The Role of NGOs in Human Security
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Abstract

Human security is fundamentally concerned with helping people to deal with unforeseeable threats and sudden downturns, whether international financial crises, environmental disasters or incapacitating illnesses. In this paper I argue that NGOs, as one of the most visible sets of actors in the related fields of human development and human rights, can play a significant role in helping to achieve human security. NGOs are especially well suited to action for human security because of their size and reach, closeness to local populations, willingness to confront the *status quo*, and ability to address transnational threats through coalition-building. While NGOs face many obstacles in reorienting their activities explicitly towards human security, including the cyclical nature of the aid monies on which many of them depend and the high costs of networking, I argue that the human security framework will nonetheless attract many NGOs to its approach.

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Introduction

No discussion of poverty, equality or development today is complete without considering the role of NGOs. Whether in the North or the South, NGOs are a visible, respected and entrenched part of many societies. NGOs like BRAC in Bangladesh are as familiar to us as The United Way in the United States; the activities of Amnesty International and the World Wildlife Fund are regularly covered by media organisations across the globe. The successes of these and other NGOs in providing health care, education, economic opportunities and human rights advocacy to millions of people are also well-known. The decentralisation of governments and scaling-back of social spending advocated by the international financial institutions and large aid-donor organisations throughout the last decades have created considerable space for NGOs, and made them key figures in a wide range of social sectors. NGOs provide over half of Kenya's health care services and more than a million self-employed women have received credit from a single Indian NGO. As NGOs have become increasingly involved in providing such services, they have also become critical in ensuring human security.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has defined human security as "freedom from want" and "freedom from fear" and has urged the global community to adopt a people-centred approach to security in their work. This definition extends beyond the traditional view of security as protecting states against violent conflict, and centres instead on the access and opportunities of individuals and communities. In this paper, I hope to provide an analysis of the roles that NGOs can play within a human security framework. It should prove valuable to researchers and policy-makers focussed on human security, to donor agencies interested in funding human security initiatives and to NGOs themselves.

The paper is organised into four sections. In the first section I will provide a brief overview of the roles that NGOs currently play in improving human development and protecting human rights – fields intimately connected to ensuring human security. In section two I will outline what I see as the potential contributions of NGOs to providing human security and in section three I will highlight the main obstacles which currently prevent many NGOs from fulfilling these roles. Finally, in section four I will identify the reasons why NGOs, many of which are already stretched to the limits of their resources, would be interested in both adopting a human security approach in their work, and participating in global efforts to ensure human security.

Section 1: NGOs in Human Development and Human Rights

While the meaning and use of the term NGO have been much debated, this paper makes use of the most commonly accepted understanding of NGOs: as independent development actors existing apart from governments and corporations, operating on a non-profit or not-for-profit basis with an emphasis on voluntarism, and pursuing a mandate of providing development services, undertaking communal development work or advocating on development issues. NGOs can be classified in many ways: on the types of activities they undertake, on their size, on their sectoral focus, or on their sources of funding. Of particular note to the present discussion is the distinction between NGOs of different geographic origins, specifically between NGOs from the North and NGOs from the South.

Throughout the last several decades, NGOs originating in the North have grown from a small number of post-war relief organisations to a major industry of large, multi-national organisations with relief and development mandates both at home and abroad. Many of these NGOs are operational, meaning that they run their own development projects nationally and internationally. Such groups, originating in the North, but with mandates throughout the South, will be called international NGOs, or INGOS. This subset includes some of the best-known NGOs at work today: CARE, Oxfam, Save the Children. Such NGOs have made a major contribution to human development across the South, particularly in the fields of health and nutrition, education and the

environment. They have also played a crucial role in ensuring human security for millions of people during emergency relief situations. This role was illustrated by INGO activities in Mozambique after the country was battered by a succession of cyclones and storms in 2000, in India in 2001 after a major earthquake devastated Gujarat, in the Horn of Africa region during recent drought and political instability, and continues to be demonstrated in Afghanistan today. It is a role which they, as large organisations with direct fundraising links in the North and a proven track record with Northern governments and international bodies, are particularly adept at playing.

Until the 1980s, the majority of NGOs at work in the South were international NGOs. More recently, however, local NGOs originating in Southern communities have become a prominent force in development. In countries like India and Brazil, local NGOs now rival their international counterparts in terms of their size, impact and resources. While indigenous NGOs and the forms of organisation on which they are based have existed throughout the developing world since before colonialism, their global rise to prominence has been relatively recent. Changed international approaches to development shifted focus from economic to social development and placed increased importance on the participation of local people in development initiatives. As agents of development, local NGOs with their relative small size, flexibility and access to local expertise, came to be perceived as possessing a comparative advantage over their often inefficient and increasingly bureaucratic governments. These trends opened the doors for a global increase in the number and range of local NGOs active in the developing world.

Today, Southern NGOs are key players in international development, major contributors to development processes within individual countries and continue to experience growth. It is often NGOs and not governments or the United Nations agencies, which are the most prominent advocates of international human rights, advocating on behalf of groups including women, children, political activists and AIDS-sufferers. The impact of local NGOs is similarly strong in individual country contexts. In Bangladesh, BRAC's health and nutrition program touches over 30 million people, or roughly half of the population of the United Kingdom.[1] The Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, SEWA in India and Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina possess brand

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[1] BRAC 2000

names that are as recognisable in their countries as those of Microsoft or Manchester United are to us.

