Policy Note

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Revisiting human security: Recommendations from a research project targeting eleven East Asian countries

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Summary

The concept and operationalization of human security are still controversial even after the intensive discussion mainly in the United Nations (UN) arena in the past twenty years.[1] The consensus on its definition has been reached only recently. This policy note elaborates how the concept of human security has been understood and practiced among the East Asian actors engaged in development and humanitarian assistance. Based on the findings of the region wide research, "Human Security in Practice: East Asian Experiences,"[2] conducted by 36 locally–based researchers and practitioners, this note advances three policy recommendations:

1. From protection to empowerment: The outside actors involved in emergency assistance need to shift its emphasis from protection by the government to empowerment of the people;
2. Promoting horizontal collaboration: The actors should try to meet people's needs at the local level by making most use of networks of collaboration among multiple stakeholders across borders; and
3. Sovereignty and mutual trust: Building mutual trust between the donor and recipient governments in times of peace, while respecting sovereignty, will greatly contribute to the success of future emergency assistance operations.

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1. Human security: Its concept, operationalization, and the outline of the research project

The idea and practice of human security are still controversial more than twenty years after its introduction. The concept of human security was originally propounded in the *Human Development Report 1994* and has gradually taken shape through substantial discussions as shown in the final report of the Commission on Human Security (CHS), *Human Security Now*, published in 2003 and the UN General Assembly Resolution in 2012[3]. Given this UN-based global consensus, it is critically important to promote further operationalization of human security in regional, national and local contexts.

The fact is that, while human security has been discussed as an international policy norm mainly in the UN and European Union (EU) arenas, less has been said about its operation. Though there have been dozens of academic books and articles on human security in Asia, not enough stories have been told about how nations in the East Asian region are addressing the challenges and threats involved in human security. This is the void the present research intends to fill.

36 researchers and practitioners in East Asia joined the JICA-RI-commissioned two-phased research project and analyzed how the concept was perceived and practiced in local contexts in each country. They shared a common understanding of human security as to ensure three freedoms — freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom to live in dignity — by combining protection from above and empowerment from below.

The second section of this policy note elaborates on East Asian perceptions of human security, derived from the result of the first phase of the project which inquired into various stakeholders' understanding of the concept, their perceptions of serious threats that their countries now face, and possible ways to address them. The third section suggests three recommendations for the East Asian and global actors engaged in development and humanitarian assistance to improve the quality of their human security operations. These recommendations are based on the findings of the second phase of the project.

2. A new understanding of human security: East Asian perceptions

The first phase of this research examined the understanding of the concept of human security in East Asia. The research combined a comprehensive literature review of official documents, academic books and papers, and more than one hundred interviews with government officials, lawmakers, researchers at universities and think tanks, NGO activists, religious leaders, journalists, business persons, and the staff of international organizations. In addition, while the interviewees were not necessarily statistically representative, part of the survey touched on anthropological realities revealed by villagers in the countryside and participants in focus group discussions.

There are three main findings derived from this research on East Asian perceptions of human security. First, the comprehensive understanding of human security as defined in the UN General Assembly Resolution[4] seems to have been widely accepted in East Asia. Regarding the perceived threats to human security in the region, not only armed conflicts but also a broad list of other threats was identified: climate change, typhoons/cyclones, floods, earthquakes, tsunami, infectious diseases, food crises, lack of basic health and education, environmental pollution, urbanization, extreme poverty, unemployment, human trafficking, violent conflict, religious intolerance, organized crime, oppression from the government, and so on. Second, although the term human security is not widely used in the region, its constituent elements have already

taken root in East Asia. Concepts such as protection and empowerment, freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom to live in dignity have been incorporated in the legal documents of several East Asian countries and can be seen in many remarks given by the interviewees. Finally, East Asian people tend to consider state security as compatible with human security. It is thought to be the sovereign state that primarily protects the people in the event of a human security crisis. Furthermore, the state is expected not only to protect its people but also to empower its people.

