# The Human Security Approach as a Frame for Considering Ethics of Global Environmental Change

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We need languages for transition; a human security framework adds value to languages of human rights, human development, and global public goods, through its emphases on interconnectedness and solidarity.

*Key words: human security, climate change, value change*

## The Need For A Language About Being Human

A great deal is now known about current global climate change:- the serious risks of moving irreversibly outside the climate-bands to which human societies across the world have become adapted over long periods; the now commencing and unavoidable phase of 'early harvest' costs that will hit poorest groups and poorest countries the most; the possibilities of a subsequent phase of major deteriorations and even catastrophe (UNDP, 2007). Much has been written also about the ethics of global environmental change. The 2007-8 Human Development Report provides a forthright introduction. To use Biblical language, from those who have little shall be taken what little they have; and the sins of the fathers will be visited on other men's sons. From those that have, do not (judging from past behaviour rather than past language) expect much; not even sympathy or attention can be presumed.

Rich countries that invest massively in their own security claim there is too much uncertainty to invest in global climate security. More than is foreseen may eventually come back from those from whom much has been taken —in terms of violent conflict, migration, disease, trafficking of persons and drugs, piracy, and other forms of 'adaptation'.

For scientific knowledge and ethical argumentation to have much influence requires more than merely publication. It requires a context of frameworks of thought that stimulate and channel attention and interest. As we have seen over the years, materials that are too uncomfortable soon get overlaid by other concerns.

The language of 'public goods'/'public bads' and 'market failures' drawing on economics (Kaul et al., 1999) is relatively comfortable and familiar, and very relevant for understanding, but may be too impersonal to motivate basic rethinking and political reorientation. It contains little discussion of the human meaning of these 'failures', including the likely resulting anger, conflict and desperation that will bring further costs. The language of economics is also in danger of misdirecting us. The 2007 Stern Commission essayed an economic cost-benefit analysis (ECBA) of climate change for the UK government. All foreseen (monetizable) effects were projected. The costs of global warming were seen as the consumption losses that it causes (for example because someone dies prematurely) and these were compared with the benefits of global warming and of the economic activity that causes it.

The commission concluded that measures to mitigate impending change would be enormously advantageous and the costs prevented would be vastly greater than the costs of the mitigation measures. The value principles built into ECBA mean that only monetized effects matter; a rich person's benefits are more important, since weighted by his greater purchasing power. Distribution is unimportant as gains for the rich can outweigh costs for the poor and even outweigh the deaths of the poor. The same evaluation approach used to justify climate change mitigation is used by the UK government to justify climate-damaging airport expansion. Thus, minutes saved for highly-paid executives can outweigh, in this monetary calculus, the loss of livelihood for very poor people elsewhere as result of increasing desertification, climate instability, and sea level rise (Monbiot 2008). The key decisions in policy analysis are made before economists apply their techniques. They are the decisions that frame the issues and are built-in to the techniques about what to include and with what weights (e.g., in ECBA: monetized values), implicitly what to leave out (non-monetized values; penniless people), and the tacit assumptions about the range of validity of a technique. For example, ECBA assumes that any type of future cost (including lost lives) can legitimately be mathematically discounted in the same way as potential monetary benefits or costs (Shue, 2006). So the poor, whose lives are already largely discounted through use of a monetary calculus in which their activities have little weight, can be 'written off' scientifically when the loss of their 'consumption streams' is outweighed by the growth of consumption streams of the already rich.

Commensuration in ECBA is helpful and legitimate when dealing with legitimately commensurated goods, where non-commensurable criteria pull sharply in different directions. Yet the appropriate advice should not be to fabricate comparisons but to seek a better option that does not involve the 'trade-off' (Etzioni, 1991). A series of choices about how we see ourselves determine the motivation required for ethically appropriate framing, creativity, and serious attention to any of the detailed debates on ethics of climate change.

