

Session 1

Human Security: Bounds of Possibility

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Abstract

Human security is a normative framework for sustainable human development, which integrates “freedom from fear” and “freedom from want”, the dual ideals upheld in the post-war formative years of the United Nations and inscribed in the preamble of the Japanese Constitution: “We recognize that all peoples of the world have the right to live in peace, free from fear and want”.

It is often understood that Japan’s comparative advantage lies in the field of civilian international cooperation for economic development, distinguished from the efforts of conflict prevention and peace-building. Recognizing the significance of conflict factors, there still seems to be a room for us to elaborate a more comprehensive, developmentalist interpretation of human security into which an agenda for peace-building can also be firmly integrated.

The conceptual uniqueness of human security can be delineated by contrasting human security with human development. Defined as the continuous process of enlarging the range of choices of people so that they can lead lives they value, the concept of human development has expanded its sphere of influence since the unveiling of Human Development Index in 1990, which replaced per capita income as the leading tool of measurement of human well-being. The concept of human development took shape in a scholarly circle of UNDP, and it is widely known that the concept draws heavily on the capability theory established by the Nobel Prize economist, Amartya Sen.

Then, the notion of human security was introduced in *Human Development Report 1994* on the initiative of Mahbub ul Haq, and developed further in *Human Security Now*, the final report of the Commission on Human Security published in 2003 (Ogata-Sen Report). In the latter report, Sen paid careful attention to the effects of boundary-crossing downside risks, which may drastically swamp the past achievements of human development in individual societies. Downside risks do include the outbreak of violent wars and conflicts, spread of emerging infectious diseases, rapid degradation of environment, havoc caused by natural disasters and megascience accidents, and

intensification of social discrimination and deprivation. In the course of manifestation of those risks, the range of choices of the affected people can be extremely circumscribed.

First of all, the human security approach is to address such a situation, in which those vulnerable to risks are exposed to an extremity of insecurities, by preventing the occurrence of disasters, protecting the worst-affected people, and promoting the problem-solving abilities of multi-layered human communities. In other words, human security is the collective effort of countering adversity, of safeguarding the choices of the most insecure, and of placing the society back on the track of forward-looking process of human development. To listen carefully to the voices of the people suffering acute deprivation will contribute to reach at an agreement on policy priority, based on the situational consideration of basic capabilities. Considering the duality of freedoms from fear and from want, the target of inquiry should be the psychological as well as physical insecurities of people.

Downside risks pounce upon a wide swath of people at a time. As a general rule, those risks compel the most vulnerable strata of society to suffer most, intensifying their existential insecurities, but the rest of the society cannot stay completely safe either. As was put by Ulrich Beck, the smog crosses borders without hindrance and democratically affects both haves and have-nots. This nature of risk invites us to reexamine the nature of social solidarity. Human security is to cope with downturns, while the chronic poverty approach is to strengthen upward mobility of the poorest. As such, these two approaches can be complementary to each other and will contribute to make our understanding of actual paths of human development more dynamic.

Through close investigation of the extremity of crisis and plight, the human security approach is expected to indicate essential requirements to make human development more sustainable. As long as human development and human security are both based on the framework of individual choices, however, a different conception is needed to envision a holistic system which would accommodate sustainable interaction between nature and human society. And yet, we cannot think of a future shape of sustainable society separately from the examination of human insecurities, because a system which fails to provide substantial security for all parts of society cannot be sustainable.

It is fallacious to assume that rapid economic growth automatically reduces poverty and insecurities. In the age of globalization, the uneven nature of growth as well as the erosion of social security arrangements obliges us to rethink the quality of growth itself and take even more sensitive attitudes toward material, individual and cultural insecurities intensified by the increased connectivity of human activities. The emergence of the human security approach has surely been a powerful response to the pressing demands of the times.

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