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Emerging Challenges to Human Security

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ABSTRACT: The concept of human security has emerged as an important shift in the understanding of security from a traditional state-centered perspective to a people-centered approach. Earlier, security was primarily associated with protecting state sovereignty and territorial integrity from external military threats. However, evolving global realities have demonstrated that the safety and well-being of individuals are equally crucial for achieving lasting peace and stability. Human security focuses on protecting individuals from a wide range of threats that affect their lives, dignity, and opportunities. In view of this, the paper examines the emerging challenges to human security and highlights the need for integrated, people-centered, and cooperative approaches to address them effectively.

KEYWORDS: Human Security, Challenges, Development, Peace, Cooperation.

I. INTRODUCTION

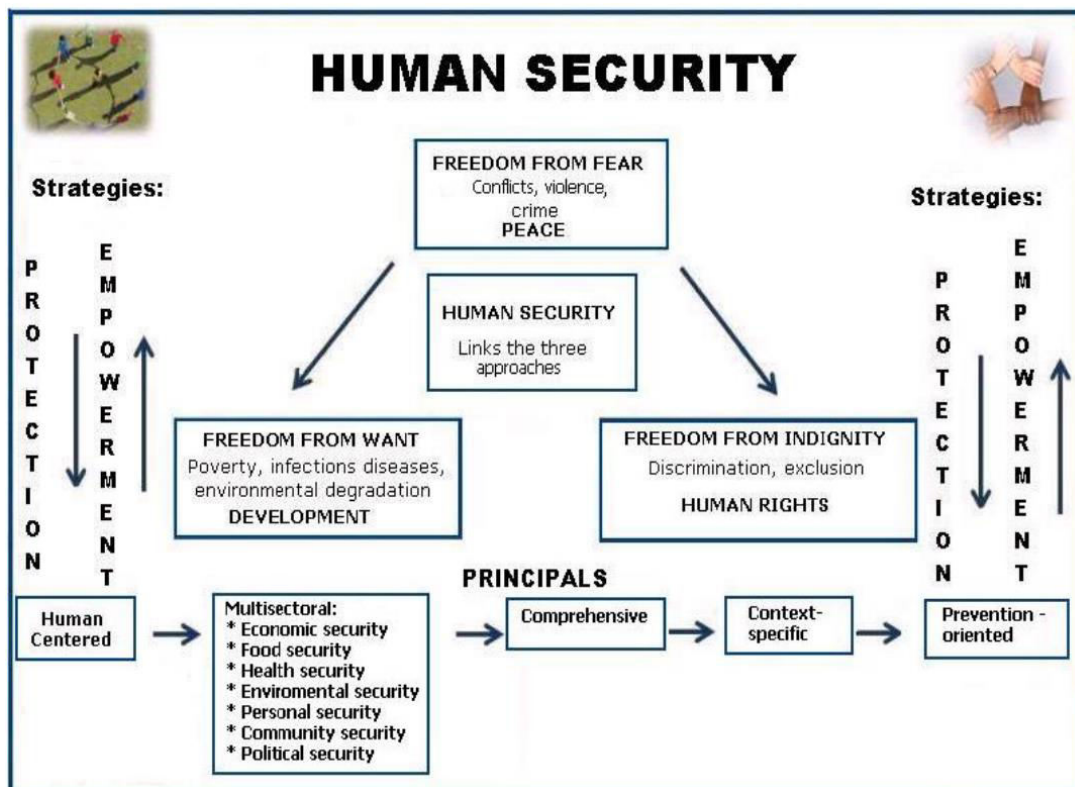
The concept of human security represents a significant, yet debated, effort by scholars and policymakers to redefine and expand the traditional understanding of security. Historically, security was mainly associated with the protection of a state's sovereignty and territorial boundaries from external military threats. This understanding formed the foundation of the idea of national security, which dominated security studies and policy discussions during the Cold War era. However, during the 1970s and 1980s, academic discussions on security began to evolve. Influenced by events such as the Middle East oil crisis and the growing global awareness of environmental degradation, scholars started to view security from a broader perspective that included non-military dimensions. Despite this shift, the state continued to remain the primary focus of protection, meaning that security policies were still largely designed to safeguard the state itself. The concept of human security challenges this traditional state-centred view by placing the individual at the centre of security considerations. In this perspective, security is not merely about safeguarding governments or territories but about ensuring the safety and well-being of people. Thus, human security emphasizes protecting individuals and communities rather than focusing exclusively on the interests of states (Acharya, 2020).

