Communicating Human Security & Capturing Perspectives

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Abstract

The human security index consists of three key components: economic fabric index, environmental fabric index, and social fabric index. These three components include various different indicators like health, education, diversity, peacefulness, governance, food security, environmental vulnerability, protection and sustainability, measures of human, societal, and national progress and GDP, equality in income distribution and financial-economic governance. Although the Human Security Index provides a quantifiable method to rank and categorize countries based on these indicators, it is understood that an individual’s own notion and perception of security varies with changes in human perspectives and experiences. Therefore, to understand human security and what it means to different individuals and communities, varied approaches focused on subjective individual experiences at the micro level are always essential. For human security to become a comprehensive planning framework, it requires the integration of diverse perspectives and inclusive thinking about human security.

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In this regard, this article seeks to discuss various tools that can be adopted to i) communicate human security among populations ii) capture the varied perspectives of communities about human security and its significance from the perspective of their lived reality. The article will use as examples, different methodologies and dialogue-based communication approaches adopted by the POP (Protect Our Planet) Movement (an NGO).
As an outcome, the implementation of these tools can enhance the overall understanding of the human security concept and the contextualization necessary for local communities.

1. Introduction

“Human security is not a concern with weapons. It is a concern with human dignity. In the last analysis, it means a child who did not die, a disease that did not spread, an ethnic tension that did not explode, a dissent who was not silenced, a human spirit that was not crushed.”

– Mahbub ul Haq, Pakistani Economist and International Development Theorist

Human security first emerged as a concept in 1994 when the Human Development Report (HDR) called drugs, AIDS, terrorism, pollution, nuclear proliferation, and environmental problems as a threat to human security. The report demanded a new concept of human security and a renewed role of the United Nations (UN) to seek solutions through a more equitable sharing of global economic opportunities and responsibilities. Almost two decades later, in 2012, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution stating that, “human security is an approach to assist Member States in identifying and addressing widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood, and dignity of their people.” The 66/290 resolution calls for “people-centered, comprehensive, context-specific, and prevention-oriented responses that strengthen the protection and empowerment of all people.” An endeavor to quantify and characteristically frame this “people-centered” and “context-specific” human development approach—that moved beyond the statistical Gross Domestic Product (GDP)—gave rise to the development of the Human Security Index.

The Human Security Index consists of three key components: economic fabric index, environmental fabric index, and social fabric index. These three components include various indicators like health, education, diversity, peacefulness, governance, food security, environmental vulnerability, protection and sustainability, measures of human, societal, and national progress and GDP, equality in income distribution and financial-economic governance. Although the human security index provides a quantifiable method to rank and categorize countries based on these indicators, it is understood that an individual’s own notion and perception of security varies with changes in human perspectives and experiences. Furthermore, with human security being perceived as “a concern with human dignity” as pointed out by Mahbub ul Haq, it leads one to recognize that human security significantly relates to one’s individual perceptions and subjective experiences. Therefore, to understand human security and what it means to different individuals and communities, varied approaches focused on subjective individual experiences at the micro level are always essential. For human security to become a comprehensive planning framework, it requires the integration of diverse perspectives and inclusive thinking about human security.

In this regard, this article seeks to discuss various tools that can be adopted to: i) communicate human security among populations; and to ii) capture the varied perspectives of communities about human security and its significance from the perspective of their individual.
lived reality. The article will use as examples, creative methodologies and dialogue-based communication approaches adopted by the POP (Protect Our Planet) Movement (a non-profit-based organization). As an outcome, the implementation of these tools can enhance the overall understanding of the human security concept and the contextualization necessary for local communities.

2. Expanding the scope of Human Security Index

The Human Development Report (HDR), released in 1990 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), introduced us to the Human Development Index (HDI). The report recorded three main components, each captured with composite indicators. They included health (life expectancy rate), knowledge (adult literacy rate), and economic standard of living (GDP per capita). Since then, these reports have been published annually, analyzing developed and developing countries alike on the global HDI scale with a focus on socioeconomic development. Over the years, HDI has absorbed criticism and engaged in dialogue on whether it is an accurate and legitimate representation of the highly nuanced concept of human development or socioeconomic development. This has led to a rise in several propositions, including the Quality-of-Life Index, the Wellbeing Index (2001), the World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Index (2003 and 2007), the World Database of Happiness (2005), and the Happy Planet Index (2006), to equitably measure socioeconomic development.

