Dialogue

Measuring Human Security

On June 4, 2025, a lively discussion took place between Prof. Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, Professor of International Affairs, The New School, and Dr. Akihiko Tanaka, President of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). Their conversation focused on the complex challenges of measuring human security, the requirements for evaluating human-centered initiatives, and an examination of the potential and the pitfalls of composite indices. The dialogue was moderated by Prof. Yoichi Mine, Executive Director of the JICA Ogata Sadako Research Institute for Peace and Development.

Sakiko Fukuda-Parr

Professor of International Affairs, The New School for Social Research, and Distinguished Fellow, JICA Ogata Sadako Research Institute for Peace and Development

Prof. Sakiko Fukuda-Parr is a development economist specializing in people-centered paradigms of development. Her current research focuses on global inequalities, international economic governance, decolonial thought, and global health. Her coauthored book, *Fulfilling Social and Economic Rights* (Oxford University Press, 2015), was the winner of the prestigious 2019 Grawemeyer Prize for Ideas Improving World Order. She was the director and chief author of the UNDP *Human Development Reports* (1995–2004) and had a career as an economist at UNDP and the World Bank. She obtained graduate degrees from the University of Sussex (UK) and from Tufts University (USA), and an undergraduate degree from the University of Cambridge (UK). She currently serves as President of the International Association for Feminist Economics (IAFFE).

Akihiko Tanaka

President, Japan International Cooperation Agency

Dr. Akihiko Tanaka obtained his Ph.D. from the Department of Political Science, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His career includes appointments as Executive Vice President, University of Tokyo, and the President of the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies. Dr. Tanaka is currently the President of the Japan International Cooperation Agency. His main expertise lies in international politics, with major publications including *The New Middle Ages: The World System in the 21st Century* (The International House of Japan, 2002) and *Japan in Asia: Post-Cold-War Diplomacy* (Japan Publishing Industry Foundation for Culture). In 2012, Prof. Tanaka received the Medal of Honor with Purple Ribbon.

Yoichi Mine

Executive Director, JICA Ogata Sadako Research Institute for Peace and Development

Prof. Yoichi Mine is the Executive Director of the JICA Ogata Sadako Research Institute for Peace and Development, Professor at Doshisha University, Kyoto, and Extraordinary Professor at the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa. His fields are human security, development economics, and African area studies. He is the author of *An Oral History of Development Cooperation: Experiences of Japan and its Partners* (Springer, 2026) and *Connecting Africa and Asia: Afrasia as a Benign Community* (Routledge, 2022) and has coedited six books in English, including *Human Security Norms in East Asia* (Palgrave, 2018).

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If Measurement Is Undertaken, What Should Be Measured?

Mine: The main theme of today's discussion is how to measure human security. The concept of human security was first introduced by UNDP in the 1994 *Human Development Report* and gained global recognition. Thirty years later, human security remains a guiding principle in Japan's development cooperation and is featured in Japan's latest Development Cooperation Charter,[1] adopted in 2023.

The JICA Ogata Research Institute has been publishing its flagship report series, *Human Security Today*, since 2022. We are now preparing the third issue, which will feature the measurement of human security and insecurities as a way to enhance international cooperation and global development. This dialogue will be a key feature of this issue.

To begin with, let me invite Professor Fukuda-Parr to share your experience at UNDP updating and expanding the Human Development Index (HDI). Through your experience of editing the *Human Development Reports*, I believe that you know almost everything about the values and difficulties of measuring various aspects of human life. The HDI is a composite index of longevity, education, and a decent standard of living. These three elements were selected from many different variables. How do you look back on your past engagement with the reporting of the HDI?

Fukuda-Parr: Publishing the HDI in a UN publication brought challenges of conceptual and technical complexities, but you also begin to understand that such an index is not just a technocratic tool but also has tremendous political significance. So, the first lesson I learned is: Treat with care.

The second and related point is that creating the HDI

was a complex and delicate exercise. You have questions about what to measure and how to measure it, but the first thing that you need to ask is whether you should embark on measurement at all.

That was the question that engaged Amartya Sen[2] and Mahbub ul Haq[3] at the very beginning of the *Human Development Reports*, back in 1990. Mahbub argued that what they needed—and what he aimed to achieve through the *Human Development Reports*—was to convince the world that economic growth is not development. Development is about improving human lives, or human development. To be persuasive and capture the attention of policymakers, the media, and the public, he needed a single measure, an index of human development, that would rival the GDP.

1 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. 2023. "Development Cooperation Charter." https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/page24e_000410.html

2 Amartya Sen is an Indian economist. He made major contributions to welfare economics and social choice theory and received the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences in 1998. He is known for his work on poverty, famine, and the capability approach, and helped lead development scholars and international organizations to focus on human development and human security.