Human security is realized when individuals have the freedom to recognize and understand the risks and threats that may affect their well-being, values, and everyday lives. It also requires that people have the opportunity to express their concerns and possess the ability to address or reduce those threats. Achieving this condition depends largely on strong human agency and the protection of fundamental rights. Recognizing the importance of this people-centred approach, the United Nations identified seven major dimensions of human security in the twenty-first century: economic, food, health, personal, community, political, and environmental security (Hamourtziadou, 2019).

- **Economic Security:** Ensures a stable and reliable income that enables individuals to maintain a reasonable standard of living. This income may come from paid employment or from government support systems and social safety nets for those who cannot work.
- **Food Security:** Refers to consistent access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that is both physically available and economically affordable, allowing people to maintain good health and well-being.
- **Health Security:** Involves access to adequate healthcare services and protection from diseases, especially those related to malnutrition, poor sanitation, and environmental degradation.
- **Personal Security:** Focuses on protecting individuals from physical violence and threats such as war, terrorism, torture, sectarian conflicts, genocide, ethnic cleansing, or violence from states, groups, or individuals.
- **Community Security:** Ensures safety and harmony within social and cultural groups, fostering a sense of belonging, shared identity, and social cohesion based on common traditions and values.
- **Political Security:** Emphasizes the protection of fundamental human rights and democratic governance, allowing individuals freedom of expression and participation in political decision-making. Political insecurity may arise from censorship, repression, or threats during protests.
- **Environmental Security:** Addresses protection from environmental threats such as climate change, deforestation,

ecosystem damage, desertification, and environmental degradation resulting from human activities and conflicts.

Fig 1: Conceptual Framework of Human Security



Source: Mostafavi (2009)

Figure 1 illustrates the concept of human security and its major components. At the centre is human security, which connects three important dimensions: freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom from indignity. Freedom from fear focuses on protection from conflict, violence, and crime and is related to peace. Freedom from want addresses poverty, diseases, and environmental degradation and is linked to development. Freedom from indignity deals with discrimination and exclusion and emphasizes human rights. The framework also highlights two main strategies—protection and empowerment—to ensure people’s safety and well-being. Understanding this framework is essential for identifying the various threats that challenge human security in the modern world. Therefore, the present paper aims to examine the major contemporary challenges that threaten human security and to highlight the need for integrated, people-centered strategies to effectively address these issues and promote sustainable peace and development.

II. MAJOR THREATS AND CHALLENGES TO HUMAN SECURITY: -

The emergence of the concept of human security represents an important and relatively new development in the broader discourse on security. This idea draws attention to several aspects of individual safety and well-being that were largely overlooked in traditional security studies. Over time, human security has evolved from being viewed merely as a rhetorical slogan to becoming a concept that has attracted considerable attention from the international community due to its meaningful implications. Nevertheless, there is still no universal agreement on what exactly constitutes a threat to human security. One major reason for this lack of consensus is that different actors—such as states, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and civil society groups—tend to interpret and promote the idea of human security according to their own priorities and interests. In many cases, national interests continue to take precedence over broader human-centred concerns. Experience has shown that achieving meaningful progress in advancing human security requires the formation of coalitions among like-minded states and non-state actors that are committed to addressing these concerns collectively. An important challenge in building such alliances is finding ways



to balance and reconcile competing national interests with the broader goals of human security. Since states remain the most powerful actors in the international system, their support and cooperation are essential. Without the backing of state power, attempts to establish and promote the norm of human security are unlikely to achieve significant impact (Hasan et al., 2008).

