Concepts of Human Security

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From definitions to investigating a discourse

Concepts of human security have been debated and disputed at length during the past twenty years or more. Many lists of definitions exist and various comparative analyses of definitions.[1] These reveal not a single concept but a family with many variants, all of which might be relevant for some audiences and contexts. One core theme is the contrast between human security as the security of persons and state security as the security of a state apparatus or territory—a contrast which highlights the aspect: security for or of whom? We should consider besides that several other aspects, including: security of which goods; security to what extent; security against which threats; security using which means; and secured by whom.

Related to this exploration of notions of 'security', we need to consider meanings of 'human', thereby taking further the examination of 'security of which goods' and of the proposed justifications for securitization claims. In contrast to their relatively refined discussion of 'security', many writers give superficial attention to 'human', using merely a contrast between the individual and the state. Yet for Mahbub ul Haq, perhaps the main founder of current human security discourse, 'for [the] human security approach human beings are the core elements', not simply individuals (Lama 2010:4). Definitional of human beings is that they are not self-enclosed or isolated individuals but complex beings whose individuality arises through relationships. Apart from referring to human beings, 'human' can also connote both the human species and whatever in human persons and collectivities is considered to be most important, most worthy, most 'human' and at risk, and therefore as requiring to be secured.

One needs thus to explore a complex semantic field. No concept exists in isolation from other concepts, from the social contexts of users and their intended (and unintended) audiences, from purposes within those contexts, and from the accumulated patterns of intended and unintended use. In other words, a complex general concept needs to be explored as part of a discourse, or indeed as part of a family of discourses since there are multiple different contexts of use in which it is taken up and related to or confronted with diverse other concepts, users and concerns, and because even within a given context many differences are possible in emphasis.

Within a given context of use, a discourse is partly constituted by the patterns of implication, complementarity, opposition and tension within a system of concepts. In human security literature one finds claims about the human security concept's links to,

[1] For example, an on-line depository of definitions at http://www.gdrc.org/sustdev/husec/Definitions.pdf, and the collation and comparative analysis in Tadjbaksh and Chenoy (2007).

even constitution by, a family of other concepts that include vulnerability, securitability, and participation. We examine this later. Similarly, the concept as championed in the 1994 *Human Development Report* and the subsequent 2003 UN report *Human Security Now* established a contrast not only with the concept of state security but also, for example, with that of human development.[2] It both adds and narrows as compared to the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) notion of human development: adding a concern with stability and narrowing to a focus on the securing of basic goods, which goods include but are not limited to bodily security. It thus served as a prioritising concept—an updated version of basic needs thinking—within the unlimited scope of human development (Gasper 2005). Consideration of human priorities connects to reflection about the interpretation of 'human'. It carries no implication of a reduction of 'basic need' to only material need; and in practice human security discourse encourages attention to subjectivity and to themes of culture, community and solidarity.[3]

Understanding a concept and discourse requires attention to actual use, distinguishing according to different users and contexts. Observation of human security thinking shows an unexpected degree of spread, including into gender studies, environmental studies, migration research and the thinking of various organizations, despite opposition often from conventional security studies theorists and some national governments, and lukewarm or hostile responses from many users of the sister discourses of human development and human rights. The spread has come because a human security perspective seems to help in generating unexpected insights, through person-centred attention to the intersections of multiple dimensions of life (see, e.g., Jolly and Basu Roy, 2006, 2007; Leichenko and O'Brien, 2008; O'Brien et al. 2010; Picciotto et al., 2007; Truong and Gasper, 2011). The concept has also been cited by some groups in support of conclusions and interventions that many others find objectionable. One needs to ask: what variant of the discourse was used ? And are the conclusions necessary inferences from the discourse, or dependent on other factors, and would they have been drawn anyway even in the absence of human security language ?

The set of issues now identified could justify a book-length treatment. This chapter will take only some preliminary steps, including reflecting on 'security', 'human' and some partner concepts within the semantic field of 'human security'. The following two sections will discuss the 'human security' concept and some of the characteristic contents and style of the related discourse or discourses, in general terms and with illustrations. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of some of the possible roles and audiences. The aim is provide themes by which to better understand the debates around definitions than by only listing and categorizing competing specifications.[4]

[2] One can draw various semiotic squares for a concept of 'human security'. Such a square shows a contrast along the top row, and contradictions along the diagonals. Different contrasts can be drawn: of 'human' with 'state' or 'national'; of 'security' with 'rights' or 'development' or 'growth', etc.

