



Human Security at the United Nations

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United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - Human Security Unit

Human Security at the United Nations

This is the second issue of "Human Security at the United Nations," a newsletter produced by the **Human Security Unit** of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

The Unit's main objective is to act as focal point on human security in the UN system, and to translate the concept of human security into concrete activities by combining the management of the **United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security** with promotion and dissemination activities in partnership with civil society, the UN and the wider international community.

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Building Peace – A challenge that rests on achieving human security

Since the end of the Cold War, the international community has engaged in an ongoing effort to outline new models of peacebuilding in post-conflict situations. Among these initiatives, the 2000 Brahimi Report examined the challenges faced in peace operations and underlined the need for change in both the doctrines and the practices of peacebuilding. To this end, numerous actors – including the UN, donors, regional organizations and civil society – have worked to rebuild their capacities and expand their knowledge of post-conflict situations.

From Côte d'Ivoire to Afghanistan, and even in initial success stories such as Timor-Leste, it is increasingly recognized that in order to build sustainable and lasting peace, comprehensive and integrated responses that go far beyond brokering ceasefires and establish the groundwork for achieving human security are needed. By focusing on bringing the rewards of peace to people and communities, and by emphasizing that a lasting peace hinges on a life free from fear, want and exclusion, human security can help recast efforts towards concrete interventions that address the needs of people on the ground.

Adopting a human security approach

Despite daunting challenges, post-conflict situations provide significant opportunities to promote change - opportunities that address the root causes of conflicts, heal fragmentation and erase inequalities, and strengthen state-society relations. But post-conflict situations can also create new uncertainties and deepen alienation. In this critical and fragile period, people's rights to political, economic and social freedoms must be reasserted if stability is to return to a country.

Moreover to be truly home-grown and sustainable, an integrated human security framework should be developed in full partnership with national and local authorities and should bring together humanitarian, developmental and security concerns and policies. Based on the following five clusters, this framework should incorporate the human security issues and needs identified in each of these clusters and emphasize their cross-cutting dimensions:

- *Ensuring public safety.*
- *Meeting immediate humanitarian needs.*
- *Launching rehabilitation and reconstruction.*
- *Emphasizing reconciliation and coexistence.*
- *Promoting governance and empowerment.*

First, in the aftermath of conflicts when national authorities are seldom in a position to ensure public safety, the protection of civilians must be among the first priorities of peacebuilding. To this end, efforts to disarm, demobilize and reintegrate former combatants and to remove small arms, light weapons

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and landmines are critical steps in reestablishing public safety. Similarly, effective national security institutions that uphold the rule of law, value transparency, and respect human rights are further pillars in strengthening public safety and advancing human security.

Second, efforts must be integrated, demand-driven and inclusive so that all humanitarian needs are met. Too often international assistance is compartmentalized for different categories of people. As a result, some needs may be overlooked and some groups may receive little attention.

Third, rather than respond along humanitarian and developmental lines, efforts should be jointly initiated and should focus on providing key services, rebuilding infrastructures, reintegrating the displaced, establishing social safety nets and promoting stable macroeconomic frameworks. Launching rehabilitation and reconstruction as soon as possible is a major incentive for peace.

Fourth, because conflicts erode trust, the need to support reconciliation and coexistence cannot be ignored. From a human security perspective, a bottom-up community based approach involving as many people as possible is essential to complement top-down justice and reconciliation processes that together help avert renewed violence based on identity politics and manipulation.

Fifth, good governance at all levels is the most important factor in promoting the cause of peace and development. A top priority therefore should be to establish institutions that promote inclusive, fair and equitable rules that can advance the progress of justice and ensure better opportunities for upward social mobility.

Implemented under a unified and integrated framework, the success of peacebuilding strategies rests on the ability to deliver the dividends of peace to people and communities in a manner that is participatory, transparent and fair. Such a coherent approach can help both international and local stakeholders recast social, economic and political structures in favor of inclusive and peaceful coexistence, and sow into the fabric of society the potential for peace, security and long-term development.

Helping people and communities recover from violent conflict – projects from the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security



Storefronts reopening in Kabul, where evidence of destruction is giving way to growing signs of economic recovery. © UN Photo / Eskinder Debebe

Since its inception in 1999, the Trust Fund has supported more than 50 projects focusing on peacebuilding and conflict recovery in over 25 countries. Efforts have ranged from protection of war victims and vulnerable populations in Afghanistan, Burundi, Rwanda, DRC and Indonesia, to support for peaceful reintegration of ex-combatants in the Republic of Congo, Tajikistan and Uganda. The UNTFHS has also supported efforts towards multi-sectoral socio-economic reconstruction in Kosovo, Liberia, Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste, while other projects have addressed the threats of landmines and explosive remnants of war in Sudan and Lebanon.

Bibliography on Conflict and Human Security

- *Recovering from violent conflict*, Chapter 4, *Human Security Now*, Commission on Human Security, 2003.
- *People building peace: a global agenda for the prevention of violent conflict*, the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, 2005.
- *In Larger Freedom*, Report of the Secretary-General, 2005.
- *A more secure world*, Report of the Secretary-General's High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, 2004.

Peacebuilding – Actors, Resources and Institutions

- *Peacebuilding Commission*, United Nations.
- *Bureau for Conflict Prevention and Recovery* – UNDP.
- *Post-Conflict & Reconstruction Unit*, World Bank.
- *Peacekeeping Best Practices Section* – Department for Peacekeeping Operations, United Nations.