Given this context, it is important to note that the prototype of a new concept of Human Security Index (HSI) was first established after the 1994 HDR. This report contained a draft “social world charter” which advocated for the United Nations to “become the principal custodian of our global human security” with indicators that attempt to characterize inclusive income, knowledge, and healthcare as actually delivered to people. The HSI—a model evolved over the years through the work of scholar David A. Hastings—has sought to address some of the challenges faced by HDI while also incorporating the robustness of its indicators.4

For two decades, the author has also been concerned about “cultural bias” in the development of indicators (Hastings 2002). How to ensure a minimum of cultural bias, and an opportunity for diverse cultural concerns to enrich concepts of human development and human security? Such an effort should harmonize as many concerns as possible about such human conditions that describe comfort, or true social (as opposed to militaristic) security of ordinary people in a society. What concepts are involved? What direct or proxy indicators might be developed and used? What indicators are available now? What improvements might be made in such indicators so that they move toward better value in describing human inclusiveness/comfort/[social]security across as much of the cultural and political spectrum as possible? How can such indicators best describe current conditions and help indicator developers as well as governments and supportive institutions strategize improvements in the human condition of a place?

The Human Security Index, with its principal intention to address gaps such as those pointed out by Hastings can be greatly strengthened by taking cognizance of the perceptions and experiences of ordinary people from diverse backgrounds and realities. This makes the communication of the human security concept and consultations on it with populations chiefly essential.

3. Growing Threats to Human Security and the Need for a Bottom-up Communication Approach

“We are faced with a development paradox. Even though people are on average living longer, healthier and wealthier lives, these advances have not succeeded in increasing people’s sense of security.”

– António Guterres, Secretary-General, United Nations

In recent years, a range of threats, like COVID-19, digital technologies, climate change, and biodiversity loss, have either gained prominence or taken on new forms. In other words, humanity is contributing to the world’s growing precariousness and insecurity. Considering the direct humanitarian costs of violent conflict, it is easier to quantify the impact of risks to human security. However, this becomes much more complicated when taking into account indirect social, economic, health-related, and environmental consequences. Social, political, economic, health-related, and environmental factors all pose risks to human security.

Since World War II, violent conflict has evolved significantly in both form and effect, influencing human security. The state’s defense against violent attacks is a prerequisite for its security, but it is insufficient for human security. As a result, it is critical to identify potential threats to human security and, with a better understanding of the concept, improve abilities to combat such threats, or at the very least, reduce their severity.

The 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) identified that climate change poses the biggest threat to human security. Both human security and human rights are at stake due to climate change. Climate change threatens human security as it undermines livelihoods, compromises culture and individual identity, exacerbates migration, and makes it more difficult for governments to ensure the necessary conditions for human security. Climate change may have an impact on some or all of the factors simultaneously. Famine, conflict, and sociopolitical instability are examples of situations with extreme insecurity that almost always result from the interaction of several causes.

Human security will be increasingly compromised as a result of climate change for many communities that are already economically and socially disadvantaged, resource dependent, and have few financial assets. In this context, the way in which the subject of rights is framed sets down the basic requirements that are applicable globally. However, national and international laws ignore these rights and fail to take into account sufferings or rights.

The UN has acknowledged the range of dangers to human security. At the 2005 World Summit, it stated, “All individuals, particularly vulnerable people, are entitled to freedom
from fear and freedom from want, with an equal opportunity to enjoy all their rights and fully develop their human potential." Human security is relatively a new notion, and there is comparatively little comprehensive literature on this topic when it is used in a broad sense. These factors make this field even more in need of investigation. It is necessary to create a more thorough and coherent understanding of human security in order to address the various risks associated with security. While the HSI has been a positive attempt to model the concept of human security, enhancing the scope of this framework and its use in policy and decision-making requires community participation. This is where the bottom-up communication approach comes into play.