To what extent do we see shared interests between people, thanks to a perception of causal interdependence, so that appeals to self-interest are also appeals to mutual interest? How much do we value other people's interests, so that appeals to sympathy can be influential due to interconnections in emotion? To what extent do we see ourselves and others as members of a common humanity, or as members of a national or other limited social community (with, for example, an ethnic, religious, ideological, or economic basis of identity), or purely as individuals? This set of choices determines our interest in and response to any proposed reasoning about ethics.

## Roles Of A Human Security Perspective

A human security perspective can influence how we see ourselves, others and our interconnectedness, how we think about ethics and security, and may contribute to globalization of ethical thinking and to doing globalization ethically.

The human security framework has been emergent for at least a generation, under various names, for example in 1970s conflict, peace and basic human needs research, by figures such as Kenneth Boulding, John Burton, and Johan Galtung, and in the 1980s work of the Brandt Commission, the Palme Commission, and the South American Peace Commission. It became prominent under the 'human security' name in the 1990s, especially through the Human Development Report 1994 (UNDP 1994).

Terms like 'human security' try to catch the attention of an audience and the user's own attention; they aim to stimulate

and motivate. Having caught attention, they then organize it: they link to a perspective, a direction. They then aspire to influence and organize activity and frame the work. The international usage of such terms, and the frameworks that they mark, however, often seem to come and then quickly go. A few terms become established, but in the process they frequently change or lose meaning. How important, persuasive and durable is a 'human security' framework likely to be?

Consider a possible analogy. South Africa has long described itself as 'a world in one country'. In this land, people from various origins including African, European and Asian have come together. Long, bitter, brutal attempts were made to separate 'Europeans' residentially, socially and politically from other groups, even while economic development and mass culture increasingly pulled them together. The project for a politically unified South African people won against the apartheid system that had denied a shared political and ethical community. The 'one people' project did not win by military conquest, but in part as a conquest of ideas and feelings: an increased acceptance of the sharing of environments and predicaments and of shared humanity.

The world as a whole is organized in some ways as a system of global apartheid—illustrated by the barriers and patrols that separate the USA from Mexico, or Spain from North Africa. Major forces pull the world together, but these can be responded to by trying to enforce separations, as did the apartheid regime in South Africa. The alternative is to rethink global systems to express an ideal of 'one world'. 'Human security' frameworks contribute to rethinking the meanings of security, 'we', 'self', 'interests', 'self-interest' and 'common interest'. Evolution away from global apartheid will be difficult. Globalization often undermines psychological security, which correlates weakly with more objective measures of security. The more the fearful barricade themselves, the more fearful they can feel.

The more they own, the more they fear losing it, even if the risks they face are far fewer than those faced by those less fortunate. However, globalization also establishes bases for real human security by building interconnections that can foster shared interests, richer identities and mutual respect. Psychologically, and in almost every other way, people are parts of bigger, indeed global, systems. Human security means broadly the security of human beings against important threats to their basic needs. It refers to the security of all people, not just the security forces or the state or the rich. A common narrow formulation refers only to the physical, bodily security of persons; or, narrower still, to bodily security against intentional physical threats. Picciotto's definition is far less narrow: security in terms of quantity of years lived (adjusted for life quality as common in health planning, and with the normative benchmark of a normal human lifespan of say seventy years), against all threats to life, whether physical or not and intentional or not (Picciotto et al. 2007). Intermediate between this and the first formulation lies the widely used phrase 'freedom from fear and freedom from want'. Even the narrower formulations of human security are radical in relation to traditional security studies thinking. The term 'human' is inherently global in coverage, and contains—for humans—a moral appeal. Combined with 'human', the term 'security' too makes a normative appeal, for priority. 'Human security' conveys a message about basic quality of life and a claim for a priority in policy.

