Sharing the journey: the way ahead for human development and human security frameworks

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ABSTRACT

As an intellectual offspring of human development ideas and practice, the evolution of the human security concept can offer some insights about how to rethink human development in the post-2015 era. This view originates from human security's focus on a deep understanding of threats, downside risks and crises. We suggest that there are three basic challenges that new human development thinking should address, namely: countering the shock-driven response to global threats that drives attention away from those left behind, promoting a culture of prevention, and catching up conceptually with the deep global transformations taking place in relation to development.

The evolution of ideas about human development during the last quarter of a century has been extremely fruitful. The introduction of Human Development Reports coincided with a historical moment of deep global transformation, and as a result these have played a meaningful role in placing people at the centre of global governance. The reports and the underlying human development framework of freedoms, capabilities and opportunities opened the door to alternative ideas, measurements and policies that defied the crumbling development orthodoxy of the 1980s, connecting multiple topics that were off the agenda, such as poverty, gender, education and youth, and gradually becoming entrenched as a leading paradigm in development thought.

One intellectual product of this human development journey is the idea of human security. This was incubated in the 1993 and 1994 global reports, and Mahbub ul Haq (1999) saw in it the basis for a new 'human world order', through which human development was to replace weapons and armies as the means for security. While this new world order was not embraced at that moment, the idea of human security did get a life of its own. Human security brought the human development notion of *people-centeredness*, a broader understanding of *protection,* and the importance of *people's agency and empowerment* into traditional security circles. The idea struggled to gain a space in such a radically different audience but, two decades later, human security thinking is recognized in global governance and security studies as an idea that is distinct from the concept of human development. In parallel, there has been increased attention to human security ideas through human development thinking, as evidenced by the Human Development Reports (Gómez et al. 2016). This shows how both frameworks can reinforce each other.

On the occasion of the *2016 Human Development Report,* and efforts to think about the way ahead for human development, we would like to discuss challenges made evident by the human security idea and practice that deserve attention. Because of space constraints, we do not include a general presentation of the two concepts, their praxis, and how they overlap and complement each other, something that has already been done several times in the literature (see Commission on Human Security 2003, Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy 2007, UNDP 2010, Gasper and Gómez 2014). Instead, we focus on the human security framework's emphasis on a deep understanding of threats, downside risks and crises (Kaldor et al. 2007, Tanaka 2015), as a significant source of challenges in which the joint action of the human development and human security concepts and frameworks is crucial. We suggest that there are three basic challenges: countering the shock-driven response to global threats, promoting a culture of prevention, and catching up conceptually with the deep global transformations taking place in relation to development. Let us explain each of them one by one.

Countering the shock-driven response to global threats

Looking at the world through the lens of threats imposes the tyranny of the urgent over the important. Terror attacks may have very limited material effects, compared to a drought or malnutrition, but reverberate more in the media and trigger disproportionate responses. Peaks in our attention to emergencies fail to address the gradual and complex process through which vulnerability builds up between shocks. The effects of shocks on global attention do have an incremental importance in answering the question of *who and what is being left behind*, however, since it is precisely those forgotten or harder to reach populations who are usually in the most precarious situation. Therefore, the human development and human security frameworks should align efforts to counter this shock-driven response to global threats (Gómez 2014).

Different kinds of threats demand an approach specific to their characteristics. First, there are the plainly orphaned threats, affecting relatively small or excluded groups of people living in poor areas. Overburdened states often fail to dedicate enough resources to confront this type of threat, and the lack of economic incentives usually does not allow for commercially generated solutions. For example, the Ebola virus used to be an orphan disease until the major outbreak in 2014, making clear the risks of relying on shock-driven responses. In cases like this, human development and human security frameworks can support visibility and awareness by echoing existing efforts to raise such issues, as is the case with the ECHO Forgotten Crisis Assessment Index.

There are also slow-onset disasters, such as drought or sea level rise, in which the pace of harm is too slow to trigger action until it is too late. These two do not lack visibility, since they are repeatedly presented as consequences of climate change, but global emphasis on mitigation rather than adaptation can result in this attention not being translated into direct action. Other slow-onset disasters such as environmental degradation and pollution are also a well-known part of the development process but, if left to the market, are only addressed after a certain level of income per capita is reached, sacrificing many in the meantime. In both cases, the challenge of balancing development and security is latent, requiring responses to mitigate risks before they become shocks.