As threats to human security continue to exacerbate due to the events unfolded by climate change and geopolitical instability, understanding the depth of the situation as it manifests itself in different demographics becomes key. In this regard, documenting individual perspectives on human security based on experiences across contexts would offer a multi-layered and comprehensive understanding for promoting the use of the human security concept as an effective planning framework. A bottom-up communication approach such as this would be inclusive, context-specific, and informed by experience, all of which would elevate the value and scope of any conceptual framework, including the HSI.

4. Tools: Communicating Human Security and Capturing Perspectives

In recent decades, the UN has built a library of knowledge on human security that can be incorporated in any form into communication strategies. In this section, we look at some communication methods specifically adopted by the POP Movement (an NGO) in its work that can be presented as potential examples for communicating human security through participatory approaches.

The POP (Protect Our Planet) Movement is a non-profit, youth-centered organization that aims to empower youth to have active participation in addressing issues of climate change through knowledge sharing, capacity building, and climate action. Fostering collective leadership, the organization leans heavily on creative methodologies and dialogue-based communication approaches to promote its objectives.

4.1. Art and Creative Methodologies

Art can be a powerful medium for knowledge exploration and research when it comes to human security. The POP Movement and its sister organizations have extensive experience in utilizing art to inform UN programs and global guidelines, including the living WHO guideline on self-care interventions for health and wellbeing. The flagship Art4Life (A4L) initiative pioneered by the Center for Human Progress (CHP), a sister organization of the POP Movement, brings together the creative forms of art like music, dance, puppetry, theater, and so on in workshop formats. This medium of communication offers a safe space for the participants and stimulates dialogue on sensitive and important issues that may be difficult to engage with otherwise. A4L can be evolved to promote participatory dialogue on human security, just as the CHP has utilized it to break the communication barrier on gender and sexual and reproductive health and rights.
Some creative communication tools adopted by the POP Movement and Center for Human Progress:

**Drama:** Drama, as a performative art to visually represent meanings and stimulate dialogue.

**Music:** Music, as a tool to inform, motivate, convince, and also strengthen expression, especially around hard-to-communicate subjects.

**Storytelling:** The art of storytelling, as a method to narrativize ideas and smoothen the process of communication in lived reality.

**Magnet Theater:** Magnet Theater, as a dialogue-based communication tool by and for communities, where a dilemma is portrayed and the performance freezes, allowing the audience to act out and test their own solutions and perspectives in a simulated real-life scenario.

**Video:** Video, as a visual communication tool which is spontaneous, engages the participants’ attention, and stimulates action and/or dialogue.
“The growing threats to human security and the regional issues tied to them now more than ever call for global responses and a one-size-fits-all approach cannot be adopted to address them.”
Another example of dialogue-based communication approaches from the POP Movement is a session organized for young audiences and other stakeholders as part of the Third International Conference and POP Festival for Youth-Led Climate Action. Focusing on climate refugees, the session brought to light how many individuals coming to the United States from Central America are fleeing because of violence, poverty, and corruption. But climate change is emerging as both a direct and an indirect driver of migration that complicates existing vulnerabilities. Persistent drought, fluctuating temperatures, and unpredictable rainfall have reduced crop yields throughout the Northern Triangle—a region that comprises El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala—challenging livelihoods and access to food in agriculturally dependent communities. In this regard, some important evidence and experience-based perspectives emerged during the session. Amali Tower, Founder and Executive Director of Climate Refugees, noted, “Disasters don’t just happen in isolation; they are compounding due to economic factors, global health crisis, pandemic, high rates of poverty, and many others.” Similarly, Felicia Rangel-Samporano, Founder of the Sidewalk School, which provides education to asylum seekers’ children on the US-Mexico border, noted in another participatory session, “I don’t think people really understand how much climate change really factors into asylum seekers’ lives while they’re coming to our country. They come to our country for a better life, to have a chance at something, whereas in their country everything’s destroyed.” The linkages between these real-world concerns and human security are undeniable. A creative communication approach adopted to understand these issues from the perspective of human security would starkly reveal the more multilayered threats that exist.