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The 'human security' language adds important themes to the older language of 'basic human needs'. First is the significance of stability in fulfilling basic needs and avoiding certain types of loss. Second is the threat of triggering fundamental damage when we lapse below certain thresholds that act as the limits to safety in pervasively interconnected systems that contain maximum tolerance levels, beyond which harm can ensue. Third is the importance of attention to feelings and subjectivity as well as to objective life circumstances. Losses include not only the loss of objects but the loss of major meanings and even identity. A human security perspective thus involves a system of ideas: a focus on individual human persons and on stability in fulfilling their basic needs, attention to causal interconnections regardless of conventional disciplinary boundaries, and emphasis on 'tipping points' and felt insecurities. It includes strong attention to the contents of individual person's lives and to human depth in understanding security. It draws on a synthesis of features from the normative languages of human needs, human rights and human development, and a framework for situation-specific wide ranging explanatory syntheses.

Human security thinking directs us to look at ordinary people's daily lives, and at the vulnerabilities, contingencies, and consequent possible disadvantages that can arise. The concentration on the contents and fluctuations of daily life, and on specific threats and misfortunes—including ill-health, disability, displacement, death—gives a more intense, realistic awareness of the meanings of 'human'. As in the work of Burton and his basic needs school in conflict studies we see how people seek security of various sorts, physical, economic, and psychological (Burton, 1990). Human security thinking is thus more strongly concerned with felt experience than some of the legal-led work on human rights and economics-led work on human develop-

ment. It focuses on the priority capacities and vulnerabilities that form the grounds for basic rights.

As in the related 'human' phrases—human needs, human rights, human development—normative importance is given to all living (and future) persons - everyone matters. Human security thinking adds an emphasis on the human species as a whole, and its shared security, insecurity and fragility to more individualistic human rights thinking. The emphases on shared fragility, basic requirements and felt experience give a foundation for solidarity, 'joined-up feeling' (Gasper and Truong 2005). By encouraging thinking deeply about all individuals, human rights language can be grounded in a way that helps to counter dangers that can otherwise arise in the use of rights language. Human security thinking extends the holistic perspective of explanation from individual daily lives through to social, national, and global systems. It examines how international, national and local level insecurities and conflicts affect and hurt individuals, and how individual level insecurities and conflicts contribute to local, national and international level pathologies. We can call this 'joined-up thinking'. It reinforces 'joined-up feeling', through a greater awareness of interconnection. Awareness of effects—actual, probable or possible— on others from one's actions may support feelings of sympathy, even responsibility; while awareness of boomerang effects—actual, probable or possible—on oneself can generate feelings of caution and precaution. A perspective of joined-up thinking, in which environmental insecurity, health insecurity, economic insecurity, military insecurity, psychological insecurity and more all sometimes strongly affect each other, reduces the significance of definitional disputes. Broad attention to types of threat and damage fits with a broad causal analysis, but even those users of a narrow physical violence definition of human security, who adopt a transdisciplinary causal perspective, are led to engage with other types of insecurity and harm, and with how people value and react to them.

In this photo of 1973, Frontiers within frontiers: children behind fence that separated them from the white community near Johannesburg. The 'one people' project in South Africa won in part as a conquest of ideas and feelings.Copyright UN/Pendl.

Which of these connections are considered most important remains a matter for investigation and evaluation, case-by-case. Jolly and Basu Ray (2007) show this based on the national Human Development Reports which have taken human security as a theme. A human security perspective is a frame for work, elaborated differently each time, not an instruction to study the effect of everything on everything or a fixed blueprint of research design.

## Issues In Global Ethics

Human security thinking might favour the changes of perspective that are needed in how people perceive shared interests and shared humanity. It extends the logic of global public goods, in particular the logic of global public health. Everyone, the rich included, lacks health security if they have sanitized their own private space but their neighbours' yards and public spaces remain unsanitized. Health threats respect no paper boundaries. Assuring one's own health requires assuring decent living conditions for one's neighbours, and not undermining them by the indirect effects of one's other actions. Health impact assessments of alternative international trading arrangements and other international 'non-health' policies are now recognised as central for global public health (special issue of Bulletin of the World Health Organisation, March 2007, 85(3)). This principle applies more broadly. Certain major bads that emanate from one's neighbours can to a large extent not be contained: pollution, weapons, people, drugs, diseases, criminal networks, etc. There cannot be security in one country alone.