[3] Berman (2007), for example, reduces the basic needs aspect mistakenly to basic material needs alone and also obscures the global-wide agenda in 'human-' language, such as seen in human rights law.

[4] The chapter builds from and extends arguments presented in Gasper (2005, 2010).

The concept and the range of definitions

Dimensions

Discussions since the 1980s have brought forward a concept of 'human security', in contrast to the conventional 20th century usages of 'security' to mean national security or state security. The 1994 UNDP Human Development Report (HDR) was a key step in this movement, and the process is ongoing. It involves changes in attention, with reference to, first, the object of security: whose security? In human security discourse the object becomes: all human persons, and sometimes, by implication, the human species.

Second, the concept broadens attention when considering security of what ? Human security thinking involves more than only humanizing an existing state security discourse by a concern for just the physical security of persons. The 1994 HDR returned to language used in the 1940s during planning for a new world order after the cataclysmic crises of 1930-45: 'freedom from fear' and 'freedom from want'.[5] Subsequently often added to these banners, including in the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights, is an even more general partner: freedom to live in dignity. The 1994 HDR specified in more detail seven typical major areas of security—economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal physical security, security of community life, and political security—but these form a partial checklist rather than a definition of human security.[6] The matching definitions concern areas of reasoned human priority; Hampson et al. (2002) spoke of 'core human values' and the UN's advisory Commission on Human Security of 'the vital core' (CHS 2003). More exact specification of what are considered areas for priority attention and protection will be place- and time-specific.

Next, consequent on this re-thinking of the object of security and of security in what respects, human security thought involves a much revised identification of, third, what are security threats and, fourth, what are priority security measures, instruments and activities. Security services cannot, unfortunately, be taken for granted as promotors of security and felt safety. Many people in many times and places have felt less secure thanks to the practices of official security forces.[7] Relevant responses to threats include protection of persons in various ways, but also empowerment of persons and strengthening of their 'securitability': 'the ability to avoid insecure situations and to retain a [psychological] sense of security when such situations do occur, as well as the ability to reestablish one's security and sense of security when these have been compromised' (Latvia HDR: UNDP 2003, p.15).[8] Similarly, the Global Environmental Change and Human Security research program has defined human security as the

[5] In the phrase 'freedom from want', 'want' has its older sense of non-fulfilment of a basic need. In this spirit Eleanor Roosevelt declared, for example: 'The freedom of man, I contend, is the freedom to eat'.

[6] The seven securities may overlap. The checklist can also be treated as about potential areas of threats.

[7] See, e.g., the Bangladesh and Latvia Human Development Reports on human security (UNDP, 2002, 2003).

[8] Leaning and Arie (2000)'s definition of human security likewise concerns psychological security, and presents this an important resource in dealing with the objective insecurity in a person or group's environment. See also Leaning, Arie & Stites (2004).

capacity of individuals and communities to respond to threats to their social, human and environmental rights.[9]

Fifth, the agenda set by the human security concept involves attention to how much has, as a matter of public priority, to be secured; it thus involves more detailed discussion of what is 'basic'. King and Murray influentially defined human insecurity as deficiency in any key area: 'deprivation of any basic capabilities' (2001/2: 594), with reference to specified threshold levels. Their measure of human security is the expected number of years of life without falling below critical thresholds in any key domain of well-being (p.592). It gives a conceptual structure which can be applied in a situation-specific way that reflects local conditions, ideas, values, and political processes; the exact meanings of 'critical' and 'key' will be settled through local specification. But for international comparisons King and Murray proposed—as 'domains of well-being which have been important enough for human beings to fight over or to put their lives or property at great risk [for]' (p.593)—at least: income, health, education, political freedom, democracy (p.598). Theirs is an objective measure of conditions in key domains, not a measure of people's judgements or feelings; but its findings can help to inform persons' subjective measures.[10]

Sixth, and now taking us (like the issue of 'security by what means?') beyond the human security concept and into the discourse, comes the issue of: secured (provided/ protected/ assisted) by whom? Implied by the rethinking of the object, components, threats to and instruments for security is also a rethinking and extension—compared to discussions of state security—of the range of relevant actors. We can think of a 'constellation of providers' (Latvia HDR 2003).