4.2. Grassroots, Community-driven Projects

The growing threats to human security and the regional issues tied to them now more than ever call for global responses and a one-size-fits-all approach cannot be adopted to address them. For a stronger, more innovative response, coordinated efforts led by grassroots and international organizations to design and implement any project are a must. Such projects heedfully respond to situations and can bring quick changes with a better monitoring and evaluation feedback loop. Through the objectives they try to achieve through community engagement, these projects can also serve as effective communication tools. Adopting this approach, the POP Movement has been working on various projects that promote regional voices with a feedback loop of bottom-up and top-down approaches. These feedback loops have aided in identifying the needs of communities across a geography, generating momentum for new projects and scaling up existing ones that are country-based and/or led independently by youth. The POP initiatives, which are country-based and led by a team of young climate leaders, address different issues pertaining to the local context by adopting varied strategies.

A common grassroots strategy adopted by the youth through the POP initiatives is tree planting. By engaging the local community, including young people, and with support from partners across the globe, the POP Movement has made progress toward human security by making the world greener through its active plantation drives. With six tree plantation initiatives in countries like Liberia, Zambia, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe, Haiti, and Cameroon, the projects inspire youth, spread awareness, build their capacities, and empower
According to the International Resource Panel (IRP) hosted by the United Nations Environment Program, well-planned land restoration activities have a cross-sectional benefit and can help all 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Increasing the land’s ability to produce food and building materials over time, addressing hunger by improving economic well-being by indirectly generating jobs and economic activities, providing traditional medicines, improving mental health through forest bathing, empowering women by increasing their access to quality nutrition, protecting infrastructure from extreme weather events, and enhancing the livelihoods of smallholder farmers are some of the benefits. A simple act of planting trees can help create healthy, thriving communities, thereby promoting human security. Furthermore, POP Movement’s tree plantation initiatives take on special significance when it comes to communicating human security. This is because the continuous feedback loop of bottom-up and top-down communication not only ensures effective monitoring and evaluation, but through it, can facilitate knowledge sharing in human security. Capacity building and awareness sessions organized prior to any tree planting drive in a region lends scope for environment-related communication on human security. In these sessions, perspectives from the local community can be documented through participatory communication tools.

Among other strategies, the POP Movement has been focusing on climate education and gender sensitization to empower youth and build their skills. This is required to manage security risks from climate change, including mitigating its impacts on the ecosystem, improving management of high-risk locations, and adapting to socio-economic changes.
Even though initiatives, such as those mentioned above, have proven to scale-up and channelize regional voices in a short period of time, their work in silos is not enough to create a global impact for human security. Therefore, by adopting varied approaches to foster collaboration among different actors, the POP Movement continuously gathers global, regional, multisectoral, and transgenerational efforts to ultimately reach the size, scale, and momentum to become a global movement. The POP Global Climate Crusade, launched in early 2022, is an attempt towards achieving this objective. It is a series of joint approaches directed at creating effective and self-sustaining initiatives. The crusade is an ongoing effort to promote climate-related activities and events—in areas including, but not limited to, education, culture, social and human sciences, and communication—to adapt to the impacts of climate change and the risks associated with it. Kicked off in the African continent, within a month, this crusade commenced more than one hundred climate action activities including twenty tree plantation drives, over sixty awareness workshops, twenty-five community dialogues, and over ten tonnes of plastic waste collected through community efforts. The activities that emerged through the Climate Crusade also focused on other Sustainable Development Goals like gender equality, good health and wellbeing, zero hunger, clean water and sanitation, life on land, and others.

In these contexts, implementing the previously noted feedback loop mechanism in grassroots, community-driven climate action projects offers a channel for not only contextualizing human security but also communicating the same and gathering valuable experience-based perspectives from local communities.

4.3. Research and Writing

The academic literature compiled and developed by the UN adeptly delineates the concept of human security by examining key areas including the need for this concept, the
multifarious roles it can play, and the gaps it can address. Human security emerges from the interaction of multiple factors and can hardly be limited to a single cause. As a result, human security becomes a very sensitive topic for communication and necessitates that it be normative, ethical, educational, and effectively handled in any inquiry. It is necessary to undertake studies to effectively communicate about a potential threat to human security and rights and offer interventions to deal with it.