3. Toward the effective operationalization of human security: Three recommendations based on the research outcomes

Based on the research outcomes of the phase one, the second phase of the project launched ten case studies on serious and pervasive human security threats in the East Asian region. The sources of these threats were classified in light of the physical system (the earth), the living system (animals and plants), and the social system (human beings). The selected themes of case studies were: the 2008 earthquake in China, the conflict and tsunami in Aceh, Indonesia, the 2011 earthquake in Eastern Japan, the ravage caused by Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar, the Haiyan crisis in the Philippines, the Chinese contributions to the fight against the 2014–2016 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, the land grab in Cambodia, South Korea's refugee policy, and the trafficking of fishermen in Thailand. Three recommendations that would assist development and humanitarian assistance practitioners in the further operationalization of human security have emerged from this study[5].

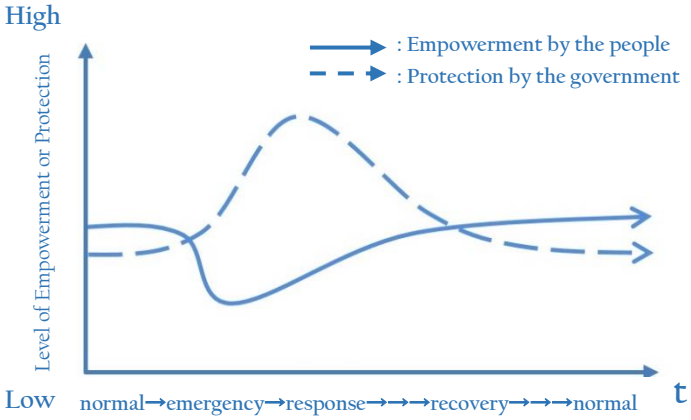
3-1. From protection to empowerment: The outside actors involved in emergency assistance need to shift its emphasis from protection by the government to empowerment of the people.

In peacetime, those actors engaged in development and humanitarian assistance can support the capacity enhancement of both government protection and people's empowerment. People's security and state security can complement each other, and this interaction secures the survival, livelihood, and dignity of the people. When an emergent case of natural or man-made disaster occurs, people's ability to empower themselves may temporarily decline. At this time, if the outside actors can strengthen the government function of protection, human security will be ensured. Concurrently, the actors should carefully examine the emergence of people's spontaneous, self-help actions toward recovery. If this is observed, it becomes crucial for the actors to shift the priority of the assistance from the protection by the government to the empowerment of the people.

For instance, when the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami occurred in conflict-affected Aceh of Indonesia, the Indonesian government was criticized because it took three days to accept external rescue and relief efforts, and the military were accused of skimming relief supplies for their own profit. This case also revealed that people became more vulnerable when the protection by the government was weak. On the other hand, the case study in the Philippines showed that, when responding to disasters, people in local communities should have participated in risk reduction planning because they knew their own community the best. Figure 1 indicates the change in the correlation between the protection by the government and the empowerment of the people in peacetime, in emergency and in recovery.

We should bear in mind that this figure is just a conceptual framework, and the transition from normalcy, emergency to recovery will not be a linear process. Nevertheless, our case studies underlined the importance of shifting the focus of assistance from protection to empowerment.

Figure 1: Relations between protection and empowerment（Hernandez et al. 2018., adapted by the author）.



3-2. Promoting horizontal collaboration: The actors should try to meet people's needs at the local level by making most use of networks of collaboration among multiple stakeholders across borders.

To make sure that assistance reaches the people, it is crucial for the government to assess people's needs precisely. However, there are cases in which the scope of what the government can do, if acting alone, is extremely limited. In these cases, the role of other actors engaged in development and humanitarian assistance becomes crucial. The government and non-government actors are expected to coordinate their activities, listen to the voices of local people in need, and make most use of networks of collaboration among multiple stakeholders across borders.

In the case study of Cambodia that has a growing economy, people are uprooted from their land without due consideration for traditional land ownership. The necessity for a network of assistance across borders was emphasized in responding to a crisis, in which international NGOs could contribute to guaranteeing the rights of the people. The experience of the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 indicates that conventional aid such as sending relief goods and rescue teams might be of little use without coordination between stakeholders. Frank and honest communication between the donors and the recipients is thus crucial to avoid unnecessary and burdensome assistance. In addition, acknowledging that South Korea's refugee policy could affect the global responses to North Korean defectors and even aggravate the situation in the Korean Peninsula, the case study shows that utmost caution is required when elaborating seemingly national policy options. The case study on responses to human trafficking in the ASEAN region underlines the difficulty of cooperation between the home and host countries of the victims and suggests the significance of effective coordination with NGOs. Various frameworks in which NGOs, civil society organizations (CSOs) and private enterprises participate in people's empowerment have been established at global and regional levels. These case studies show that it is critically important, when providing support to people, for the outside actors to try to meet people's needs by listening to their voices, cooperating with the government, and making effective use of networks of collaboration among multiple stakeholders across borders.