The importance of Southern NGOs is likely to continue to grow given the increasing prominence afforded to these groups in donor funding plans. Flows of official development assistance from the North to the South have declined over recent years, but the proportion being channelled through NGOs is increasing steadily. Consider the current state of aid to Africa, for instance. While total aid receipts on the continent have fallen by more than 20% since 1994, NGOs are increasingly the recipients of the donor funding that does arrive on the continent.[2] In 1999, both the American and Dutch governments decided to channel an increasing proportion of their development aid in Africa away from governments and towards NGOs. In the case of the United States, this policy will result in the greatest proportion of their 700 million dollars of funding for Africa being given to NGOs.[3]

As these examples illustrate, both local and international NGOs have come to be experienced, renowned and resourced actors, and key to development processes and planning. These NGOs are instruments of human development and human rights counted on by governments, donor agencies, international financial institutions and millions of people worldwide. In many development sectors they are the main or only providers of regular services. They have also become positioned as among the best-suited actors for ensuring human security for the people they serve.

In Section 2, I will highlight the ways in which the focus, expertise and infrastructure developed by NGOs through their human development and human rights activities allow them to make unique contributions to human security provision.

Section 2: Main Potential Contributions of NGOs to Human Security

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[2] OECD 2000
[3] Chege 1999

The recently created Commission on Human Security has adopted a working definition which sees the objective of human security as safeguarding of "the vital core of all human lives from critical pervasive threats, in a way that is consistent with long-term human fulfilment".[4] This definition highlights that human security is concerned with the unforeseeable threats that arise in people's everyday lives. That NGOs have become key actors within human development and human rights, does not alone prove their relevance within the field of human security. While the fields do complement each other, the Commission itself has emphasised the distinction between the two fields in its work. Human development "seeks to create and enhance opportunities and capabilities" whereas human security "aims at securing social protection against risks and vulnerabilities".[5]

Human security concerns cut across the traditional sectors of development activity. An earthquake or cyclone, for instance, threatens more than the immediate survival of the people affected by it. Their economic well-being, health and ability to influence political agendas are also threatened. Multi-sector actors by definition, governments are perhaps the most appropriate and able actors to ensure the human security of their populations. As Sabina Alkire argues, "Governments have the responsibility and authority to provide human security to their citizens".[6] Yet many of them have been unable to tackle the human security needs of their populations on their own. After all, threats to human security may arise outside of the state boundaries which confine government actors, be politically inexpedient for ruling parties to address, result from situations which governments lack the political will to take in hand, or arise out of government's own policy decisions. While governments may have the responsibility to ensure their citizens' human security, they are often neither able, nor appropriate, institutions for the task.

NGOs are among the many other actors, including the judiciary, media, labour unions and religious bodies, who have shown themselves to be adept at complementing or supplementing the human security efforts of government agencies around the world. The complex set of interrelated factors which cause and perpetuate underdevelopment, and which NGOs address through their activities, are mirrored in the myriad of direct and indirect threats to human

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[4] Alkire 2002: 2
[5] Commission on Human Security Secretariat 2002: 4

security around the globe. By increasing people's ongoing development opportunities and the capabilities on which they can rely for their physical, economic and social needs, NGOs play a key role in reducing these threats and improving people's human security. Based on my research with NGOs in Africa and South Asia, I can identify six main additional contributions of NGOs to providing human security.

1. *Size and Reach*

Globally, NGOs have developed a reach, and are growing to a size which is unparalleled by most other organisations working within the field of human security. Networks of international and local NGOs criss-cross countries as diverse as India, Senegal and Peru and can be found in even their most remote corners. Individual NGOs are increasingly expanding their services and front-line offices across their countries. Many are even investing in establishing satellite offices in neighbouring countries. These groups can reach communities that multilateral agencies and government bodies lack the infrastructure or funds to work with, and are the local experts on which millions rely for their health, education and economic development needs. As existing providers of development services, they are already working to prevent threats to human security from arising. As the most local groups available to tackle human security issues, NGOs could also be the most able to mount a rapid response to sudden downturns in their areas.

A few examples will illustrate the contribution that the size and reach of NGOs can make to ensuring human security. In Bangladesh, which houses one of the world's largest NGO sectors, two local NGOs alone work with a client-base of roughly seven million people. The first, BRAC, has core programs in rural and urban development, education and health in all 64 districts of the country, and reaches more than 50,000 villages. Over one million children attend its' schools and it provides paid employment to 60,000 people.[7] Its activities in health, education and microcredit provide systematic protection from sudden threats to human security for millions. Its very existence provides job security to thousands. The second NGO, Proshika, is active in 57 of Bangladesh's districts and estimates that 10 million people have benefited from its range of

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[6] Alkire 2002: 28
[7] BRAC 2000

programs.[8] In the event of a violent conflict or national economic collapse, few international or Bangladeshi organisations could rival the ability of these two NGOs to ensure human security for the people with whom they work.