Climate change, as a condition, poses risks to individuals and communities, including threats to livelihoods, culture, and political stability. As systematically reviewed in the AR4 and AR5 reports of the IPCC, there are clear linkages between climate change and human security, and to support these, there is a need for continuous research studies in areas, communities, and geographies affected by climate change. In this regard, the POP Movement has been invested in some pioneering research endeavors.

A recent study to investigate the environmental and public health impacts of the presence of Sargassum (macroalgae) on the coastal areas in the state of Quintana Roo, Mexico, is one such research project. For the past few years, beaches in Mexico and the Caribbean have been plagued by massive rafts of a golden-brown seaweed called sargassum. Thick, slimy, floating macroalgae, coming from the Caribbean, are piling up on the Gulf of Mexico. Sargassum, moved by currents, has reached the Straits of Florida. Various problems associated with the presence and decomposition of these macroalgae have been observed. These include an unpleasant appearance of the beaches due to the excessive presence of sargassum, the release of odors (gasses such as methane and hydrogen sulfide) that can be harmful to health, poor quality of water that takes on a brown color, effects on coastal ecosystems such as seagrasses and corals, significant loss of biodiversity, respiratory and skin infections due to direct contact with sargassum, which not only affect the inhabitants and tourists who come on vacation but also, to a greater extent, workers who are engaged in removing macroalgae from the sea and the beaches and handling it until its final destination on land. Through this research, the POP Movement is aiming to identify the impact of the presence of sargassum on the environment and the health of the nearby living communities and also to determine how it can be a threat to human security.

With research as a tool, the POP Movement has been constantly working with experts to conduct capacity building workshops, dialogues, primary research, and literature reviews to propose strategies to mitigate the impact of climate change on public health. A recent paper proposes how adopting a well-defined public health framework would redress the social and environmental determinants of health and allow officials to build strategies and programs to aid communities in acquiring knowledge of climate resilience and preparing them for the health effects of climate change.

In this series of efforts, another way of collecting perspectives and communicating about human security issues is by covering various aspects of climate change as a threat to public health and publishing them. An example is the upcoming book, *Health and climate change nexus: Unraveling the connections*. This book covers multiple dimensions of health and climate change in both developed and developing countries, and the interconnections
between health and climate change are discussed. In this book, strategies are recommended for mitigating the negative impacts of climate change on people’s health. Research on the linkages between climate change and human health is reported in over 14 chapters from Mexico, Africa, the UK, the USA, India, South Asia, and Latin America. This information from developed and developing countries will be of immense interest to a global audience of researchers, activists, governments, and others.

5. Conclusion

“We will not enjoy development without security, we will not enjoy security without development, and we will not enjoy either without respect for human rights.”

— Kofi Annan, seventh Secretary-General of the United Nations (1997-2006)

This powerful remark by Kofi Annan closely ties together the concept of human security with human rights. As human security emerges as a rights-based issue, it is incumbent that the conceptual and policy framework surrounding human security brings within it diverse perspectives and contextualized experiences from the micro levels. For this purpose, communicating about human security to different individuals and population groups would be the crucial first step.

The article used as examples, creative methodologies and dialogue-based communication approaches adopted by the POP Movement and its sister organizations. Implementation of the tools discussed in the article enhances the overall understanding of the human security concept and the contextualization necessary for local communities.

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Notes
6. Simon Caney, “Climate Change, Human Rights and Moral Thresholds,” in Human Rights and Climate Change, ed. Stephen Humphreys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 69–90, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511770722.004, in particular, on the most disadvantaged. Specifically, it is projected to result in flooding, heat stress, food insecurity, drought and
increased exposure to water-borne and vector-borne diseases. Various different normative frameworks have been employed to think about climate change. Some, for example, apply cost–benefit analysis to climate change. The Stern Review provides a good example of this approach. It proceeds by comparing the costs (and any benefits)