3 Mahbub ul Haq was a Pakistani economist who proposed the Human Development Index (HDI) and worked to connect the philosophy and practice of development. After serving as Pakistan's Minister of Finance, he also worked as a public policy practitioner in international organizations such as the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme. He collaborated with Sen in developing the idea of human development and was also his lifelong friend.

Being sensitive to political implications is quite an important requirement for indicator-making.

——— ***Yoichi Mine***

Amartya Sen was skeptical, arguing that it was not possible to quantify human development, a concept that he contributed to elaborating, which was based on his theories about capabilities—or development as freedom and expanding capabilities to live a life one values. They spoke for hours and hours, on the phone into the night, over several days.

Mahbub ul Haq ultimately convinced Sen by pointing out that "only a single number, an index, will be able to compete with per capita income, and even though that was not going to be perfect, it would not be as vulgar as GDP per capita."[4] Amartya wrote about this in his Foreword to the edited volume *Readings in Human Development*, published in 2003. Amartya agreed to proceed with helping Mahbub ul Haq develop the HDI because he shared Mahbub's belief in the need to shift development thinking and redefine the goal from growth to people. He knew that this could be a key communication tool for that purpose. So, the starting point in crafting the HDI was to recognize its imperfections.

What concerns me is the impact it had on development discourse. I believe that the index inevitably simplified the concept of human development. It became widely misunderstood as being about income, education, and health and lost the broader agenda that includes things like security, having a say in decisions, and the more complex meaning of development as freedom. In other words, technical perfection had to be sacrificed to serve a political purpose, to shift policymakers' attention to improving people's lives as a priority, away from the single-minded focus on expanding production.

Mine: Thank you very much. Being sensitive to political implications is quite an important requirement for indicator-making. Having a single number index is a political venture, but I think it may also be necessary to be political.

Tanaka: I think the HDI was a great invention, one that would compete with GDP per capita. For that purpose, Mahbub ul Haq's insistence on producing a single number—an index—was an appropriate, correct choice. In order to point out the limitations of GDP per capita, one needed to create a single number that would not represent the same thing as GDP per capita. I think the UNDP's *Human Development Report* showed clear discrepancies between GDP per capita and the HDI. Significantly, the world has come to know that there are other types of measurement of development, or the expansion of people's capabilities.

Then, as time went on, the HDI was calculated every year and published in UNDP reports. Now, all national and global leaders are looking at the rankings in terms of the HDI. A recent report indicated how the HDI declined during the COVID-19 pandemic. The numbers presented as the HDI have been playing a very important role in showing the world that there are different measures of development other than GDP per capita. But I agree with you that there is some danger in relying on a single number.

In fact, the HDI is not such a complex indicator. It consists of only three components (education, health, and a standard of living), aggregated by arithmetic means.

Fukuda-Parr: Yes, it is exactly the difference between the country's HDI rank and its rank in income that reveals its

[4] Sen, Amartya. 2003. "Foreword," In *Readings in Human Development,* edited by Sakiko Fukuda-Parr and A. K. Shiva Kumar, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

developmental performance. The key challenge for countries, particularly low-income countries, is to make the best use of the resources available—as reflected in GDP per capita—to improve lives, as measured by the HDI. What drove Mahbub to persuade UNDP to launch the HDRs was his experience as Planning Minister in Pakistan in the 1960s. He was troubled to see that the country succeeded in achieving robust growth, yet half the women in rural areas remained illiterate. For him, that was not success.

Tanaka: In many ways, even though the HDI is a single-number index, it is relatively easy to decompose. Still, of course, there are limitations to this single-number approach. It is regarded as the only measurement of human development, but indeed, there are many other aspects that we need to consider when it comes to human development.

The central issue of measurement is the relationship between what we want to understand and how we can measure it. As long as development, international relations, and international governance are concerned, certain political factors should be involved. Yet, the method of measurement must be scientifically sound. It should be valid, reliable, and acceptable to the international community.

This is a huge challenge. I think the team at the JICA Ogata Research Institute is tackling difficulties regarding how to create measures that can capture the essence of human security worldwide.

How Should It Be Measured?

Fukuda-Parr: You are also absolutely spot on in pointing out the importance of simplicity and accessibility. I would also add transparency. A lot of indices are what I would call black boxes. There are hundreds of indicators with many components, and their methodology is either not explained or so complicated that a normal person cannot replicate it.

This is what makes the HDI policy relevant. After the global HDI was launched, people in countries began to play around with the index. They tried to find out why their HDI was high or low compared with other countries, particularly their neighbors. Decomposition into the three components made it easy to find out which factor was lagging and needed greater investment. I remember that the government of Egypt was disappointed by its HDI ranking and was able to identify low scores in the education component. That, in turn, could be traced to low school enrollment among girls in Upper Egypt. So, the HDI had real policy impact.

I found the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and human security indicators for Japan very interesting because they are disaggregated by prefecture. This was also done with the HDI.

