What is human security?

Human security as a concept evolved out of a 1994 United Nations Development Programme *Human Development Report* by Dr Mahbub ul Haq. The report defined it as a universal concern, based on an interdependent reality, people-centred and focussing on early prevention, rather than later intervention. It covers seven key areas of security: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political security (see UNDP Human Development report 1994 for details).

Since then, human security has been re-defined by numerous organisations, academics and policy makers. Early successes of the human security framework within and outside the UN has been the concerted action against landmines, culminating in the anti-landmine convention, and the creation of an International Criminal Court, which has had some success in bringing war criminals to trial. A number of governments have formed a Human Security Network, and there are several research centres around the world.

In 2003 the independent Commission on Human Security, chaired by Mrs Sadako Ogata, and Professor Amartya Sen, called on the world to respond to the complex human insecurity globally in a more integrated and concerted way. Two goals are instrumental in their report: protection and empowerment, meaning the protection of freedom and the empowerment of those left vulnerable in ongoing and post-conflict situations. As they note: "Human security complements state security, furthers human development and enhances human rights." There remains debate about the primacy of rights and the power of a vague concept that has been adopted by only a few countries (most notably Canada and Norway) and the UN.

We believe that the concept provides a new framework of understanding security in the broadest sense, one that challenges state-centric realist international relations theory and looks at security from the perspective of lived experience of fear, hunger and want. Indeed, it has been the conflation of national security with military security that has limited the scope of engagement between states and the social or cultural bases of their national security concerns. Our emphasis will be both theoretical and practical, and the Institute has a strong commitment to promoting global justice, human rights and gender equity. The Institute builds on the work of the existing Centres for Dialogue and Refugee Health, and has strong interests in food security, refugees and displaced peoples, global governance and human rights, epidemic diseases and climate change.

The literature on human security ranges from issues such as drug and people trafficking to genocide, but what links them is a recognition that security is a product of human relationships and structures. While human security encompasses a huge gamut of problems that cut across developing and developed nations, the focus of the Institute is on Australia's region, understood as including the vast range of countries that constitute the Asia/Pacific and Indian Ocean regions. We recognise the need for work that goes beyond immediate issues of humanitarian relief and development assistance to include broader reflections informed by the particular insights of the humanities and creative arts.

In having an expansive definition of human security and leaving it open to its own borderlands, academia can infuse it with lively theoretical debate and, more importantly, grounded field studies. This is part of the task we have set ourselves at the Institute for Human Security.

Human security can be a bridge between national concerns and international and globalised problems. The nation states remain key players in delivering human security, assisted and critiqued by civil society and non-governmental agencies. As Winslow and Erikson (2004) argue, human security offers a means of getting 'back to basics' in studying identity networks and their functions. This opens new and interdisciplinary avenues of enquiry in how people's relational security can be conceptualised. This will, in time, have policy impact, especially in light of changes in the delivery of development aid and assistance.

At the Institute for Human Security at La Trobe University, we use the term 'human security' neither as an analytical term nor as a political tool, rather we aim to employ it as a conceptual scaffolding to share and utilise existing capacities, enhance them and build upon them in order to produce interdisciplinary and fresh interpretations, analysis and research outputs in the broad area of human security. The aim, then, is to assist those directly affected by and involved in the processes of making human security for all a reality and providing research to point towards the 'good' processes for providing human security and critiquing processes and ideas that may increase human insecurity.

Dennis Altman and Gerhard Hoffstaedter