Human security can be further strengthened through coordinated responses and sustained cooperation among countries at the global level. The United Nations World Summit of 2005 formally acknowledged that development, peace and security, and human rights are closely interconnected and mutually reinforcing. During this summit, human security was described as the right of individuals to live in freedom and dignity, free from fear and poverty. In today’s highly interconnected world, unilateral policies and narrow interpretations of traditional state security are no longer sufficient to address emerging global challenges. In this context, the United Nations plays a vital role in safeguarding people, promoting international peace, and ensuring stability across nations. Although several countries and institutions—particularly Canada and Japan—have actively promoted human security initiatives, their implementation has often been fragmented and limited to specific sectors. One of the major obstacles is the institutional division within the UN system itself, where responsibilities related to security, development, and humanitarian assistance are distributed across different agencies. This separation often leads to overlapping activities, duplication of efforts, and insufficient coordination.

In addition to these structural challenges, other issues also affect the effective implementation of human security. These include concerns related to gender equality, the process of rebuilding societies after conflict, and the absence of clear and coherent strategies in integrated peace missions. Initiatives such as the Peacebuilding Commission have been introduced to encourage coordinated international strategies and to place human security at the centre of global peace and security agendas. At the same time, advancing human security requires a broader transformation in development thinking. It calls for a new development paradigm that integrates poverty reduction with security considerations, human rights protection, gender equality, and sustainable development goals.

By focusing on real and immediate threats to human well-being and by encouraging coordinated policy responses, the human security framework can function both as a guiding approach for global action and as an important indicator of human well-being. Furthermore, progress in this field also depends on the role of academic research. Scholars are increasingly encouraged to adopt interdisciplinary perspectives in order to better understand the complexities of human security and to contribute to the development of more effective solutions (Muguruza, 2017).

Table 1 presents the major dimensions of human security along with their key indicators. The table demonstrates that human security is a multidimensional concept. Each of these dimensions represents specific conditions that are necessary for safeguarding the safety, well-being, and dignity of individuals. When considered together, these indicators highlight that human security extends beyond the traditional focus on state protection.

Table 1: Dimensions and Indicators of Human Security

S. No.	Human Security Perspective	Indicators
1	Food Security	Ensuring that sufficient food is consistently available to all people. Food should be regularly produced and supplied, economically and physically accessible, and nutritionally adequate for proper utilization.
2	Economic Security	Guaranteeing a stable income, access to employment, and availability of economic resources and opportunities necessary for a secure livelihood.
3	Health Security	Protection from serious diseases through the availability of effective medical facilities and accessible, affordable healthcare services for the population.



4	Environmental Security	Maintaining a safe and sustainable environment free from threats such as desertification, uncontrolled deforestation, environmental degradation, and other ecological risks that may harm human life and livelihoods.
5	Personal Security	Ensuring individuals are protected from physical violence and threats, including human trafficking, forced labour, terrorism, and other forms of personal harm, while promoting psychological well-being.
6	Community Security	Promoting social harmony and cohesion while protecting people from tensions or conflicts arising from ethnic, religious, or social group differences within communities and institutions.
7	Political Security	Safeguarding human rights, ensuring justice, protecting freedom of expression, and enabling citizens to participate actively and fairly in governance.

Source: Zachariah and Nnaji (2024)

In the contemporary era, the global security environment has become far more complex and multifaceted than it was in the final decade of the twentieth century, a period when the neoliberal worldview strongly influenced global political and economic thinking. Compared with that time, the present international system faces a wider range of risks, challenges, and threats that interact with one another in complicated ways. Security concerns are no longer limited to traditional political or military issues; instead, they involve multiple dimensions that affect global survival and stability.