So the HDR 1994 concept brought shifts in attention concerning security of whom, security with respect to which types of good, to what extent, and against what threats. The attention to a broad range of types of good, and (correspondingly) of types of threat, is objected to by some authors, epitomised by MacFarlane and Khong (2006). They presume ownership of the term 'security' by conventional 'security studies' which concentrates on deliberate violent threats to physical well-being, and simply assert that threats from environmental change, for example, are not part of the 'human security' field. In effect they defend old-fashioned (state) security studies' established access to privileged funding. They aim to reserve the term 'protection' for only protection of life against violent attack, as if protection of health, and protection of anything else against anything else, are not 'protection'.

Security claims are claims of existential threat, meant to justify priority response. Attempts to limit such prioritisation to one type of threat, such as threats of physical damage from physical violence, and/or one type of referent/target such as the state, are arbitrary. The root and usages of the term 'security' validate no such restriction; indeed

[9] See http://www.gechs.org/. **T**he UN Trust Fund for Human Security (2007) emphasises too that: 'human security goes beyond protective mechanisms to include the need to empower individuals, identifying their security threats and articulating the means by which they will implement the changes needed.'

[10] For further work along such lines, see Werthes et al. 2011. For another detailed recent objective index of human security, that groups under three main headings—economic, environmental, and social fabric—see the work of David Hastings, for UNESCAP and others, at http://www.humansecurityindex.org/ . It involves objective measures of objective aspects. We can also have objective measures of subjective feelings/perceptions, and subjective measures of subjective feelings (like fear) or of objective conditions. (See Gasper 2007a, for a more refined vocabulary than only objective/subjective.)

according to Rothschild (1995) for centuries the term applied only to individuals. Further, remarked Owen, while authors like MacFarlane and Khong do 'make the shift to the individual in theory [they] ignore it in practice by subjectively limiting what does and does not count as a viable threat … [It] is communicable disease, which kills 18,000,000 people a year, not [military-style] violence, which kills several hundred thousand, that is the [greater] real threat to individuals' (Owen 2005: 38). Similarly, a combination of climatic movements and planned neglect by colonial regimes left tens of millions dead in the late 19th century (Davis 2001); and a parallel danger is emerging in the 21st century (see e.g. UNDP 2007; Hansen 2009). MacFarlane and Khong's approach reduces to a 'security studies approach', not a 'protection-based' one.

Purpose

We need to consider for any concept its purpose, or purposes. For the human security concept different users have had different primary purposes, leading to different interpretations. Some relate, as we have seen, to re-focusing discussions of 'whose security?'. Two other widespread purposes have involved adding to UNDP's original concept of 'human development' (UNDP 1990): firstly, by a concern with the stability of attainment of the goods in human development; secondly, by including the good of physical security of persons.

The first of these latter two concerns leads to definitions of human security (HS) in terms of the stability of the achievement or access to goods; in particular when coping with 'downside risks', a phrase of Amartya Sen (e.g., 2003). But 'human security', if defined only in terms of that phrase, would concern also the degree of stability with which the super-rich hold their super-riches. His partner phrase 'downturn with security' does not equate security to the stability of everything but rather to the removal of unacceptable risks for weaker groups. Reflecting that security is a prioritizing term, and that Sen here discusses 'human' security, 'downturn with security' refers to securing the fulfilment of basic needs or the ability to fulfil them.

The second of the two concerns—broadening human development thinking by adding 'freedom from fear' to 'freedom from want'—has involved at least the addition of personal physical security, in the sense of freedom from violence, to the list of component objectives within 'human development' (HD). Physical security was from the mid 1990s incorporated into the definition of HD (see e.g. UNDP, 1996:56). This contributed to a confusion that some people felt in distinguishing between HS and HD.