The human security perspective generalizes the public health perspective, in which disease anywhere and the conditions that breed it, form a threat everywhere. In the case of climate change, powerful groups in some rich countries until lately calculated that global warming would bring them no net harm, or even net benefits: agricultural growing seasons, for example, would extend. Problems resulting for other countries were theirs alone. It is evident though that global warming will bring not modest marginal variations in climate but possibly massive system-breaking impacts within countries and, when more fragile countries disintegrate, across countries. The past generation of inaction on climate change has left less room for

debate. The delay in action and the accelerating deterioration mean that, even considering only the personal benefit of most people presently alive in rich countries, it is imperative to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, regardless of which ethical theory one subscribes to (Climate Ethics group at Pennsylvania State University, www.climateethics.org). Arguments about the claims of future generations are no longer essential. They simply add to the necessity for adjusting structures in the countries with the largest emissions. Public goods provision cannot be merely a matter of calculation of self-interest, otherwise free-riding by self-interested participants can destroy a system. Only shared norms, institutions and regulatory activities can bring security.

The energy for moving towards and sustaining norms of solidarity comes especially from real cases that evoke awareness of shared humanity, human fragility and feelings of unfairness. Sympathy is fostered by attention to the personal, the individual, the imaginable and tangible. The human security perspective shares this intense attention to individuals, in a particularly vivid and realistic way due to its focus on priority requirements of physical security, food security, physical and mental health, and community membership. Emphasis on these human specifics provides a conceptualisation of what is common in our humanity. A human security perspective thus adds or strengthens attention to humanity as a whole, the human species, a community of fate that shares a fragile life support system. To an awareness of and respect for individuals it adds an understanding of human individuals, the category of human species, and a sensitivity to the specifics of human need, vulnerability and shared insecurity, wherein each affects all. Some commentators fear that a 'human security' language leads to subordinating human development concerns to conventional thinking on military security. But human security analysis is a reaction to such a danger, not its cause. It encourages us to ask: whose security, and what increases security? Human security analyses have argued in detail that major reductions of military expenditures can often increase security, by redirection of efforts to fields that build democratic peace.

## Conclusion

How can transition occur from the wasteful, thoughtless, unsustainable style of resource use now present in rich countries? The Great Transition project that originated at the Stockholm Environment Institute (Raskin et al. 2002; Raskin 2006) identifies three required value shifts: first, from a preoccupation with the acquisition and consumption of commodities to a broader and deeper picture of what gives quality of life; second, from an overwhelming individualism to a human solidarity, based indeed on respect for individuals; and third, from an attitude of mastery and domination of nature to an attitude of stewardship for 'Mother Earth'. Any transition needs a language that makes vivid and meaningful what is at stake, that unites and motivates groups committed to change, and that persuades enough of those groups who could otherwise block change.

Given the language and global ethic of human rights, and that of human development as the expansion of human freedoms, what does a human security perspective add? The value shifts identified as necessary by the Great Transition work (Kates et al., 2006)highlight that human rights language, and the capability approach's 'development as freedom', while important, are not sufficient. Alone, they are potentially too individualistic and compatible with visions of self-fulfilment through unlimited consumption and exploitation of nature. The emphases required—on human solidarity, stability and prioritization, prudence and enlightened self-interest, sources of richer quality of life, felt security and fulfillment, and ecological interconnection that demands careful stewardship—are more fully present in human security thinking. A human security perspective helps to ground the human rights and human development approaches in the nature of being and wellbeing. Human security conveys interdependence more than does human rights language, and adds a synthesizing approach in explanation and diagnosis. Human security acknwoledges dangers, vulnerability, and fragility, and it connects to human subjectivity, which increases its explanatory force and motivating potential.

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