

Human Security and Empowerment in Asia: Beyond the Pandemic

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POLITICS IN ASIA

HUMAN SECURITY AND EMPOWERMENT IN ASIA

BEYOND THE PANDEMIC



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Why Human Security Now?

- This edited volume examines how the security of people and states in Asia has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 8 case studies that delve into a diverse set of human security issues, such as poverty, the environment, food security, forced migration, gender, health and ageing, as well as peace and security.
- Analyse how vulnerable groups and populations in Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Japan are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

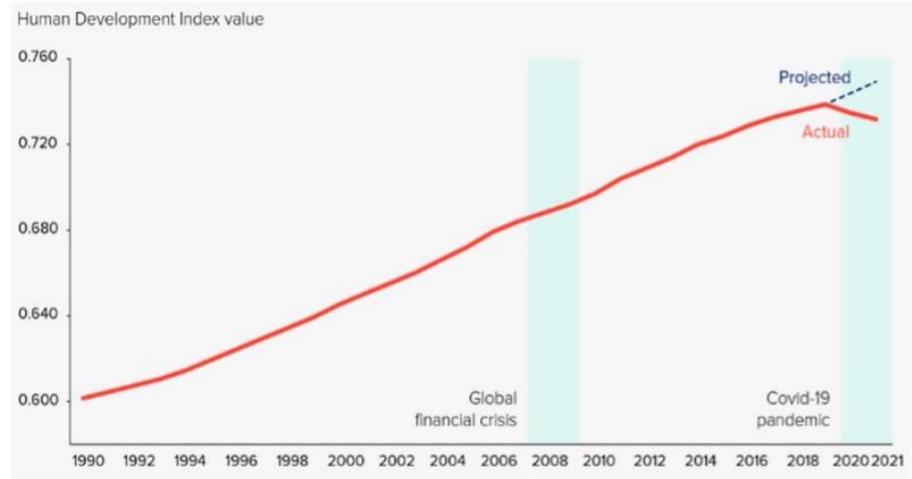


FIGURE 1.1 COVID-19 and the abrupt regression of human development
<https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-2021-22>



FIGURE 1.2 Human security and development
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Three phases of Human Security development



1

Freedom from fear
and freedom from
want



2

Protection and
Empowerment



3

Solidarity

Freedom from Fear, Freedom from Want

- The concept of human security first introduced in the UNDP Human Development Report 1994.
- 1994 report identified seven core human security values – economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security.
- Distilled to 'freedom from fear and freedom from want'.



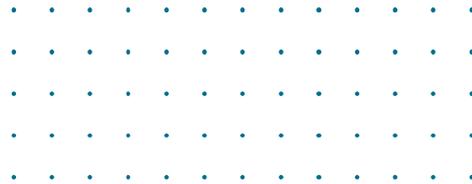
Protection and Empowerment

- Human security went through two more iterations after its inception in 1994 – second iteration is found in the 2003 human security report entitled Human Security Now, produced by Commission on Human Security (CHS).
- The 2003 report identified two strategies critical to promote human security – ‘protection’ and ‘empowerment’, that are interlinked and mutually reinforcing.
- Protection implies a top-down approach, while empowerment emphasises people as actors and participants in defining and implementing their vital freedoms, a bottom-up approach.



Solidarity

- UNDP's special report on human security in 2022 – endorses the place of protection and empowerment, and operationalises the latter by introducing concept of solidarity, as a necessary strategy to improve human security.
- The report provides reasons why it is necessary to further encourage mobilisation for others security.
- When it comes to threats such as climate change, empowerment alone is insufficient – what is necessary to resolve these issues is the notion of solidarity.
- Solidarity means bringing together various stakeholders such as local groups, international organisations, global civil society, religious communities and the private sector.



Nexus Between Protection and Empowerment

- When society is faced with a particular threat, one of the two may receive more attention, and the other may recede into the background.
- In emerging crises, actors with resources would take the initiative to provide top-down protection to actors experiencing distress, even at this stage, people's participation and empowerment must be promoted.
- Wave of empowerment should be encouraged to continue growing.