For example, in Brazil, they calculated the HDI for different states and municipalities. This revealed extreme inequalities in Brazil; some regions had extremely low rankings in the HDI, similar to levels in the poorest countries of the world, while other regions could compete very favorably with the highest levels of development. Our Brazilian colleagues put it this way: "You can travel from Zambia to New York within Brazil." These results were important tools for policymaking.

Mine: The two reports on Japan's Human Security Indicators that Professor Fukuda-Parr was talking about were translated into English and published by the JICA Ogata Research Institute.[5] In these reports, Japan's national statistics are disaggregated into 47 Japanese prefectures, and prefectural statistics are further broken down into dozens of local municipalities.

[5] Takasu, Yukio and JICA Ogata Research Institute. 2020. *SDGs and Japan: Human Security Indicators for Leaving No One Behind*. Tokyo: JICA Ogata Research Institute; Takasu, Yukio, Yoichi Mine and JICA Ogata Research Institute. 2024. *SDGs and Local Communities: How to Create Human Security Indicators in Your Town!* Tokyo: JICA Ogata Research Institute.

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We have national statistics offices, and there are upstream and downstream dimensions. Upstream, indicators can be aggregated at regional and global levels. The downstream level is also quite important. National statistics can be disaggregated by provinces and municipalities, featuring locally tailored, diverse indicators that promote participatory accountability.

In this connection, let me mention that JICA has 15 domestic offices, each of which is rooted in local cities, towns, and villages. I don't know much about the domestic activities of the now-defunct USAID, but I believe that one of JICA's advantages lies in its rootedness in local communities.

Tanaka: Coming back to the point that Professor Fukuda-Parr mentioned about transparency, I think this is an advantage of the index approach.

For example, Taiwan is not a member state of the United Nations, so the *Human Development Reports* do not include Taiwan's HDI. But because the calculation method is so transparent, you can get Taiwan's HDI quite easily, and you can apply a similar method to many other places. Yes, similarly, we could calculate the HDI of Japan's 47 prefectures. That's the good point.

Also, the HDI method is quite transparent if we want to analyze when and where the HDI is not progressing as expected. You can check which element is pulling the country back, whether it is life expectancy, education, or economic growth. So, the structure of the HDI could really suggest which elements policymakers should look at.

Fukuda-Parr: That's right, I agree.

Tanaka: Having said that, many people may argue that these three dimensions may not be sufficient, given the complexity of development throughout the world. As you mentioned,

human development is a multidimensional phenomenon. You need to have a broader base of information. I'm not sure whether we should discuss other types of indicators here, but we all know that the SDGs adopted a more comprehensive, inclusive approach to include all sorts of targets and numerical indicators.

Now, the SDGs have 169 targets and more than 230 numerical indicators, which may be a great achievement. In reality, the world is more complex than 230-dimensional spaces, but even in this comprehensive framework, it is still very difficult for citizens or policymakers to understand where their economy or country is located in these 230-dimensional spaces.

There is a tension between the merits of having a simple single number and the merits of having many indicators. Each has both merits and demerits, and this will also be true when we measure human security. We need to somehow strike a balance between these merits and demerits.

Who Is the Measurement For?

Fukuda-Parr: Yes, we have to be pragmatic and see a single number as a complement, not an alternative, to more detailed tables. Too much detail can be confusing, and one

can't see the overall picture. But a single number misses important details. I recall Amartya was fond of quoting from T. S. Eliot: "Humankind cannot bear very much reality."

These questions about what is appropriate depend on what it is going to be used for and by whom. The GDP, HDI or a human security index are used by donors. They want to compare the performance of aid-recipient countries. These measures are useful for donor organizations like JICA, as well as for presidents and prime ministers of countries who want to know broadly how well they are doing in comparison with other countries.

That is why the MDGs were limited to eight goals and a couple of dozen indicators; they were developed by the donor community. In contrast, the SDGs were created through a more bottom-up process, through open debates. That goes some way toward explaining why the framework is so expansive, with 17 goals and over 200 indicators. There are too many indicators to remember, but ultimately, they are more useful for a wide variety of national policymakers. For example, they are useful for the Minister of Environment in a country who wants to compare environmental indicators related to climate change or biodiversity with those of other countries.

So, both a dashboard and an aggregate single index like the HDI are needed because they serve different purposes. I think the importance of transparency and simplicity is also related to disaggregation. If an index is designed to be useful for national policymakers, then inequality and disparities among population groups are among the most important things they really need to know.

One of the critical challenges in measurement frameworks is to facilitate disaggregation by gender and other population groups to provide data for the analysis of distributional impacts of policy. Age disaggregation—for youth and the elderly in some countries—as well as disaggregation among ethnic groups and historically disadvantaged minority groups, is also very important.