Along with this growing complexity of global threats, another serious concern is the increasing sense of alienation among individuals in modern society. It is paradoxical that human beings, who are naturally social and whose existence depends heavily on interaction and cooperation with others, are experiencing greater isolation in an age marked by remarkable scientific and technological advancement. Despite unprecedented improvements in communication technologies and global connectivity, many individuals feel more distant from one another than ever before. This growing separation among people has deeper implications. When individuals become alienated from others, they also begin to lose connection with their own inner values and sense of purpose. In other words, social alienation gradually leads to self-alienation, distancing individuals from the very essence of their human existence. If this condition continues unchecked, it could have serious consequences for global society. The most alarming outcome could be the erosion of the fundamental qualities that define humans as rational and compassionate beings, ultimately weakening the significance and value of human life itself (Vejnović & Obrenović, 2023).

Ensuring human security for every individual is a complex and difficult task. Numerous challenges continue to hinder its realization. These challenges often weaken peace and stability both within and between states. Major challenges that undermine the effective achievement of human security are discussed below (Thakuri, 2018):

- 1. Climate Change and Environmental Degradation:** Climate change has significant implications for human livelihoods. It contributes to environmental degradation, threatens ecosystems, and disrupts life-support systems essential for human survival. This creates a strong link between climate change and human security.
- 2. Unchecked Population Growth:** Rapid population growth places enormous pressure on natural resources. The global population has surpassed several billions and continues to increase, leading to overcrowding and growing demand for limited renewable resources.
- 3. Disparities in Economic Opportunities:** Economic inequality remains a major challenge to human security. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and per capita income are unevenly distributed at both national and international levels. As a result, a large portion of the global population lives in poverty, has lower life expectancy, and struggles to meet basic human security standards.
- 4. Excessive Migration and Refugee Problems:** Migration and displacement have increased significantly due to poverty, conflict, and uneven development. At the time of the Human Development Report (HDR), international migrants numbered around 35 million, internally displaced persons (IDPs) about 20 million, and refugees approximately 19 million. These



numbers continue to rise.

5. Civil Strife and Wars: Prolonged interstate conflicts, civil wars, insurgencies, and proxy wars in many regions of the world continue to threaten human security by causing widespread destruction, displacement, and instability.

6. Terrorism and Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD): Terrorism has increasingly become a strategy used by non-state actors to spread fear and violence. Such acts result in the loss of innocent lives and destruction of property, posing a serious threat to global human security.

7. Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime: The illegal trade in narcotic drugs has emerged as a major challenge to human security. Drug trafficking generates enormous illegal profits, involves large-scale tax evasion, and leads to severe social and health consequences in many societies.

Despite the widespread acceptance of the human security paradigm, it is not a complete solution to all security challenges. Critics argue that the concept is often ambiguous and difficult to implement effectively. Many obstacles continue to hinder its realization, and major issues such as poverty, hunger, health crises, and conflicts still persist and, in some cases, are worsening.

IV. CONCLUSION

The concept of human security has significantly broadened the understanding of security by shifting attention from the protection of states to the protection of individuals and communities. Unlike traditional security frameworks that focus primarily on military threats, human security emphasizes safeguarding people from a wide range of social, economic, environmental, and political risks. The recognition of seven major dimensions—economic, food, health, personal, community, political, and environmental security—demonstrates the multidimensional nature of threats that affect human well-being.

In the contemporary global context, human security faces numerous emerging challenges. Issues such as climate change, environmental degradation, population growth, economic inequality, migration crises, civil conflicts, terrorism, and organized crime continue to threaten the safety and stability of societies. Additionally, increasing social alienation and fragmentation in modern societies highlight the need for stronger social cohesion and human connection. These challenges indicate that ensuring human security requires more than traditional policy responses; it demands comprehensive and coordinated strategies at local, national, and global levels.

Despite growing international recognition of the importance of human security, several obstacles remain. Institutional fragmentation within global organizations, competing national interests, and the lack of effective coordination among different actors often hinder the successful implementation of human security initiatives. Therefore, strengthening human security requires greater cooperation among states, international organizations, civil society, and academic communities. Integrated policies that link development, human rights, peacebuilding, and environmental sustainability are essential for addressing the complex challenges of the modern world.

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