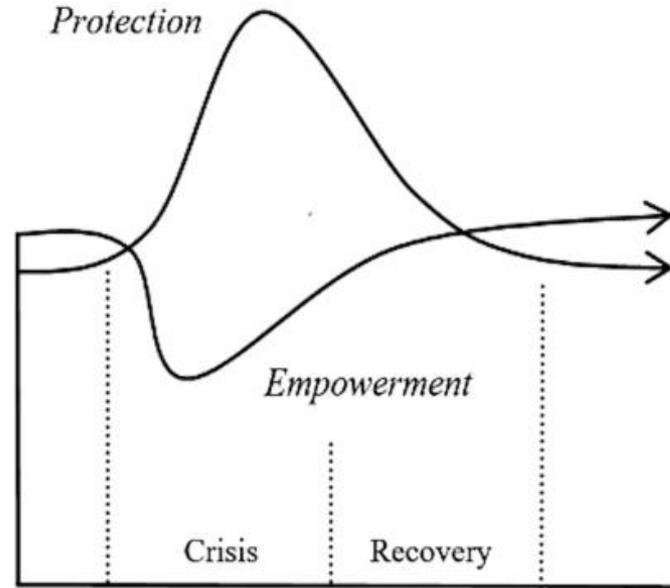


FIGURE 1.3 Resilient recovery

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Definition of Empowerment

- Sadako Ogata and Amartya Sen point out that protection and empowerment are 'keys to human security', needed to advance the goals and promotion of human security.
- "Inasmuch as our notion of empowerment is about **change**, it refers to the **expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices** in a context where this ability was **previously denied** to them." - Nalia Kabeer
- Enabling environment is critical to allowing better assessment of the ability to make choices freely.



Inclusive Response and Resilient Recovery

- Eight case studies of diverse set of human security issues – poverty, environment, food security, forced migration, gender, health and aging.
- How vulnerable groups and population are acutely and disproportionately impacted by COVID-19
- Identify specific challenges and opportunities for empowerment as seen through different narratives and practices of affected groups and communities.



Findings of the Study

- **Growing complexity of threats to human security**
- The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the growing complexities of kinds of human security threats facing humanity today.
- How health crisis can have cross-cutting impacts on economic security, food security, environmental security and personal security.



Findings of the Study

- **Compounding Vulnerabilities**

- Food security - for the undernourished, the health crisis has severely restricted their mobility, making it more difficult to obtain food and access essential services, such as healthcare, and further exacerbated their economic insecurity.
- Economic insecurity - for the urban poor, the pandemic has aggravated their economic condition and education for children.
- Gender - for women experiencing health issues, such as access to sexual and reproductive healthcare, the pandemic has only served to worsen their marginalization, making them one of the most at-risk groups in societies.



Findings of the Study

- **Reinforcing Structural Impediments**

- These kinds of challenges are shown in the case of the urban poor in Vietnam. In Chapter 2, (economic insecurity/poverty), details the heavy burden borne by these groups in making the right choices to make a living, even with limited resources, leading to a cycle of vicious poverty that they cannot break from.
- Chapter 3- Food security discusses the plight of survivors of devastating disasters in Indonesia whose constant struggle to avoid hunger and famine.
- Chapter 4, Health security has shown how COVID-19 jeopardized the well-being of women health workers who were the frontline responders during the crisis. Highlights 'hidden pandemic' – rise in cases of domestic violence and restricted access to essential reproductive health services and supplies.



Findings of the Study

- **Providing Protection in Extremely Difficult Circumstances**

- Emergency cash-transfer programs proved to be most efficient means of addressing hunger and malnutrition – empower recipients to have more choices in purchasing food, develop skills...
- Chapter 5, empowering displaced populations, show how speedy provision of temporary housing to vulnerable, went a long way in providing protection, addressed psychosocial needs, and enabling environment for affected communities to cope with and help build capacity and resilience.



Findings of the Study

- **Protecting the Environment as (the Other) Security Referent**
- Chapter 6, using the case study of plastic pollution in the Citarum River in West Java, Indonesia describes how the pandemic has led to human activities that were extremely detrimental to the health of the river.



Source: Monash University

Findings of the Study

- **Exercising and Claiming Back Agency**
- Chapter 7, on Gender, highlights the case study of the plight of women in a situation of armed conflict in Mindanao province in the Philippines which has shown how several women's groups can work together to help prevent violence against women.
- The framework of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda, the advocacy and work of women's civil society groups proved to be invaluable not only in providing protection but also in empowering other women and developing their capacity to engage in dialogues for peacebuilding and development.



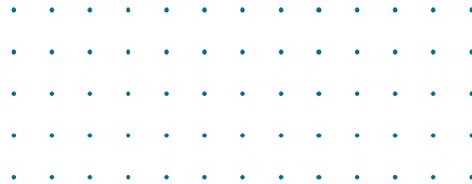
Source: UN Women/Maricel Aguilar



Findings of the Study

- **Empowerment at Multiple Levels**

- Chapter 9, peacebuilding, provides perceptive insights into multi-level empowerment strategies carried out by the previous Duterte Administration, on the protection and empowerment of the local people in the territory of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) in the Philippines.
- Using a 'nested process' framework, Ishikawa describes the close interactions between the national and local governments in dealing with the pandemic while managing the other risks and fragilities in the autonomous region.



Findings of the Study

- **Unpacking the Continuum of Protection and Empowerment**
- As the case studies have shown, the process between protecting vulnerable communities, also led to empowering those same communities to 'act on their own behalf and on behalf of others' (Commission on Human Security 2003) is not seamless and is beset by several challenges.
- Communities needing protection cannot be passive recipients but must be part of an inclusive, transformational process that engenders empowerment.
- Protection and empowerment, therefore, require no less than a multi-stakeholder and multi-level commitment to achieve human security.