People are also left behind when threats are protracted, and require a long-term commitment to crisis management that is difficult to obtain. Recovery takes time and levels of resources far exceeding those needed for relief, and depends on a governance structure that is often weak and unprepared. It also involves action on a broader range of sectors, as well as maintaining action when relapses into emergency occur—as they certainly do following violent conflicts or tropical storms, for instance. Looking back to recovery after crises in the middle and long term from a human development perspective could be a great source of insights into the ways that individuals and communities fail to

bounce back, and on what can be done to minimize such effects, something that adopting human security ideas can reintroduce into crisis management theory and practice.

Spotting those populations left behind through any of the above threats can be especially problematic when crises hit non-poor countries that are less ready to receive external attention and criticism. In these settings, the long experience of human development research, which has addressed such situations in regional and subnational areas, would be a great asset in managing political sensitivities around thorny issues or when a national approach becomes intractable. Of course, the greatest challenge is to tackle the 'unknown unknowns', those persons and communities we still do not realize are being left behind. That is why continuous innovation and collaboration in examining our world are essential.

Human security work has thus opened a window of opportunity to more actively participate in framing what is or is not a threat, to question how the saliency of threats is decided, and to determine what crisis management entails. It emphasizes the centrality of people in the calculations that make us value some threats over others, and gives attention to the full cycle of relief, recovery and prevention. Still, in order to move from a shocks- to a needs-driven response to crisis, our strategies for change must be anchored in times of peace covered by human development, and not just tied to emergencies. The human security framework emphasis on knowledge of the threat has to go hand in hand with human development indicators, so that long-term processes can be adequately tracked. The human development framework excels in monitoring and evaluating people's capabilities and, thus, exploring partnerships between the two frameworks could be highly fruitful.

Making space for a culture of prevention through development

Another challenge in the exploration and expansion of the human development framework is how to understand and practice prevention as part of the process of development. When seeing the world through the occurrence of threats, as is the case in human security thinking, it is very common to hear that crises are opportunities. Yet going back to business as usual once the peak of the emergency is over is an equally common response. In the crisis management cycle, prevention is the phase that receives the least attention, but is the one everybody agrees should be the most important. Solving such contradictions is beyond what precautionary human security language can achieve—that is, using the fear of the threat to generate social change—since the driving forces of policy-making in times of peace are different from those in times of emergency.

There are many hurdles for mainstreaming a culture of prevention in practice. Aiming to address the root causes of threats, in which poverty tends to be given a central position, can paradoxically be part of the problem. Reducing the explanation of people's vulnerability to poverty closes the door to tailoring actions to the particular threats they face. While it may be true in general that better income, health and education levels can make populations more resilient to an earthquake, for example, these cannot replace mitigating the threat physically through better building codes and preparing for more effective responses when the shakes come again. A trickle-down effect from human development to human security should be contested, just as human development ideas contested the original trickle-down economics.

The opposite is also possible: There are threats from considering that providing relief is more convenient or less cumbersome than tackling the root causes of the problem. Neighbouring countries may prepare to accept refugees for example, but tend to be less willing to be involved in the political work that is inevitably needed to end displacement. Humanitarian assistance in protracted and intractable crises is merely a 'Band-Aid' solution. As we pointed out above, the full cycle of crisis management needs to be covered, and both human security and human development frameworks can complement each other in balancing attention to root causes and tailoring actions to specific threats.

Nonetheless, illustrating the positive impacts of prevention is rather difficult: people are more conscious about their needs in any given moment than about downside risks that have not hit them yet. It is thus difficult to justify expenditures on the intangible benefits of prevention in the face of many other pressing needs. Internalizing prevention may in fact require some form of paternalism, in as much as preventive measures do not represent the will of the majority. The human development framework, deeply committed to democracy, has still to shed light on how to deal with such situations, as democratic institutions may not be enough to push forward unpopular prevention. Presenting prevention as a win-win strategy for development, or bringing along co-benefits as in climate change action, has had limited impact. The temptation to use fear as a means to muster approval is a double-sided sword that may be instrumentalized to enforce draconian measures, creating new insecurities. Still, the role of fear as a trigger of prudence shows that working on the perception of threats along the developmental process, as collaborations between human development and human security frameworks have shown in the past (Gómez et al. 2016), can be an entry point to better confronting this challenge.