Tanaka: Each measurement has its own purpose. In this sense, striking a balance while sticking to a single-number index may not be a proper way to approach measurement issues. If we design appropriate measures for each purpose, from the viewpoint of organizations like JICA, which have many projects on the ground that are working in local communities, we need measurements that can guide our activities effectively. Such measurements are often not national aggregates, but rather more disaggregated data, such as gender- or age-based data, and all of these data are important to us.

However, beyond that, we face certain critical issues about the relationship between various indicators. These may not always be directly applicable to those working on the ground, but sometimes development impact is achieved through the combination of different activities. There has been a tendency among sectoral experts, who use their own measurements and pursue their own goals, to forget or ignore the impact that may have been realized by other activities. In my understanding, health sector development is closely related to infrastructure development. For example, the road pavement rate is quite significant for improvements in healthcare. It is necessary to somehow broaden the scope of aid practitioners' activities and the range of measurements accordingly.

When it comes to the SDGs, different goals often have their own proponents in different international organizations. But, in reality, their targets are closely interrelated, and this requires much more interdisciplinary or intersectoral efforts, both in practice and in measurement.

Fukuda-Parr: I think there are some positive impacts of the SDGs in this regard. I'm quite favorable toward the SDGs because they reflect the reality: development is complicated, it is multisectoral, and all sectors are interrelated. And today's world faces demands for new data to address emerging

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policy priorities—such as in environment, technology, and inequalities—in today's world.

Tanaka: I agree that the SDGs have really widened the scope for many practitioners as well as theorists of development cooperation and international relations. And the SDGs have also widened the scope for decision-makers regarding how many areas they have to consider, not just one, but from Goal 1 to Goal 17. But still, I think the current statistics that are being used have a lot of weaknesses. Some of them are quite well established, while others are still under trial. And some of them are very complicated, complex indicators, and it is difficult to understand how they are calculated.

The JICA Ogata Research Institute is conducting research that could potentially contribute to the post-SDGs debate. They are now thinking of proposing about 40 or 50 core indicators, which should be applied to all countries and then combined with other sets of country-specific or region-specific indicators.

Fukuda-Parr: Strengthening statistical systems should be a priority.

Tanaka: I think it is very necessary to strengthen statistical offices, but at the same time, the research community is also required to develop measures that are valid, reliable, and easy to create.

I believe that we need many researchers who truly have ideas about what are sufficiently realistic and appropriate indicators that can be made readily available without excessive cost. If each indicator or sector requires millions of dollars to collect data accurately from each country, that is not practical.

We urge researchers to be innovative and inventive in finding ways to measure and collect data more easily.

Fukuda-Parr: I'd also like to raise a couple of other challenges. First, no country has time series data for every single one of the 234 indicators[6] in the SDG framework. For some indicators data have not been collected, while for others methodologies have not been developed and agreed. So there are many gaps in global SDG indicator tables. To fill in these gaps, a lot of effort goes into using estimates based on modeling. However, the models are a black box, and the methodologies used are often controversial.

Another challenge stems from the withdrawal of the United States from global health funding. The U.S. has been a major funder of basic data collection. For example, the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) have been in existence for decades, funded by USAID. DHS has been the basis for many countries' basic well-being data, such as child nutrition. Now the agency has closed down. This has major consequences in myriad ways across global health operations. Because of the sudden withdrawal of this funding, the data system and database are collapsing. The lesson in all this is to be aware of the danger of creating dependence.

Tanaka: I think the impact of the dismantling of USAID and the radical reduction of ODA provided by developed countries in many areas will be felt seriously worldwide. I think one area that is quite significant is data maintenance and data creation. It is admirable that USAID funded these data, which have

[6] The SDG global indicator framework was agreed upon at the 48th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission in 2017 and adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in the same year. The indicators are reviewed annually, and in the 2020 comprehensive review, 36 changes, including revisions, additions, and deletions, were proposed and approved. The 2025 indicator framework contains 234 indicators, but if indicators repeated under two or three different goals are included, the total number of indicators is 251. See United Nations Statistics Division, "Global Indicator Framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and Targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/indicators-list/

become public goods. Unless a certain mechanism is set up, the supply of these public goods may disappear if no one is willing to take responsibility.

And here, we probably need to persuade the U.S. government, on the one hand, to rethink the merits of its activities. On the other hand, we need to create a cooperative mechanism to maintain the data that are needed, through collaboration among international institutions as well as many governments.

Fukuda-Parr: I think this is one of the most important functions of the United Nations system. Basic surveys like the DHS should not have been conducted through a bilateral arrangement; they should have been part of a multilateral process. UNICEF has a somewhat similar initiative called the Multiple-Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS),[7] which can serve as an alternative. MICS, together with the DHS, has provided substantial coverage. This really highlights the importance of certain activities directly related to the creation of global public goods as essential functions of multilateral institutions.

