *Consensus-building Approaches and Policy Coordination Mechanisms: Responsive and Responsible Policy Formulation and Implementation in South Africa*. The project is funded by the European Union and the National Treasury through the Conflict and Governance Facility (CAGE) and managed by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSV) and Action for Conflict Transformation (ACTION). Although the project is still in its initial stages, this paper explores the links between human security, policy formulation and conflict as part of the background to the project. It argues that the prevalence of a participatory democracy contributes to people-centred policy formulations that reduce the potential for violence while at the same time meaningful public participation in policy formulation and implementation contributes directly to human security.

The paper begins by developing an understanding of human security that extends to include the links between democracy, participation and human fulfilment. It goes further to examine the role of the state in relation to human security and begins to dissect the various forces that impact on current state policy formulation. This is followed by the presentation of a model that articulates the relationship between these forces, the policy formulation mechanisms that impact on state policies and the potential for these mechanisms to either contribute to or prevent negative responses and outbreaks of violence when the policies are implemented. Finally the paper outlines the expected future direction of the project and clarifies how an action research component will further emphasise and interrogate aspects of the paper's central arguments.

Ubuntu: I Am Human, Because You Are

*Ubuntu*¹, an age-old African world-view, tradition, and way of life, which has as its foundation our common humanity, is at the heart of human security. According to Constitutional Court Judge, Justice JY Mokgoro, “the meaning of the concept becomes much clearer when its social value is highlighted. Group solidarity,

¹ The word *ubuntu* is used in several Nguni languages including Zulu, Xhosa and Ndebele. Some Southern African equivalents include: *botho* (in Sotho or Tswana), *hunhu* (Shona), *bunhu* (Tsonga), and *vhutu* (Venda).

conformity, compassion, respect, human dignity, humanistic orientation and collective unity have, among others been defined as key social values of ubuntu.”²

Ubuntu weaves together the humanity of each individual, in relation to the existence of, compassion and respect for, and sharing and living with others. One's identity as an individual and his/her existence and meaningfulness depends on the existence and survival of other individuals, and on human interdependence. Sharing with and caring for each other gives a social and traditional base to individuals and communities to live together and ensure that the survival, livelihood and dignity of individuals and communities are respected. This African philosophy of *Ubuntu* is in direct contrast to the Hobbesian conception of life as ‘short, nasty and brutish’ in the absence of the state, and overlaps strongly with recent efforts to define security not in terms of security of the state but of the security of human beings i.e. human security. Despite the fact that the term human security and its conceptualization is recent, its essence is not fundamentally new and echoes ancient human traditions of caring and respect for one another.

A working definition adopted by the UN Commission on Human Security described human security as “protecting vital freedoms. [This] means protecting people from critical and pervasive threats and situations, building on their strengths and aspirations. It also means creating systems that give people the building blocks of survival, dignity and livelihood. Human security connects different types of freedoms - freedom from want, freedom from fear and freedom to take action on one's own behalf. To do this, it offers two general strategies: protection and empowerment. Protection shields people from dangers. It requires concerted effort to develop norms, processes and institutions that systematically address insecurities. Empowerment enables people to develop their potential and become full participants in decision-making. Protection and empowerment are mutually reinforcing, and both are required in most situations.”³

² Mokgoro, JY, 1998

³ Sen, A, Ogata, S et al, 1999, p. 10

The report of the UN Commission emphasised that human beings continue to face life threatening situations that are beyond their control such as ‘financial crisis, a violent conflict, AIDS, a national policy that under cuts public and private investment in health care, a terrorist attack, water shortages, chronic destitution, or pollution in a distance land.’⁴ These threats necessitate the revision of the traditional concept of security that was previously focused on the upholding of the state’s territorial integrity and power base. This revision was further facilitated by changes in global political dynamics that followed the end of the Cold War, the domineering trend of globalisation and the decline in the role of the state, all of which negatively affected the capacity of the state to adequately protect people from human security threats.