3-3 Sovereignty and mutual trust: Building mutual trust between the donor and recipient governments in times of peace, while respecting sovereignty, will greatly contribute to the success of future emergency assistance operations.

In the previous sections, two messages

were highlighted for the successful practice of human security: shifting the emphasis of the assistance from protection to empowerment and utilizing networks of collaboration among multiple stakeholders across borders. The baseline for these recommendations is to understand that cooperation beyond national borders is inevitable in emergency situations. However, even when the worst kind of crisis hits, the government and the people of the affected country may not welcome offers from the outside actors that have not built a trustful relationship. Instead, the offer might be perceived as foreign interference in domestic affairs. Only by building a strong relationship of mutual trust between potential donors and potential recipients in times of peace, the recipient government will be willing to work with the outside actors during emergency crises. In this way, the donors will be able to organize a quick and effective response without any suspicion of the infringement of sovereignty.

In the case studies of this research project, the responses of governments to such offers are indeed diversified, beyond merely accepting or rejecting the assistance. When Ebola hemorrhagic fever occurred in West Africa, China was able to implement rapid and large-scale support because 19 Chinese doctors had already worked in Guinea after dealing with the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in China. And, when the Sichuan earthquake occurred, the Chinese government immediately accepted support from the international society, judging that its sovereignty would stand firm even if the country accepts the offers of assistance. However, in the case of Cyclone Nargis, the government of Myanmar welcomed assistance only from friendly countries (from ASEAN, Russia, Japan, etc.), while the government of the Philippines accommodated the assistance in conflict-affected Mindanao only from the countries such as Japan and Malaysia.

As shown in the case studies, whether to accept support from particular actors when faced by a threat depends on various factors such as the confidence in its own sovereignty on the part of the recipient state, the relationship between the people and the government in the country concerned, and the degrees of trust forged between domestic and international actors during peacetime. Therefore, the actors engaged in development and humanitarian assistance are encouraged to build a trustful relationship with recipient governments, respecting their sovereignty both during peacetime and during emergent crises.

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[1] The Japanese government including JICA considers the concept of human security – the right of individuals to live happily and in dignity, free from fear and want, through their protection and empowerment – as the guiding principle that lies at the foundation of Japan's development cooperation as described in the Cabinet Decision on the Development Cooperation Charter. Their advocacy that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) should reflect this concept has contributed to the inclusion of such terms as "people-centered", "preventive" and "no one left behind" in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted in 2015.

[2] The outline of the research project can be found in: https://www.jica.go.jp/jica-ri/research/peace/peace_20131001-20180331.html In this research project, the target countries in East Asia are Japan, China, South Korea and eight countries from the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN): Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

[3] The related documents are as follows: (1) United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 1994*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1994; (2) Commission on Human Security, *Human Security Now*, New York, Commission on Human Security, 2003; and (3) United Nations General Assembly, Follow-up to Paragraph 143 on Human Security of the 2005 World Summit Outcome, 6 September 2012, A/66L.55/Rev.1, New York, United Nation, 2012. After its introduction in *Human Development Report 1994*, several countries including Canada reinterpreted the human security concept, and this gave rise to an offshoot concept called responsibility to protect (R2P). On the other hand, countries including Japan and Thailand understood the nature of threats in broader and more comprehensive ways. For example, the 2012 UN General Assembly Resolution clearly distinguished the concept of human security from R2P.

[4] United Nations General Assembly, Follow-up to Paragraph 143 on Human Security of the 2005 World Summit Outcome, 6 September 2012, A/66L.55/Rev.1, New York, United Nation, 2012.

[5] Separate from the results of the research project, the attached appendix provides examples of JICA's cooperation activities in line with the spirit of each recommendation.

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