Mine: This is very true. USAID was not just providing humanitarian assistance but also collecting primary data, which became indispensable in places like sub-Saharan Africa.

How Should Subjective Data Be Treated?

Mine: Let me ask Professor Fukuda-Parr a question. We have talked about the pros and cons of a single-number index and multiple dashboards. The dashboard thinking was proposed in the so-called Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Report[8] in 2009. The commission clearly pointed out the limitations of the single-number approach in favor of a dashboard consisting of carefully selected variables.

In the *Human Development Report 1999*, Amartya Sen wrote that the HDI would get "readers to take an involved interest" in the tables and rich analyses contained in the reports. So, the index is just an introduction, and we are invited to look at the rich database.

The problem is how to design such a dashboard. You have developed the Social and Economic Rights Fulfillment Index (SERF Index),[9] which is an attempt to create an innovative set of indicators.

At our institute, we are thinking about including some

[7] Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) began in the mid-1990s and consist of indicators covering diverse aspects related to children and their families, including education, health, living conditions, and work. They are household surveys conducted under a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) program and are compiled based on microdata, including face-to-face interviews with household members. They are used to support the analysis and formulation of comprehensive national plans and policies. https://mics.unicef.org/

[8] The Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Report, formally titled *Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress,* was prepared by Joseph Stiglitz, Amartya Sen, and Jean-Paul Fitoussi and published in 2009. The report identified the limitations of using GDP as an indicator of economic performance and social progress and called for the construction and development of more comprehensive alternative indicators.

[9] The SERF Index, or the Social and Economic Rights Fulfillment Index, is an indicator that quantitatively measures the fulfillment of economic and social rights by states and local governments, based on objective data published by countries and international organizations. It incorporates the perspective of both individuals as rights-holders and governments as duty-bearers, and it enables not only international comparison but also analysis of disparities between regions and groups. Fukuda-Parr is one of the authors of a paper that laid the conceptual and methodological foundations of the SERF Index. See Social and Economic Rights Fulfillment Index, "Overview 2025," https://serfindex.uconn.edu/overview-2025/.

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>
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subjective elements in the human security dashboard, as we did in the research project on horizontal inequality and conflict prevention.[10] We can measure people's subjective anxiety and assess the state of the environment as planetary health,[11] and both could be integrated into human-centered indicators.

Fukuda-Parr: I am not so convinced by the process of quantifying subjective information. In the case of democracy, press freedom, and corruption, you ask a bunch of people, "Which country is more corrupt, Singapore or Nigeria?" and everybody probably says, "Nigeria." Then Nigeria gets a score of 10 and Singapore 1. What kind of empirical evidence is that? I think it's just collecting opinions.

Subjective data will introduce bias. If you put a number on it, then you pretend that it is not subjective but objective. The literature in the sociology of knowledge is very helpful in thinking through these challenges. Quantification gives an illusion of scientific certainty. You're just fooling yourself by turning a subjective feeling into a number and saying, "This is scientific, and this is certain and objective, not biased."

Tanaka: I agree that there are problems with the subjective data, which relate to people's intentions, perceptions, or judgments. There have been many attempts to quantify them by giving quite arbitrary numbers to different scales, as you said.

But I think attempts to systematically collect data on perceptions are necessary. The prevalence of public opinion polls all around the world indicates that they are actively used. So, the problem lies in the misuse and abuse of perceptual data, and we have to use the data derived from subjective judgment carefully.

In that sense, it would be better to have multiple sources of such subjective data. If you have only one degree of freedom measured by USAID, that could be dangerous. But then, if you present multiple views, then people can at least compare them. For example, I recently realized that the V-Dem, or Varieties of Democracy,[12] indices for India are quite low in terms of liberal democracy, but India is becoming more and more open. And the judgment of Freedom House[13] is somewhat kinder to India, and there are such divergences in judgments. It is important for the research institute to let readers know that those are subjective. And quantification can be temporary and hypothetical, so you have to use it very carefully, though I still think that systematic attempts to gather perceptions are quite important.

Fukuda-Parr: Exactly. I agree with that. But I think another

[10] The research project "Preventing Violent Conflict in Africa" was conducted from 2008 to 2013, and Sakiko Fukuda-Parr also participated. As part of the project, an opinion survey was conducted to examine citizens' perceptions of horizontal inequalities in African countries. For the research results, see JICA Ogata Research Institute, "Preventing Violent Conflict in Africa: Inequalities, Perceptions and Institutions," https://www.jica.go.jp/english/jica_ri/publication/booksandreports/preventing_violent_conflict_in_africa_inequalities_perceptions_and_institutions.html.

[11] Planetary health is an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary field aimed at analyzing and addressing the effects of human disruption of Earth systems on human health and life more broadly. It was proposed in the 2015 Rockefeller Foundation–Lancet Commission report. Its realization requires cooperation not only from scientists and medical professionals, but also from society as a whole, including economics, policy, media, business, and citizens.