Some users sought then to limit the meaning of HS to physical security of individuals, as sometimes espoused by the Canadian government and the Human Security Network of like-minded countries. As we saw, some authors even want to limit the concept to the physical security of persons against violent threats or, even narrower, the physical security of persons (especially non-military) during violent conflicts and against organised intentional violence. The purpose of this third answer is to broaden the scope of the security studies concept of security, beyond state and military security, and/or to change the focus, to a concern with the physical security of persons. It reacts against both the UNDP notion of HS, felt to be too broad, and the traditional notion of national security, felt to be increasingly misleading or insufficient in an era when most violent conflict is intra-national and overwhelmingly most of the casualties are civilian.

The answer of the UN Commission on Human Security (CHS 2003) gave more careful attention to the notion of 'human'. It considers what are the requirements of being 'human', in addition to sheer existence. These requirements go beyond freedoms from fear and from want. We may add freedom from humiliation and indignity, perhaps also freedom from despair (Robinson, 2003), and, for example, the freedom of future generations to inherit a healthy natural environment. The Commission defined human security as: 'to protect the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfilment' (CHS, 2003:4). Human security so conceived concerns the securing of humanity, humankind; which must be ensured before its fuller flourishing is possible. Seen from the side of military security studies and policy, this interpretation represents an extension beyond freedom from fear. Seen from the side of human development thinking, it represents an extension beyond freedom from want, but also a narrowing to concentrate on the highest priorities within each category.

A range of definitions

So, broadly speaking, the concept of 'human security' redirects security discussions in one or typically more of the following ways: from the national-/state- level to human beings as potential victims; beyond physical violence as the only relevant threat/vector; and beyond physical harm as the only relevant damage. The redirection can be done to different extents, so we encounter diverse 'human security' definitions, as shown in the shaded cells in Table 1. The columns concern how wide a range of values is included in the concept. Columns I and II have broad ranges, from Human Development discourse; column V a much narrower range, from conventional security studies; and in between them columns III and IV, including the definition, have an intermediate scope. Picciotto et al. (2007) for example in column IV cover the aspects of 'freedom from fear' and 'freedom from want', using as a weighting criterion the impact on human survival chances; thus they look at far more than direct deaths from armed violence. These various interpretations of human security can be compared with a base case which is not a concept of human security: a 'pure' capability approach definition of human development as expansion of valued capabilities. The rows bring in whether or not human security is defined or partly defined in terms of stability of achievement of valued or priority goods..

Table 1: Some alternative definitions of human security (see shaded cells)

	I VALUED CAPABILITIES EXPANSION (e.g. *UNDP 1990*)	**II HD IN TERMS OF UNDP'S LONGER LIST OF GOODS (e.g. *UNDP 1996*)**	**III BASIC NEEDS ONLY (in terms of types and level)**	**IV LIFE-PRESERVATION against structural violence as well as physical violence**	**V PERSONAL PHYSICAL SECURITY ONLY (& civil rights)**
ATTENTION TO *LEVEL* OF SOME VALUED VARIABLES (snapshot or average over time)	Sen's Capability Approach in minimal form	Human Development Reports' focus (includes physical security)	King & Murray (2001/2)		Canadian & Norwegian government definitions of HS[11]
HS IN TERMS OF *STABILITY*		Stability in degree of achievement of a long list of goods	'Downturn with stability [for ordinary and poor people]'		
HS IN TERMS OF *BOTH* LEVEL AND STABILITY		Haq (1999; & UNDP)'s maximal definition of HS. Govt. of Japan definition[12]. [GECHS]	Commission for Human Security definition (CHS 2003)	Picciotto et al.; Thakur (2004): avoidance of 'critical life-threatening dangers'	

(Source: adapted from Gasper, 2010).

We noted that minimalist definitions fail to respond to the fact that much more premature death and human wounding arise from poverty than from physical violence. The UNDP concept of human security involves a focus on a broader range of aspects of people's security than only physical safety and survival. To keep the concept sufficiently sharp and distinctive but not arbitrarily restricted, the Commission on Human Security formulated the range of aspects to include as, in effect, basic needs plus stability, with their specification to occur via reasoned prioritization within the relevant political communities. Given the relevance both of priority needs and stable fulfilment and the advantages of a conception that is neither extremely broad nor very narrow, and neither rigidly universal nor purely local, this formulation constitutes a relatively attractive concept of human security and is now quite widely used (see also Owen, 2004).