The revision of the concept of security and the emphasis on human security does not replace state security. It rather considers the two as mutually reinforcing concepts by underlining the security of human beings and recognising the capabilities and limitation of state security in ensuring the safety of human beings.⁵ According to Commissioner Frene Ginwala, in her presentation of the UN Human Security report to South African President Thabo Mbeki, in his capacity as President of the African Union, “States ought not to be the sole or main referent of security. People’s interests or the interests of humanity, as a collective, become the focus. In this way, security becomes an all-encompassing condition in which individual citizens live in freedom, peace and safety and participate fully in the process of governance.”⁶

This re-conceptualisation of security is located in its recognition of people as human beings before they are anything else. The ethnic or national identity of people comes second and is preceded by their humanity and what they require to exist as human beings. The concept of human security also adopts a people-centred approach that takes individuals and communities rather than states, governments or territories as a ‘point of reference.’⁷ Implicit to this is the need for meaningful participation of individuals and communities in the mechanisms of the state that formulate and implement policies that affect them. It is this implication that provides the basis for a

⁴ Alkire, S., 2002, p. 1.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ginwala, F., 2003

⁷ Elements of the Concept of Human Security, 1999, p. 2.

deeper exploration of the impact of public participation on the potential of state policies to achieve their human security aims.

Democracy and Human Security

A growing body of knowledge on democracy and human security underscores the significance of public participation in providing long-term institutional assurance of the survival, livelihood and dignity of human beings.

The writings of the 1998 Nobel Prize winner for Economics, Amartya Sen, on the significance of democracy and freedom in the life of human beings are seminal in this regard. In his essay entitled ‘Democracy as a Universal Value,’ Sen argued in favour of the ‘capacity of democratic systems to better deal with natural disasters’ and underscores the prevalence of historical evidence of the absence of hunger (an aspect of human insecurity) within democratic states.⁸ Sen started his essay by reiterating his response to a question forwarded to him by a Japanese newspaper in 1997, asking him to identify the most important thing that has happened in the twentieth century. Provoked by the question, Sen scanned the major political and economic events that has characterized the century – the end of the British and the French empires; the two world wars; the rise and the fall of Nazism and Fascism; the rise of communism and its collapse in the Soviet Union and radical transformation in China; and, a shift of economic dominance by the West to economic balance by Japan, East and Southeast Asia. Sen, however, had no difficulties in identifying the ‘rise of democracy’ as the most significant development of the century.⁹

Sen identifies three functions or ‘distinct virtues’¹⁰ of democracy that are of paramount importance to understanding its relationship to human security.

Firstly, the *intrinsic value* of democracy, which is related to the political freedom of individuals. As part of human freedom, political freedom refers to the civil and political rights of human beings. Exercising these rights is ‘a crucial part of good lives of individuals as social beings. Political and social participation has *intrinsic value* for

⁸ Sen, Amartya, 1999 (a), pp. 3-17

⁹ Ibid, pp. 2-3

¹⁰ Ibid, pp. 9-12

human life and well-being.’¹¹ This, in other words, signifies the moral satisfaction or sense of belongingness, and benefits, that human beings gain as a result of taking part in social and political activities.

Secondly, the *instrumental value* of democracy, which in Sen’s words ‘enhance the hearing that people get in expressing and supporting their claims to political attention (including claims of economic needs).’¹² Governments’ responsiveness to public demands plays a determinant role in this regard. It includes, but is not restricted to the power of people to elect and recall those who govern them.

Thirdly, the *constructive importance* of democracy, which refers to the platform provided by democracy for a learning process between people. It is this platform that allows for the formation of values and priorities in society.¹³ Here, Sen raised and defended an important aspect of democracy i.e. public discussion, which otherwise can be described as dialogue. Public discussions and dialogue are central in the process of information exchange, identification of needs, setting priorities, making choices and building consensus.

To be prevented from any of these elements of democracy is ‘a major deprivation’¹⁴ for individuals and communities that affects human survival, livelihood and dignity. In other words, human security.