[12] The V-Dem Democracy Index is compiled and published by the V-Dem Institute, located within the Department of Political Science at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. It is an indicator representing varieties of democracy, composed of multiple disaggregated components such as free and fair elections, civil and media freedoms, and judicial independence. See V-Dem Institute, "The V-Dem Project," https://v-dem.net/.

[13] Freedom House is a research and advocacy organization established in 1941 with the aim of protecting human rights, expanding freedom, and strengthening democracy. It conducts analysis and numerical assessment of the state of democracy and civil liberties in each country and regularly publishes them in the report *Freedom in the World.*

way in which biases come in is in defining what to measure. I have been very critical of the Global Health Security Index[14] during the pandemic. At a certain point, it ranked the U.S. and the U.K. as No. 1 and No. 2, respectively, and Japan as 40th or 50th or something like that. But when you look at the data on how many people died per 100,000 due to COVID-19, the U.S. and the U.K. were at the top, while Japanese casualties were very low.

And why is there this discrepancy? Because their notion of pandemic preparedness emphasizes laboratories, investments in research, and things of that kind, but says very little about public health infrastructure, and human resource capacity in interventions like contact tracing, which are simple yet critical to stemming the spread of contagion. Funnily enough, I always find it bizarre that the Global Health Security Index is developed by the Nuclear Security Institute, by people who are experts in military security. What do they know about public health?

Mine: Expert opinions and public opinions may be totally different, so they shouldn't be confused. When it comes to preparedness, I remember that, nearly twenty years ago, Madam Sadako Ogata wanted us to create a human security index as a kind of early warning tool.

Violent conflicts have unique contexts, but if more people are jailed, or if human rights violations are increasingly reported by the press, we may be able to predict some grave situations. This could be a useful kind of index, though its purpose is different from the measurement of human well-being.

[14] The Global Health Security Index is an indicator that assesses each country's health security system for dealing with infectious disease outbreaks, including resilience, risks, and compliance with international norms. It was developed by the Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI) and an affiliated institution of Johns Hopkins University in the United States and was first published in 2019. See Global Health Security Index, "About," https://www.nti.org/about/programs-projects/project/global-health-security-index/.

Tanaka: I think the pandemic preparedness indicators should be another example of very complex composite indicators. This can be useful, but I think those composite numbers should always be checked against the crude numbers, like death rates.

Fukuda-Parr: Yes, exactly.

Tanaka: Crude numbers are generally considered crude, but at least they reflect certain important elements of reality. This may not include the evaluation of sophisticated institutional arrangements, but still, if a composite indicator is apparently inconsistent with the trend of crude numbers, then you should ask, "What's going on?"

Fukuda-Parr: The reason why my colleagues and I developed the SERF Index—Social and Economic Rights Fulfillment Index—is that, at the time we were working on this, there was a lot of debate in international human rights circles about the need for measurement.

The most widely used data came from the U.S. State Department reports on human rights and the Freedom House index. We were very concerned that those were U.S.-centric and reflected U.S. perspectives on human rights and violations. They also concentrated on civil and political rights and ignored socioeconomic rights like access to education and health.

We developed the SERF Index for two reasons. First, socioeconomic rights were neglected. Second, ironically, there was a real possibility of measuring these rights with tangible, measurable outcomes, using legitimate, reliable international data series such as child mortality and a wide range of other health and education indicators.

However, these data were basic outcome data. Human economic and social rights are not just about whether you have a high level of child mortality. They assess whether the government is doing enough to reduce the challenges that children face. Human rights are rights that people enjoy or

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claim. They are also duties of governments to respect, protect, and fulfill. The difference between a development goal and a human right is that rights incur duties (or obligations). How much a government can achieve—for example, in ensuring access to clean water—often depends on the level of economic resources at the disposal of the state. If you are in Japan or the U.S., with very high levels of GDP, you can do much more than if you're in Sierra Leone. Therefore, you have to compare achievements, for example, child mortality, taking into account these differences. You need a measurement system that is adjusted for income. This is the adjustment that we made in developing the index of economic and social rights, or the SERF Index.

We made a definitive decision not to work on civil and political rights because they were inherently not measurable. But economic and social rights can be quantified and so should be measured, and the data can be used to assess government performance. This makes it possible to provide evidence to hold governments accountable and advocate for more action to realize human rights.

Mine: It is quite innovative in combining the perspectives of both duty-bearers and rights-holders, a combination of obligations and entitlements. This is an unexpected combination of two distinct, essential things.

Tanaka: I think socioeconomic rights, as you mentioned, have been measured in a very straightforward manner and are quite reliable in many cases. Combining these with the duty-bearer's responsibility is quite valid, in the sense that socioeconomic data often represent positive liberty, which is something that the government should act on. So, the capability of the government to promote such rights is an important factor in measuring the degree to which human rights are protected.