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Looking at project activities in the field, perhaps a key contribution of human security has been its emphasis on the need to address the full range of factors affecting people's well-being, including, not only physical safety but also the sense of security that comes from having enough to eat, a place to live, employment, access to health care and educational opportunities.

Strengthening human security in northwestern Tanzania

Among many initiatives, one example of this approach has been the Fund's efforts towards broad-based recovery in the Great Lakes Region of Africa. Decades of strife have taken a severe toll on this region, not only claiming millions of lives but also tearing apart communities and displacing people on a colossal scale. Since 1993, the violence has driven at least 600,000 Burundians and Congolese into northwestern Tanzania. This influx of refugees has compounded many problems in the Kagera and Kigoma regions, including arms trafficking, food insecurity, lack of education, the spread of HIV/AIDS and the destruction of environmental resources.

With competition over natural resources, proliferation of small arms, food insecurity, as well as lack of education and the spread of HIV/AIDS, recovery needs in the region go beyond emergency humanitarian relief and require a multi-sectoral strategy that breaks the cycle between conflict, poverty, loss of education, infectious diseases and environmental degradation.

Operating on several fronts, the project focuses on emergency preparedness, reduction of illicit small arms, strengthening of food security, enhancing basic education, addressing AIDS awareness, and promoting livelihood development.

The initiative combines the efforts of six United Nations agencies, namely UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, FAO and UNIDO. By integrating the efforts and technical expertise of these agencies, the project has been a catalyst in addressing post-conflict human security challenges in this region.

Contribution from civil society - Participatory Vulnerability Analysis (PVA) rooted in principles of human security by Action Aid

Together with the international community, engagement by civil society is instrumental to the success of post-conflict peacebuilding. With their strong presence on the ground, civil society organizations are often best positioned to tackle the root causes and effects of conflicts. Amid this critical group of actors, Action Aid has been at the forefront of creating change on behalf of the poor, the vulnerable and the disenfranchised. Among Action Aid's various tools, Participatory Vulnerability Analysis (PVA) brings together communities for an in-depth examination of their vulnerabilities. By mobilizing and empowering the most vulnerable and by involving responsible government bodies and other relevant stakeholders, PVA holds the potential to improve how people affected by conflicts can actively be involved in the assessment, decision-making and delivery of post-conflict peacebuilding processes.



A women-only focus group building a problem tree during a PVA exercise in Ethiopia. © Action Aid / Silvia Ferretti

Recently, when ethno-religious tensions escalated in the Plateau State of Nigeria, Action Aid deployed PVA in twelve communities. Ranging from political marginalization; land and cattle disputes; insufficient access to basic social services; and public safety challenges, the PVA exercise revealed the principal security threats faced by the communities and led to the formation of local strategies including the establishment of a network that supports advocacy, capacity building, and training in the implementation of community action plans; a bi-monthly human security watch that serves as an early warning and



In its first three months, the campaign collected 1,863 pistols, rifles and submachine guns in the Kigoma region alone. © UN Photo/ Evan Schneider

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and conflict monitoring system; and a bill to establish the bureau for conflict transformation and peacebuilding.

Action Aid has used PVA in many countries and in various contexts, especially in post-conflict settings. The multi-level aspect of the process has ensured buy-in of state institutions and other stakeholders and has enabled community issues to be integrated into planning processes at various levels of governance. Tools used throughout the PVA are flexible and adaptable to the needs of communities and include vulnerability mapping, building historical timelines, holding focus group discussions, conducting livelihoods analyses and developing coping mechanism matrices. For more on Action Aid and its use of Participatory Vulnerability Analysis please click [here](#).

Latest News

- **Tenth Ministerial Meeting of the Human Security Network** to be held in **May 2008** in Athens, Greece.

- **Fourth Meeting of the Friends of Human Security** to be held on **11 April 2008** at United Nations Headquarters, New York.

- **Sixth Meeting of the Advisory Board on Human Security – 14-15 November 2007, New York.** Documents in support of the meeting are being finalized and will be made available on our website shortly.

- **Third Meeting of the Friends of Human Security – 7 November 2007 – New York**, organized by the Permanent Missions of Japan and Mexico, and OCHA. As outlined at the Second Meeting of the Friends of Human Security in April 2007, the Friends of Human Security is intended as a flexible and open-ended platform for Member States to advance a common understanding of human security, pursue collaborative efforts and mainstream human security in UN activities. The meeting was attended by representatives of 47 Member States and 11 international organizations. Also present were Dr. Srgjan Kerim, President of the Sixty-Second Session of the General Assembly and Sir John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs. For more information please [click here](#).



Third Meeting of the Friends of Human Security, United Nations Headquarters, 7 November 2007.
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- **Integrating for Peace: A Reflection on the Peacebuilding Commission's Strategy for Integration – 7 November 2007, Paris**, organized by the Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Internationales – Program for Peace and Human Security (CERI-CPHS), in partnership with the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO). For more information, please visit the [CPHS website](#).

- **Seminar – Human Security: An Integrated Approach to Freedom from Fear and Freedom from Want – 5-6 November 2007, Brussels, Belgium**, organized by Social Alert and Pax Christi International. For more information, please [click here](#).

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