Identifying natural disasters, especially famine, as avoidable, Sen stated that ‘...in the terrible history of famines in the world, no substantial famine has ever occurred in any independent and democratic country with a relatively free press.’¹⁵ He exemplified this by the major famines of the 20th century that included: Soviet Union (1930s), Indian (1943), China (1958-61) and Ethiopia (1973/74 and 1984/85). All of them occurred while the countries were administered by dictatorships. On the contrary, developing countries with democratic governments like India in 1973 and Botswana in the early 1980s faced terrible droughts and other natural disasters but managed to feed their peoples without experiencing famine. Denouncing claims that

¹¹ Ibid. p. 9

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 7-8

directly associate famine with natural disasters, Sen, in his book 'Development as Freedom', emphasised the role of democracy in preventing famine through generating political incentives including elections, multi-party politics and investigative journalism.¹⁶ He identified a free press and active political opposition as the 'best early warning systems a country threatened by [human insecurity] can have'.¹⁷

Emphasising the instrumental value of democracy, he said that the responsiveness of a government to its people especially to their 'acute suffering' and insecurity depends on the pressure the people can exert on it.¹⁸ In line with this, government's responsiveness to massive human insecurity depends on whether people can influence government policy formulation and implementation processes. In other words, whether or not there is public participation.

But it is not only the existence of public participation that is important but also the extent and meaningfulness of that participation. Here we make a distinction between representative and participatory democracies. A *representative democracy* that includes universal franchise and a system of voting that allows citizens to periodically hold their leaders accountable may still leave people feeling excluded from the ongoing process of policy formulation and implementation. The ability of people to feel as if they are influencing government depends more on the level of *participatory democracy* people enjoy and is limited when this participation is restricted to periodic opportunities to recall their representatives.

These limitations of representative democracy can only be addressed through entrenching and enshrining strong participatory systems that complement representative democracies and that ensure that the participation of people in decision-making and policy-making processes is continuous. In practice, this requires the deliberate creation of public space, accessible mechanisms and proactive processes that enhance the role members of the public and civil society groups, including community based organizations, can play, in commenting on and contributing to human security policy.

¹⁶ Sen, Amartya, 1999(b), p. 178.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 181.

¹⁸ Ibid., 179-180

Social Policies, Human Security and Globalization

Historically, the state is identified as the primary actor that provides peace and security to its citizens and ensures human security. There however is a need to be very cautious about any assurance of the role of the state in ensuring human security for at least two reasons. First, as explained in the previous section, the nature of the state in terms of its priorities, democratic values, and practices, determines its role in human security. States that are dominated by unaccountable elites have a tendency to focus on the security of those elites, and on the territories and other resources they control. The suffering of many Zimbabweans under the leadership of Robert Mugabe and the experience of the disenfranchised majority in apartheid South Africa are good examples in this regard. Second, the decline of state power with the emergence and expansion of globalisation has reduced the capacity of states to ensure human security.

For the most part of the 20th century, the state remained the central actor in economic and political life. At this time, the state enjoyed a determinant role in the life of its citizens and the nature and direction of its economic policies. This hegemonic role of the state, however, started to fade away in the post-cold war period as the increasingly dominant Bretton-Woods financial institutions were often able to dictate the economic structures and policies of sovereign states, and redesign them in a manner suitable for international trade and financial flow. By forcing the state to assume limited and regulatory roles in their own economic systems, conditions were set for states to re-structure their systems, shrink their institutional apparatuses and substantially cut their social spending on social services such as health, education and water. The powerful influence of these external forces has contributed to a reality that undermines the notion of the state as sovereign and brings into question its capacity to direct its own social and economic policy formulation.

Incapacitated and weak states find it difficult, and are often prohibited, from providing universal and comprehensive social policies that ensure the survival, livelihood and dignity of their citizens.¹⁹ In this vein, the pressures of globalisation,

¹⁹ Deacon, Bob, 2000, p. 34.

the dominance and pervasiveness of the global economic system and the increasing power of transnational corporations and the combined impact of these forces on social policies and human security is extremely significant. The major impacts as outlined by Deacon²⁰ include: (1) the loss of state revenue generating capacity mainly as a result of privatization, reduction/cancellation of trade tariffs and labour taxes, which make states incapable of investing in social policies; (2) the decline of public services as a result of the privatization of basic infrastructure and services such as electric power, water supply and telecommunication in the name of efficiency which subjected the poor to unbearable market prices; (3) the shrinking of state institutions, which resulted in job losses and reliance on meagre safety net programs; (4) the detachment of the state from the economic sphere which obstructs its role in reducing social inequalities through any meaningful re-distribution policy; and, (5) the reduction of budget deficits achieved by downsizing the public service and reducing government expenditure – resulting budget cuts for health, education, food subsidies and other social services.