Catching up conceptually with the great development

transformation

Development as a post-World War II project designed to increase the rate of growth in order to close the divide between developing and developed countries was supposed to finish one day. The meaning of development has changed drastically since then, partly thanks to human development ideas, but whether development itself will come to an end or not is a pending question. The recent international agreement on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has given the development project a fresh meaning for the next 15 years, but there is no final answer yet. Particularly of concern for the evolution of human development ideas is the fact that people-centeredness and the human face have been fully internalized into the global rhetoric, pressuring human development supporters to explore new frontiers in order to offer further grounds to perpetuate development, or do something else.

First of all, the human development community has to decide if they want the project to live forever, and, if so, on what terms. Much of this discussion is internal to the community, and so beyond the scope of this think piece, but some of the frontiers to be explored in the future are actually frontiers with human security ideas, and so the experience of human security thinking may offer some light on this process. Particularly interesting is to see how human security thinking has survived despite being heavily criticized from all flanks: presented as hot air by the orthodoxy, and as hidden orthodoxy by critical thinkers. Nonetheless, the nature of the threats we confront has kept relentlessly evolving, making the inadequacy of yesterday's priorities and means of security all too evident. Human security language has catalysed attention to, for instance, climate change adaptation in relation to the dynamics of conflict, livelihoods, migration and cultural change; it has also supported the framing of the global response and partnerships needed to confront Ebola and disease pandemics in general. Security is central to the functioning of all societies, and even if the academic term sounds unconvincing, the human face of insecurities and the inhumanity of traditional security make human security relevant. In the case of development, the human development framework could put forward ideas of progress, well-being, flourishing, sustainability or even quality of growth as candidates to be used as proxies for a development that never ends, at least not in the foreseeable future.

If development is to remain a central concept in global governance, what frontiers of its meaning and coverage would be worth exploring? A central topic in human security discussions has been the changing nature of sovereignty and whether some threats justify international intervention. The rise of the South implies stronger sovereignty, and thus more cases in which people left behind cannot be identified or access external support, as we pointed out above. What would be the strategy for such challenges? Perhaps advocacy in partnership with human rights, policy innovation as in food security, or international intervention as suggested in the *2014 Human Development Report* will be relevant future strategies. Giving more prominence to networks of care or supply chains functioning across states is also an option.

Development could also be unpegged from its origin in international assistance—as is already true in practice (Pritchett 2015). There are many flows that nowadays are much more important for countries in the South than aid: remittances, foreign direct investment, migration, South to South exchanges, and so on. The human development framework discussions have paid attention to these for some time, and thus, can use this experience to redefine development, if framing them as such is of any use. Besides, the new development is not only about southern countries' ownership of their development trajectories, but also about the role of human development ideas in northern countries' internal affairs. Human security has been repeatedly criticized for being exclusively a foreign policy tool; supporters have responded to this idea by highlighting how major threats know no boundaries. The human development framework could be applied more often in richer settings to identify what the project of development means in those contexts, and what the challenges for implementation might be.

Even if leaving aid behind is not totally possible, there is a role for the human development framework to rethink assistance under the new global circumstances. Divisions in terms of peacebuilding, humanitarian assistance and development aid have been shown to be artificial for those on the receiving side of the equation, pressuring for more interoperability and even integration. Human development thinking could contribute to finding the way forward on the reform of international organizations, with such reforms often characterized as difficult as a result of turf-minded bureaucracies. Moreover, the SDGs include peace and justice as an objective for 2030, while, in parallel, some forms of military aid are due to start being counted as development aid. In the *1993 Human Development Report,* UNDP pressed the case for human security because "twice as much ODA per capita goes to high military spenders as to more moderate spenders." The time may be ripe to check the numbers again and reflect on what assistance would mean in a world that needs it less for growth, as many countries graduate from aid, and more for attending to crises (Kato et al. 2016).

Finally, a word of caution. Expanding frontiers nowadays is less about exploring virgin lands and more about stepping into others' territories. The modest success of the human security idea has not been about pushing radical new thinking; it is all too common to hear that practitioners already do human security; they just do not call it that. Instead, the survival of the concept has been made possible thanks to what others can do by framing their work as human security. There is no single umbrella of human security thinking therefore, but a polyphony that springs up in unexpected places—in criminology and in nursing, in environmental science, and in international law. The way ahead for human development and human security frameworks thus depends more on partnering with all the rest of the like-minded epistemic communities that inhabit those frontiers, giving them a voice and recognizing what they bring to the table, and less on coming up with new names for what they are already doing. We all share this journey.

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