Hubert (2004) added that, given the development-human security nexus it might though make little difference in the end whether the concept adopted of human security is broad or narrow, if we realise that human security will not be well achieved without development, nor vice versa. The *Human Security Report* series from Canada (e.g., Mack 2005) considers only armed conflict and organised violence but also all their effects, which in fact ramify into almost everything else. So too may their causes. So while violence appears convenient as focus for data collection and subsequent model-building, the associated research and policy should extend much further. When we look at the fuller human security discourse, we may then find that the disputation around the concept comes to matter less.

[11] The Canadian government and its Human Security Network partners have however often added 'freedom from want' content to a 'freedom from fear' centred interpretation. Sometimes the government even declared "For Canada, human security means freedom from pervasive threats to people's rights, safety or lives." (http://www.gdrc.org/sustdev/husec/Definitions.pdf).

[12] Defined in terms of all the forces 'to threaten human lives, livelihoods and dignity'. This formulation is found in many official Japanese statements, e.g. Govt. of Japan (1999) and JICA (2006).

The discourse — concepts in context

Behind the foreground features—a focus on security of individual persons, and a wider scope of the areas considered under 'security' and as contributory factors and possible countermeasures to insecurity—are generative themes. One is a humanist normative concern for the well-being of fellow humans: the proposition that what matters is the content of individuals' lives, including a reasonable degree of stability. It is part of what O'Brien (2010) calls the equity dimension in human security thinking. It is largely shared with the sibling discourses of human rights, human needs, and human development (Gasper 2007b). Much human security thinking contains in particular an insistence on fulfilling basic rights, derived from basic needs, for all.

Second, the focus on threats to basic human values leads to a humanist methodology of attention to mundane realities of life—including exploration of the things that people value and of the diverse but interconnected threats (actual and/or felt) to these values.

Third then is a richer picture of being human. Humans are not only individual choosers, but are 'encumbered subjects' who have each a body, gender, emotions, life-cycle, identity and social bonds, including memberships of (multiple) groups and of a common species. Normative priorities for being human include a sense of meaning and identification, and recognition of and respect for others. The vision of humans is as both vulnerable and capable.

Fourth, as part of what O'Brien calls the discourse's connectivity aspects, is a characteristic stress on the interconnection of threats. Elsewhere I have called this feature 'joined-up thinking', and used the term 'joined-up feeling' for the motivating focus on human vulnerability and on the human rights that flow for all from basic human needs (Gasper 2007b).[13] Besides a generalised concern with interconnections, human security thinking involves, fifthly, attention to the specific intersections of diverse forces in persons' and groups' lives.

A holistic methodology of attention to the lives of real persons.

We find in human security thinking an anthropological concern for understanding how individual persons live. People seek bodily, material, psychological and existential security. Risks and insecurities are case- and person-specific, and partly subjective, so human security analysis requires listening to people's 'voices', their fears and perceptions, including the 'voices of the poor' but also of the rich (Narayan et al., 2000; Burgess et al., 2007). The methodology lends itself particularly to surfacing concealed issues of women's security (see e.g. Hamber et al., 2006). Such insights are of long standing in the humanities, in anthropology, and in the basic needs school in peace and conflict studies (Burton, 1990; Mitchell, 2001), but are frequently forgotten in other fields. Human security thinking has given them a new home. The broader ('UNDP/Japanese') perspective on human security seems to have advantages here over a narrower ('Canadian' or MacFarlane-Khong) one, in conducing to fuller use of this holistic perspective.

[13] Work for the 2009 European Report on Development, on development-conflict linkages and on diverse causes and consequences of state fragility, adopted the 'joined-up thinking' label.

Vulnerability and capability

Humans come in units—as persons. We enumerate humans in terms of integers, whole numbers, not fractions and decimals. And the lives of human persons likewise involve specific threshold levels: one does not live a quarter-fold when one receives only a quarter of one's dietary requirements; one dies, relatively quickly. Being human has various specific requirements. From these needs come socially-specific notions of a series of normative thresholds across a range of aspects: the minimum levels required for normative acceptability. 'Human security' issues in the area of health, for example, do not include all health issues, only those up to a normatively set minimum threshold, which is to some degree historically and societally relative. (See e.g. Owen 2005; Gasper 1996, 2005.) Lack of the threshold concept leads writers like MacFarlane & Khong (2006) to attempt to decree that whole issue areas like health and environment are outside the remit of 'security', in the mistaken belief that this is necessary in order to allow meaningful priority to anything within human security discussions.