As a result of this reduction in state capacity it is clear that the responsibility of formulating and implementing policies that impact positively on human security cannot be left solely within the realm of the state. A concept of human security that combines the protection from violence, the satisfying of people's basic needs and an approach to democracy that creates the space for meaningful participation further extends the imperative of a genuine partnership between the state and its citizens.

²⁰ Ibid, pp. 32 – 39.

Figure 1: Demonstrates the inter-relationship of public participation and the capacity to impact positively on human security needs in the policy formulation and implementation processes. It also points to the negative impact of reduced capacity and the ensuing tensions and violence and emphasises the potential to increase positive human security impact through cooperative partnerships and meaningful public participation.

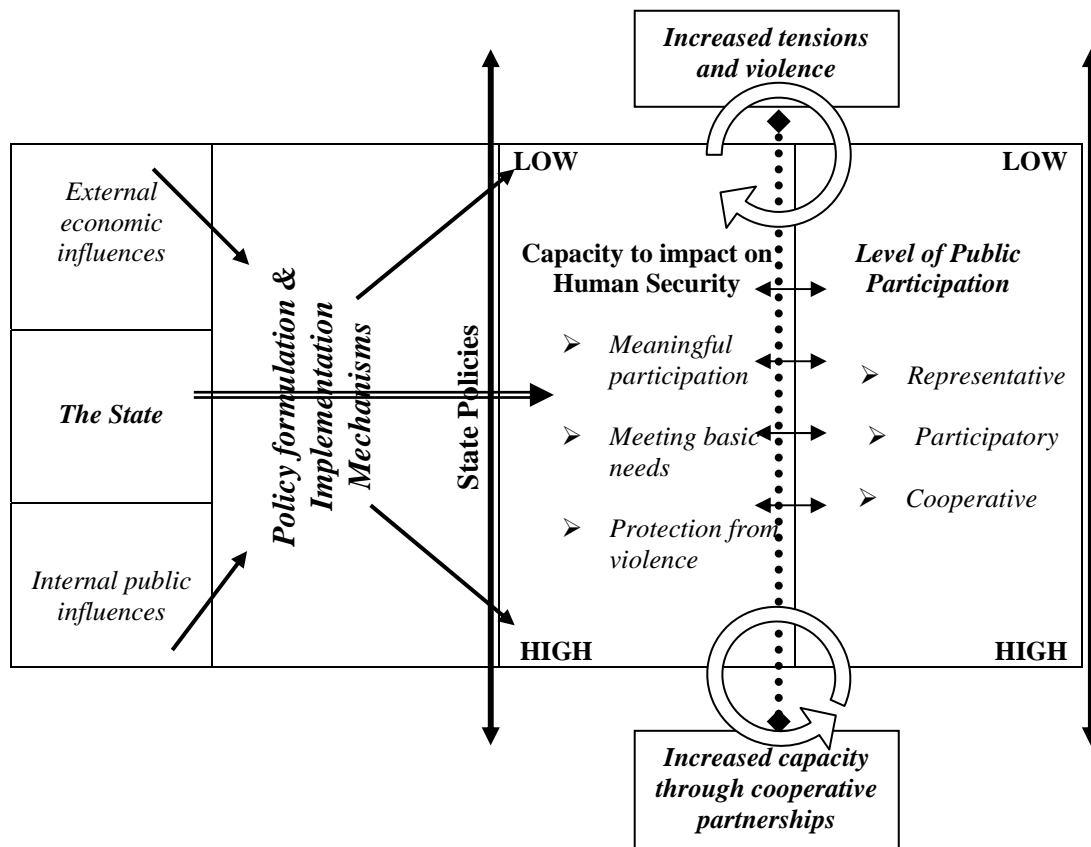


Figure 1: Policy Formulation and Implementation, Human Security and Public Participation

The reduced capacity of the state to impact positively on human security needs and the absence of mechanisms for public participation both contribute to a rise in levels of tension and the potential for violence – as people may resort to violence as a means of articulating their interests and to demand the fulfilment of their basic needs. This can be counteracted through meaningful public participation, which aims to build cooperative partnerships that recognise participation as an aspect of human security that can immediately be met, while simultaneously using the combined capacity of the partnership to deliver on the need to protect people from violence and meet their basic needs.