If a country is very capable of economic development but neglects this duty, then that's a very bad thing. If the government is financially very poor, even if maximum efforts are made, it may not realize the level of socio-economic rights that are needed. When we think about defining our human security indicators, we need to take this into consideration.

Measuring Human Security

Mine: We should include both positive freedom and negative freedom[15] in indicators. Then, there is one thing I want to hear from President Tanaka. Index-making should involve multidisciplinary endeavors because we are surrounded by many different kinds of threats and risks that are not only related to human society but also to the living system and the physical, planetary systems, as argued in your important article on human security.

Tanaka: Well, one idea is the utilization of objective, unobtrusive data. A typical example is data collected from space. JICA has a good relationship with the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA), which launches satellites to monitor greenhouse gas emissions around the world. There are many other types of imagery data taken from space. There are big data collected objectively about the physical environment. Maybe we need to be more innovative in collecting data on the living system, and space-based data could be helpful in that regard. The utilization of such big data can be a useful addition to the data that we have traditionally relied on.

[15] Negative liberty means that one's freedom of choice is not interfered with by others, while positive liberty means realizing the good through political participation. The philosopher Isaiah Berlin discussed this distinction systematically. The former is sometimes understood as corresponding to political freedom and civil rights, while the latter is sometimes understood as corresponding to social and economic rights.

As Professor Fukuda-Parr said, various organizations use different models to make estimates. If estimates are based on those data and are not far from reality, then they could be helpful. The big data from the natural sciences concerning physical and living systems is quite important.

But I'm skeptical about the use of big data on human society because the big data generated socially can be highly biased. Socially, an infinite number of the same opinions and inputs are fed into social media, and large-scale language models (LLMs) use these biased data. This produces a huge amount of hallucination and may spread bias around the world. In the meantime, I think big data collected by the natural sciences or life sciences should be utilized more.

Fukuda-Parr: I share your skepticism. I wanted to go back to your question about interdisciplinarity and human security. I'm not quite sure if I understand what you mean by interdisciplinarity, because my understanding of human security is that it's a human-centered concept. Therefore, when we want to develop an integrated human-centric assessment, we naturally want to look at human outcomes. So, in the case of the HDI, we look at human outcomes, such as "Do people live long?" and "Can people read?" We're not talking about whether there are enough schools, which is part of an enabling environment, not the human condition. We're not talking about whether there's clean air. We're talking about whether people live long. There should be a distinction in human security measurement between human outcomes and the exogenous contexts in which people live, such as the availability of infrastructure or climate conditions.

Tanaka: I think the measurement of human security should be human-centered. What we mean by interdisciplinarity is conceiving of a causal mechanism that affects humans. Human security can be endangered simply by quarrels with other people, but those quarrels may be affected by bad weather, pandemics, and health conditions. So, interdisciplinarity means going beyond the smaller silos of studies on human beings.

Mine: Human outcomes relate to all human conditions, including the relationships between humanity and nature. This should be studied and investigated.

Tanaka: People's conception of dignity may involve the situation of nature in which they are embedded, but that should be regarded as a social concept. What type of physical environment people tend to value may differ from culture to culture. Those are, I think, again, part of the causal mechanism or causal theory.

Mine: Human security is a human-centered concept. Professor Fukuda-Parr, what do you honestly think about the potential of the human security approach, which is a pillar of JICA's mission, based on your experience?

Fukuda-Parr: Well, I think it's wonderful that JICA is using human security as its central concept for understanding the

Big data collected by the natural sciences or life sciences should be utilized more.

———*Akihiko Tanaka*

The operationalization of human security overlaps considerably with human development and with a human rights-based approach.

——Sakiko Fukuda-Parr

meaning of development. I think the challenge with this concept has been in operationalizing it.

When I teach courses on development, I put these different paradigms together, saying, "Here are paradigms that are human-centered: human security, human rights, human capability, and human development." These concepts are all quite distinct but share a concern with human wellbeing, dignity, and freedom as the core goal of development. They differ in ways that make them appropriate for different real-life conditions. The concept of human security is particularly useful in times of insecurity, such as war, high unemployment, or when the economy is extremely unstable. But human rights might be more relevant in other contexts.

Mine: Operationalization is quite important to promote human security, indeed.

Fukuda-Parr: I think the operationalization of human security overlaps considerably with human development and with a human rights-based approach. There are important differences that can lead to diverse policy designs. For example, a rights-based approach would always prioritize serving the most deprived first, whereas the human development approach considers other factors. Yet they would both advocate the need to prioritize addressing poverty and inequality. So, I personally don't think it's productive to promote human security by insisting that it's different from other human-centered approaches. Exploring differences is an interesting intellectual exercise for theorists, but not always for practical implementation.