Attention to the lives of real persons underlines that vulnerability, not only capability, is a defining feature of humanity. Invulnerability could even make one inhuman, without sympathy. We are more likely to be open to the vulnerabilities of others if we share such vulnerabilities ourselves (Rifkin 2009). A human security approach seeks to manage and moderate vulnerability, and complements the stress on capability found in human development thinking.

At the same time, human security thinking emphasises capability too, as seen in the concept of 'securitability' and the stress on empowerment as well as protection. To only be protected can be disempowering. It reduces both felt security and objective security because capabilities wither or are never developed and confidence stays low. For the Global Environmental Change and Human Security program, human security is defined as where 'individuals and communities have the options necessary to end, mitigate or [sufficiently] adapt to threats to their human, social and environmental rights; have the capacity and freedom to exercise these options; and actively participate in pursuing these options' (http://www.gechs.org/human-security/).

Many authors explore the posited necessary conditions for human security outcomes, Kraft, for example, holds that 'Human security by its very nature implies [i.e., requires] a more open kind of society—citizens must be able to voice out to the government their security concerns so that these can be given proper attention in the context of the societal good' (2007: 5). Some authors define human security as including those posited conditions and capabilities. The Commission for Africa's definition included a similar stress on participation, apparently proposed as an inseparable necessary condition:- people-centered 'human security becomes an all-encompassing condition in which individual citizens live in freedom, peace and safety and participate fully in the process of governance. They enjoy the protection of fundamental rights, have access to resources and the basic necessities of life, including health and education, and inhabit an environment that is not injurious to their health and wellbeing' (Commission for Africa 2005: 392).

Interconnection and nexuses

Analyses of requirements can support claims for their policy priority if and where they identify a major causal connection, from fulfilment or non-fulfilment of a highlighted

factor, through to a qualitatively different set of other things that have clear normative importance. The term 'nexus' captures when such a connection concerns a major link, active at least in some situations, between 'spheres' that conventionally are conceived and administered separately—such as between environment and war. Human security thinking looks at such links: for example between economy, conflicts, distribution, environment, and health.

The foundational ideas of the United Nations Charter and its system for collective security highlight freedom from want and indignity in addition to freedom from fear, because of not only the first two's independent importance but also an expectation that freedom from fear will never be attained or stable if freedom from want and indignity are absent. 'Collective security now [is] seen to require the defense of human rights norms and principles' (Quataert 2009: 40). State security is expected to be fragile and expensive—as well as morally empty—if not based on the security of persons. Similar principles can apply within nations: '…unless industry is to be paralysed by recurrent revolts on the part of outraged human nature, it must satisfy criteria which are not purely economic', wrote R.H. Tawney (1926: 284).

Nor are the links only limited bilateral ones. Economic trends can greatly increase the chances of conflict, via mechanisms that lie outside of the field of attention of businessmen, conventional academic economists and economic policymakers (Collier et al., 2003; Picciotto, 2005; Picciotto et al., 2007); the resulting conflicts may then have implications for distribution and health, as well as for economy, crime and further conflict; the distributional changes may impact on environment; and so on. The required 'joined-up thinking' can still be feasible to a worthwhile extent, even as we move beyond traditional problem-framings, because the particular interconnections to be stressed will be selected according to their importance case-by-case.

Thresholds and tipping points

Human security analysis sometimes centres on a particular, dangerous, type of connection, at a particular locus: a flashpoint or tipping point, a stress level beyond which threshold the negative effects dramatically escalate, even leading to collapse or, in the case of persons, death or highly increased chances of death, whether through disease or violence or self-harm, as in the suicides of those broken by harrassment or debt. Beneath certain levels of malnutrition small children can suffer irreversible mental deficits. Some types of stress or abuse may produce irreversible emotional harm. Arguably, whole societies too can go over a stress tipping-point as in Rwanda in 1994, when bad harvests, economic crisis and extreme externally imposed expenditure cuts were loaded on top of a history of tense inter-group relations and recent armed conflict (Prunier 1997; Uvin 1999).[14] Contemporary literature on climate change is replete with warnings about

[14] The international Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda concluded that:

> [Explanatory factor 6 behind the 1994 Rwanda genocide of almost a million people in a few months was:] The economic slump starting in the late 1980s and the effects of the actions subsequently taken by the government in consultation with the international donor community, i.e. the structural adjustment programmes of 1990 and 1992. The economic deterioration, largely due to a sharp decline of world market prices for coffee—Rwanda's prime export earner—as well as to unfavourable weather and economic policies such as increased protectionism, price controls and other regulations, affected the whole society. In US dollar terms, GDP per capita fell by some 40 percent over the four years 1989-1993... The international community, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund,

tipping points in our climate systems, beyond which deleterious change will accelerate markedly and becomes effectively irreversible (e.g., Campbell et al., 2007; Dyer, 2010). Climate tipping points are impersonal; but in human systems tipping points often have a strong normative component, linked to ideas about rightful entitlements and past agreements. When normative thresholds or bottom-lines are felt to have been violated, results can be the same as for breaching of an impersonal causal threshold: eruption or collapse. We should distinguish though between the concept of thresholds, which are points beyond which there is dangerous change, the concept of tipping point, where such change notably accelerates, and the more extreme notion of 'point of no return'. These were conflated in the synthesis report on UNESCO's multi-year human security research programme (2008), perhaps contributing to the resistance that programme findings met from the organization's funders and controllers.

Intersectionality

The theme of interconnection is often formulated at a general level in terms of relations between vast sets of factors, the subject matters of different intellectual disciplines (e.g. Brauch 2005). Applied through the holistic methodology of attention to the lives of real persons the theme leads us to the intersections of these factors and to the patterns of impact on diverse individuals, groups and localities—the 'local difficulties' that arise as various stress-factors and vulnerabilities interact.

Leichenko and O'Brien's book 'Double Exposure' shows how economic globalization and global environmental change, for example, have additive effects and interactive effects, which trigger further rounds of reactions and consequences. The groups who are most threatened by global environmental changes are often the groups who are most threatened by global economic changes. They are more exposed, for example because of where they live. They are also more vulnerable—more damaged by the same exposure and more damaged by their actual exposure—because they have less resources to use in protection. And often they are the least resilient because again they have fewer economic, social, cultural and political resources. Leichenko and O'Brien reveal how we miss these vital combinations and interactions when we work in abstracted disciplinary discourses, whether of social science or of environmental science. We notice them when we instead undertake a holistic analysis of human security that starts by looking at particular people and locations and at the intersecting forces in their lives.[15]

Roles – how can concepts help?

A discourse is inevitably incomplete and underdefined, and thus has multiple potentials. How it becomes actualised, and how it further evolves, depends on its users and contexts of use. In clarifying a concept and discourse we must ask for what tasks they are being used or useful: their roles and with respect to whom; for example, in defining a research program or in indicating and motivating a policy orientation.[16] In particular, much usage

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overlooked [the] potentially explosive social and political consequences when designing and imposing economic conditions for support to Rwanda's economic recovery. (Eriksson et al., 1996: 15.)

[15] See also O'Brien & Leichenko (2007), O'Brien et al. (2010).

[16] Werthes and Debiel (2006) and Gasper (2010) are two more extended attempts to delineate roles in this field.

of the human security concept, and the very choice of the label 'human security', can be understood as 'boundary work' (Star and Griesemer, 1989) that aims to span between conventionally separated intellectual and political spheres.

Adding to understanding

A human security approach can often generate fresh case-specific understandings and insights, through the holistic methodology of looking at specific people's lives and vulnerabilities with an eye for interconnections and intersections. When Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans the victims were especially: poorer Afro-Americans, poorer people in general since they lived on worse land, and people over sixty. This last group suffered more than 60% of the 1800 deaths. Leichenko and O'Brien (2008) recount how economic change had made the city more vulnerable. Its old industries had declined. Strong lobbies had ensured that many new channels had been cut from the Mississipi river to the sea, which allowed new paths for storm surges from the ocean to reach the city. Privatization and corporatization of municipal and social services meant that coordination was weak and could not cope with emergency demands. Patients in private health care facilities were immediately evacuated after the hurricane, while those in public care were left waiting for five days. Similarly, in the reconstruction phase, for-profit facilities were rebuilt much faster than not-for-profit schools and public housing. By using a human security approach, looking at the particular situation and multiple vulnerabilities of particular groups/types of people, and thus as in storytelling and scenarios becoming aware of and 'emphasizing the dynamic interactions between processes, responses, and outcomes, [Leichenko & O'Brien]…elicit new insights and research questions beyond those associated with separate framings and discourses' (2008: 33).

