



From Warfare to Welfare: Human Security in a Southern African Context

Marie Muller and Bas de Gaay Fortman (eds.) 2004.

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A book with such a striking and hopeful title deserves attention. The rhyming keywords differ little in spelling, but function in radically opposed semantic fields. Warfare is about eliminating an enemy – consisting of fellow human beings who happen to be motivated by their ideology or culture, or simply by their political and military leaders. Welfare is about rendering social services and improving the quality of life of fellow human beings. These keywords and the two directional prepositions indicate that the publication wishes to promote a paradigm shift from fighting to serving.

The sub-title defines the specific focus on human security in a Southern African context. During its brief history of not much more than a decade, ‘human security’ has become a thought-provoking and change-provoking concept. It brought to an end the millennia-old custom of thinking and acting only in terms of *state* security. Human casualties, suffering and insecurity, both military and civilian, were always deplored, of course, but traditional history

books tended to concentrate on the wars that were fought between states and were won by military might. Lately, however, more and more civil wars came to be fought within states. They were caused by poverty and deprivation, and they resulted in greater poverty and deprivation. The want and the fear of the ordinary people increased. Their human insecurity became a matter of great concern. This did not only happen in countries subjected to civil war, but also in those suffering from drought and disease.

The coining of the term 'human security' was therefore an important first, awareness-raising step. But further steps had to follow. Discussions had to take place, and decisions and plans had to be implemented through effective programmes and projects.

This is where the book under discussion fits in, and where it can make its significant contribution. Its introduction begins with a list of seventeen indicators of serious human *insecurity*, and a reference to an abundance of programmes responding to all these needs. A major problem with such programmes is also stated, however: the lack of co-ordination of efforts. The rationale behind the book is then formulated as follows: '...the need for an integrated version of and approach to human security in the Southern African context formed the background to the partnership that resulted in the symposia on which this publication is based' (p 2).

The contributions from both workshops – the one in South Africa, 1998, and the other in the Netherlands, 1999 – are presented as eight chapters arranged in two parts. The first is a more conceptual and general part, and the second a more pragmatic and Southern Africa-focused one. It may also be said, however, that in each of the chapters practical implications are mentioned or implied.

Readers should bear in mind, of course, that almost all the chapters originated as presentations at the workshops. For publication they were thoroughly revised and/or updated or expanded, but they obviously communicate the particular perspectives and emphases of the various authors (and inevitably some overlaps and repetitions). Most readers will probably appreciate this challenge to read attentively and comparatively, and to allow their own inferences and conclusions to take shape. Readers who expect ready-made synopses and prescriptions may be disappointed, however.

The concept of human security is well described and discussed. It is distinguished from state security, but its interconnectedness to state security is also emphasised. In both directions, the good or bad quality of the one type of security influences the quality of the other type. Most governments are indeed trying to improve their human security record, but for the sake of their own future some governments care more about the security of their state and less about that of their citizens.

The interdependence which is strongly emphasised in the first chapter is that between human security, human development and human rights. These three are, in fact, the socio-political, socio-economic and socio-legal components of human dignity. Where any of these elements is/are lacking, or where there is a justice gap or an education gap, the demands for change grow stronger and the likelihood of conflict becomes greater. Preventive and transformative approaches are discussed with regard to pre-, in- and post-conflict situations. The importance of the involvement of the people in a process, and of the ownership of a process by the people, is emphasised.

Possible problems are discussed, but shortcuts to problem solving are warned against. Problem-solving theory should not be applied in ways that fail to question an existing order, or fail to aim at transforming a prevailing situation. Proper use should be made of critical theory that takes equity, justice and freedom seriously, and attempts to change an unjust status quo.

Relevant and urgent recommendations are therefore made about integrated, comprehensive approaches. It is through providing development and rights that security can be promoted. And the development that is needed is a broad one, comprising economic, social and political improvements. After all, 'the ultimate purpose of knowledge and its application are aimed at improving the human condition' (p 59).

Where the focus is on the Southern African context, due attention is given to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and its sub-structures that are specifically responsible for security and related matters. Relevant details are given and discussed with regard to history and functioning, funding and other problems, individual and organisational shortcomings, general and specific objectives and prospects.

Of particular interest and value are the discussions of ways to promote human security – in general and in the Southern African context. Early warning signs should be taken seriously, and appropriate early action should follow. Preventive action should be promoted and undertaken in spite of the lack of interest that is often shown towards it. Although it is not, and cannot be, spectacular, it can be effective – and cost-effective as well. Policies and practices to limit the supply and flow of small arms – for use in armed conflict or in crime – and to promote disarmament and demobilisation should be supported and implemented. A whole chapter is devoted to dealing with the limitations to human security caused by crime and corruption. When preventive measures have been unsuccessful and violence has erupted, intervention should take place swiftly. Possible ways of intervening are discussed: diplomatic action, for instance mediation, economic action, for instance sanctions, and military action, for instance the preventive stationing of troops in a neighbouring country. When finally a conflict has been satisfactorily resolved, post-conflict peacebuilding should take place in a multi-dimensional way. Local ownership of peace agreements should be established. Reintegration of soldiers, structural reforms, and consolidation of the rectification of root causes should be implemented as soon as possible.

It is clear that the authors of these chapters and the editors of this book had no illusions of magic shortcuts that can take fighting groups ‘from warfare to welfare’. Nor did they envisage miracles that would suddenly and dramatically improve human security in Southern Africa and elsewhere. They are presenting their publication both realistically and optimistically. They acknowledge that ‘human security is only at its inception – a runner-up on the security agenda’ (p 27). But they are convinced that human security has a strong case to justify its recognition and propagation.

This dual orientation is a very relevant and very valuable advantage of the book. Another advantage is the amount of interrelated aspects, examples, insights and recommendations mentioned and discussed. But its greatest value is probably embedded in its message of *conceptually informed practicality*, which is clearly reflected in the planning of the two parts: a more general conceptual frame of reference, and a more specific agenda of possible approaches and actions. It should encourage and empower its readers to maintain an always

fruitful cross-fertilisation between theory and practice. Through critical and creative thinking and through insight-based and commitment-driven words and actions, we can indeed co-ordinate our contributions towards improving the human security scenario – in Southern Africa, Africa, and abroad.