Tanaka: Yes. In practice, I think any useful human-centered concepts have a really broad scope that covers almost all-important things. I think the difference in terminology simply guides us to look at aspects to which we should pay keen

attention. When we talk about human security, we should not forget about human development and human rights. Human security, which is a combination of freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom to live in dignity, pays attention to all three of these essential areas.

Then, protection should not be the only measure for human security action. Empowerment, or making society more resilient, is probably a better way to secure human security. In that sense, human development is essential to preserving human security.

So again, when the SDGs were discussed in 2012, 2013, and 2014, we argued that we should include all sorts of human-centered concepts like human development and human security. But the 2030 Agenda didn't include even a single direct mention of human security. But if you read the text, what is the document all about? Actually, it is human security. There was political resistance to the use of the term within the UN system.

Mine: In the Pact for the Future adopted at the Summit of the Future in New York last year, some basic values were highlighted. These are well-being, security, dignity, and a healthy planet. This combination is nothing but human security.

Seeing the "Human" Beyond the Numbers

Fukuda-Parr: I think it's because, in the UN, human rights are part of the UN Charter. That is the agreed language. In that sense, when there is an overlapping concept, that term is favored. I also wanted to raise this question about the MDGs and the SDGs because this is where I have the most problems with the use of indicators. These indicators were used to set policy agendas, rather than to monitor progress.

In the case of the MDGs, they were used as a planning framework when they were intended to be monitoring indicators. For example, goals like universal primary schooling were accepted as the main priority for education, which then made no sense in many countries where the goal had been achieved.

In the case of the SDGs, instead of negotiating the elements of a shared vision of the world, the process at the UN proceeded by negotiating the goals, targets, and indicators. There was a lot of disagreement over indicators because they define the goal. This, to me, is like the tail wagging the dog.

There's also a lot of contestation over indicators, as a substitute for fighting lost battles on goals. For example, Goal 10 was hotly contested and agreed upon in a compromise. But those who opposed the goal fought over the choice of indicators. They achieved their purpose there by installing an indicator of inclusive growth that looks at the growth of income of the poorest. That doesn't measure inequality today, which is driven by the concentration of income and wealth at the top. The indicator framework doesn't include any inequality measures, not even the Gini coefficient.

In the next round of the negotiations for the post-2030 Agenda, I wonder what is going to happen. We are in such disarray at the moment. One wonders what the political consensus will bring, but I hope it won't be driven by numerical goal-setting.

Tanaka: By using numerical indicators, you can give a clear message to the audience, but it can also be dangerous in the sense that it simplifies a complex matter.

Goal 1.1 of the SDGs, "Eradicate Extreme Poverty," means that we should aim for zero poverty. Is zero poverty a realistic goal? Actually, there is no reliable theory to achieve that objective.

Of course, we should work on it even though we don't have theories. We have needs and actors, and when there are needs, we should do our best. Considering future goals broadly, we need to examine the goals and develop a causal understanding behind them, so that we can tell whether we are on the right track or not.

Fukuda-Parr: Yes. And let me go a little further. I think that we should use indicators as monitoring devices, not as goals. The SDGs are aspirational statements of the international community about where you want the world to go. It's not a technocratic plan. That's why it's not like a five-year plan with a planning target that says, "We will build many more, like 100 kilometers of primary road," or "We will increase school attendance from 90 to 95 percent." It's not that kind of management blueprint. It is a politically negotiated consensus about aspirations for the world.

Mine: May I ask you about how the MDGs and the SDGs were negotiated? You wrote a book titled *The MDGs, Capabilities, and Human Rights*. Do you have any comments on this aspect?

Fukuda-Parr: Well, the question of simplification that Dr. Tanaka mentioned was very clear in the making of the MDGs, and that is the main argument of the book. It traces how the goals simplified the understanding of development, reducing it to meeting a short list of basic needs, expressed in simple metrics. For example, the MDGs reduced gender equality to the number of girls in secondary school. Instead, there was,

We should use indicators as monitoring devices, not as goals.

——Sakiko Fukuda-Parr

in fact, the Beijing Declaration of 1995 included a 13 point agenda, including issues such as political representation, and violence against women.

On the SDGs, I also published a special issue of a journal based on a collaborative project,[16] which looked at the process of how the SDG targets and goals were negotiated and analyzed the political negotiations that led to the definitions of these goals. That project reveals quite a lot about the politics of negotiating development. For example, Japan was pushing for the inclusion of human security language, while the U.S. and the U.K. were strongly opposed to including the reduction of inequality as a goal.

Tanaka: There's always a political cost in arriving at a consensus. Thank you very much. Please keep advising.

Fukuda-Parr: With great pleasure. Thank you very much for today.

END

[16] Fukuda-Parr, Sakiko and Desmond McNeill. 2019. "Knowledge and Politics in Setting and Measuring the SDGs – Introduction to Special Issue." *Global Policy* 10 (S1): 5–15. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1758-5899.12604