Likewise, reviews of the many national Human Development Reports that have taken a human security approach found that they produced novel insights and suggestions (Jolly and BasuRay 2006, 2007). The studies look into sources of objective and felt insecurity, without *a priori* restrictions according to disciplinary habits or an intellectual template fixed by a donor organisation. Amongst subsequent similar HDRs, the 2009 report for the Arab Region deserves particular mention (UNDP 2009); as does the earlier Latvia report (UNDP 2003).

Reorienting policy analysis

Extending these insights, O'Brien (2006, 2010) suggests that the debate on global environmental change has been stuck in an inappropriate problem-frame. First, it is dominated by natural science questions and not sufficiently framed in terms of human significance. It is likely then to get stuck in science wars which are inherently endless, since more knowledge often produces more uncertainty not less; rather than thinking about which humans face known dangers and which ones also face the nastier sides of the inevitable uncertainties. Second, like conventional security studies, the debate continues to operate with a now partly obsolete national framing of issues, so that policy debate is dominated by again inherently endless disputes over the respective rights and blame that should accrue to nations. She proposes that more fruitful and more pertinent may be to frame discussion in terms of human security: to recognise that many poor persons face high and rising insecurity, and to consider how to respond to this.

Wider attention to contributory factors increases our awareness of vulnerability and fragility, but also of opportunities and resilience. In policy design, a human security perspective raises issues of system re-design to reduce chances of crises, not only palliative responses when crises have hit (Lodgaard 2000), and has served 'as a focal point around which an integrated approach to global governance is emerging' (Betts & Eagleton-Pierce 2005: 7). It increases thinking about prioritisation within sectors (as in the MDGs programme) and, if we use broad concepts of human security, also between sectors. Seeking system re-design and intersectoral rebalancing are campaigns for change over the longer-term, but with possible eventual large-scale benefits.

Providing an intellectual bridge

Besides human security thinking's promotion of analytical integration, it offers 'boundary work' services in other respects. Consideration of the sources of and threats to human security helps to bring together the different organizational worlds of humanitarian relief, socio-economic development, human rights, conflict resolution, and national security (Uvin, 2004). Human security discourse also synthesises ideas from the predecessor 'human discourses' of human needs, human rights, and human development, (Gasper 2007). It better grounds human rights and human development work in attention to the nature of being and wellbeing; focuses them on high priorities; highlights interdependence more than does human rights language, and increases attention to dangers, vulnerability, and fragility; and it connects to human subjectivity, which increases its explanatory force and motivating potential.

Promoting solidarity?

Human security analysis recognises emotions, identifies surprising conjunctures, and can give a sense of real lives and persons. The language of 'security' itself touches emotions, which is both a source of strength and of danger (Gasper and Truong, 2010). While the 'human security' label aims to reorient security discourse, it carries risks of being taken over by the psychic insecurities and fears of the rich and the military instincts of those with large arsenals and the habit of using them. However, those fears and habits exist already and have long had ways of expressing themselves without requiring 'human security' language in order to do so. The difference made by such a language may be in the opposite direction, gradually helping to promote interpersonal and global sensitivity and solidarity. Human security thinking looks at diverse, situation-specific, interacting threats and how they affect the lives of ordinary people, especially the most vulnerable. It promotes the ability to imagine how others live and feel, and the perception of an intensively interconnected shared world in which humanity forms a 'community of fate'. It thus favours the changes that are needed for global sustainability in respect of how people perceive shared vulnerabilities, shared interests, and shared humanity (The Earth Charter; Gasper 2009). A narrow concept of human security does not block such changes, but is less conducive than the broader versions.

Human security thinking has to operate at various levels, just as we see in thinking about say 'well-being' or 'equity'. Research and policy programmes in particular geographical, historical and organizational contexts will each make their own particular definitions. Some of those will be narrow, others broad. At the same time, a broad

conceptual perspective is necessary since it can inspire and guide the diverse particular endeavours.

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