Consensus-building Approaches and Policy Coordination Mechanisms in South Africa – the way forward for the project

CSVR recently commissioned a research study that explored state repression and post-apartheid social movements²¹. A key argument put forward by co-authors McKinley and Veriava links the recent rise in tensions at community level and outbreaks of state and community violence to a perceived failure of the South African state to provide social and economic services badly needed by its people. It goes further to argue that the public protests that have accompanied this perception are the consequence of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) policy currently adopted by the government.

Unlike the previous Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP), GEAR was presented to the public as ‘non-negotiable’ with little or no meaningful public participation and scrutiny by non-state actors, including trade unions, think tanks, policy research institutes, opposition political parties, and community based organisations²². Unable to influence state policies through established institutional systems, it is further argued that those negatively affected by GEAR and the ongoing reality of the economic and social legacy of apartheid resorted to public protest as a means to articulate their concerns and increased frustration.

In a report from Mandela-Park, Khayelitsha, Cape Town, a case study in both the McKinley study and in this project, the absence of mechanisms for effective public participation is clearly identified as a major cause of tension and violence. “On hearing that the ANC MEC for Housing in the Western Cape, Nomatyala Hlangana, would be appearing on a local radio station, members of the Mandela Park Anti Evictions Campaign (MPAEC) went to meet her. While on air she agreed to meet with the AEC. Once the spotlight was lifted however, she would renege on her promise”²³.

According to the report a meeting was later convened by the MEC but the MPAEC was not invited. Angry and frustrated members marched to her offices but were met

²¹ McKinley, Dale and Ahmed Veriava, 2005.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid, p. 47

by police who fired rubber bullets and tear gas and arrested over 40 people. Several incidents of stone throwing and destruction of property have also been reported. The report concludes that “The trajectory of the current conflict between social movements and the state suggests that, rather than disappearing, there is likely to be an intensification, something that will dramatically shape the next decade of South Africa’s democracy.”²⁴

The CAGE project will build on this research and include Mandela-Park as a focus case study within the project. Using an action research intervention the project will explore the potential for creating policy formulation and implementation mechanisms that increase the capacity of the state to meet human security needs within this context. In addition it will seek to suggest mechanisms and strategies that will prevent further outbreaks of state and community violence.

In an accompanying case-study public participation in South Africa’s foreign policy in relation to Zimbabwe will also be explored. The ongoing violence in Zimbabwe and its impact on South Africa are a key fault line for further violence in the region. CSVR has also been hosting the Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum which, together with an increasingly frustrated civil society in both SA and in Zimbabwe, have been increasingly outspoken in their calls for South Africa to play a more decisive interventionist role in finding solutions to the crisis in Zimbabwe.

The CAGE project will explore the potential for these voices to impact on foreign policy within the current policy formulation frameworks. It will also discuss and suggest alternative models that extend to include cooperative approaches in the implementation of the policies.

It is anticipated that through this action research intervention the capacity of all stakeholders to contribute constructively to human security will be enhanced. The expected reduction in tension and levels of violence should be of benefit to communities across the region.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 60

Concluding Remarks:

The South African experience provides good examples of the link between human security, policy formulation and conflict. It underlines the fact that the mere feeling of exclusion from policy formulation and implementation processes increases the potential for public protest and violence. Public participation mechanisms and strategies may not be able to overcome all of the negative impacts of globalisation and a neoliberal economic system on social policies and human security, but they have, at least, the capacity to provide public space that can encourage public debate and facilitate interaction and understanding between civil society and state actors. It is only through this sort of interaction and cooperation that differences in policy direction can be understood and accommodated without the need to resort to violence. Violence inevitably affects those who are marginalised the most. Thus any approach that reduces or prevents violence must surely be worth exploring.

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