In Zimbabwe, most local NGOs undertake development work in multiple regions of the country and many have prioritised the creation of their own regional or provincial offices with which they can share decision-making and programming responsibilities. The low cost and relative ease of travel and communications within Zimbabwe is one factor which contributes to this phenomenon. Good roads traverse the country and its telecommunications infrastructure is one of the best on the continent. A number of local NGOs have achieved nation-wide representation, with offices in all Zimbabwe's provinces. In countries like Tanzania, where travel is costly and difficult, it is international NGOs which have developed a nation-wide presence. Their human, transport and financial resources make it possible for them to reach communities from the Great Lakes region to the Indian Ocean. Whether served by local or international NGOs, millions of African people, many in isolated rural communities, now have access to effective social development programs which help to protect them from various forms of insecurity.

The size and reach of NGOs contributes additionally to human security as it allows individual NGOs to engage with multiple threats to human security at once. As NGOs have grown in size, they have also grown in scope, moving between sectors of development and incorporating new areas of interest into their portfolio of services. They each offer their clients or beneficiaries a wide and often diverse range of services.   While predominantly research and advocacy organisations, IBASE in Brazil and DESCO in Peru, for example, focus on a range of social and political issues including gender, human rights, democratisation, food security, social responsibility, and the environment. SEWA and WWF in India, while both organised around employment and labour issues, also incorporate other aspects of their members' livelihoods and security into their work, undertaking projects on credit, food and water, housing, insurance, legal aid, child care and health care. With their financial, political, environmental and social foci there are few essential services that these NGOs do not provide to their members.

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[8] Proshika 1999, Proshika 2001

These features of NGOs make them 'one-stop shops' for governments, donor agencies and multilateral agencies interested in funding human security initiatives. In single or small numbers of NGOs, donors are able to achieve nation-wide and multi-sector coverage of human security issues. The existing size, reach and scope of NGOs are assets to human security work that few other actors can so regularly provide and thus makes NGOs particularly relevant contributors to global human security.

2. *Comparative Advantages*

The global rise of NGOs has been accompanied by the development and widespread dissemination of the myth of NGOs. To some observers they are the universal panacea to underdevelopment, to others the torch-bearers of civil society and to still others, David to the Goliaths of oppressive government regimes, globalisation and poverty. In many circles NGOs have come to have every possible positive attribute included among their list of virtues. This uncritical view of NGOs, as free from the inefficiencies, corruption and self-interest that plague so many institutions, is naive, unhelpful and undoubtedly wrong. But as agents of development, many NGOs do possess unique qualities and comparative advantages which make them particularly well-suited to human security initiatives.

The first of these sets of comparative advantages is the flexibility and adaptability of NGOs. Used to undertaking projects with only limited resources and imperfect information, NGOs are resourceful and willing to work with uncertainty – key elements to succeeding in human security. For example, local NGOs in Tanzania mount a host of successful development projects without large offices, overhead funding, or even a full complement of permanent staff. A philosophy of 'making-do' dominates the sector and it seems that few NGOs complain about their lack of funds, not because they do not lack funds, but because they see their role as one of doing the best they can with what little they have. While many of the NGOs I met in that country lacked vehicles and some even computers, only a small number of them considered themselves to be facing a real shortage of funds. NGO directors are well aware that donor funding to NGOs is usually short-term and limited to project expenditures, and have adapted their strategies accordingly. NGO members donate their old computers, sacrifice their personal

vehicles for organisation activities and do odd-jobs for the NGO at their regular places of employment. Several Tanzanian NGOs have convinced the government to grant them free office space in unused government buildings. This kind of resourcefulness permeates the Tanzanian NGO sector.

The flexibility of NGOs is also illustrated by their recognition of the fungibility of money. Local NGOs in particular, unconfined to rigidly defined and head office-approved projects and programs (as their international counterparts are), see the money they receive as fungible. They are often criticised for so treating their financing, and management tools supported by donors, whether log-frame analysis, budgeting or reporting, are all designed to reduce the ability of local NGOs to transfer funds, donated for one purpose, to another. But fungibility means that local NGOs are able to listen to their clients and better address the changing needs these clients demonstrate by using what monies the NGO receives for what up-to-date aims it finds most important. In terms of our current discussion, this ability of NGOs allows them to play a significant role in alleviating sudden threats to human security for their clients.

Ensuring human security for populations is as much about building effective political, economic and social institutions, or challenging government policy and budgeting priorities, as it is about preparing for an unpredictable drought or volcanic eruption. Touching on fields such as gender issues and democratisation, protecting human security involves representing local populations and, therefore, requires relevant actors to gain legitimacy in the eyes of such populations. Local organisations are one of the few appropriate groups to undertake such tasks. They are also perhaps the only ones with the ability to succeed in work that is so dependent on understanding local social, cultural and environmental contexts, and on mobilising and ensuring the meaningful participation of local populations. As relatively large and well-experienced groups, with both strong ties to the grassroots-level and links to national-level actors such as government, the media and academics, local NGOs are well-suited to playing this role. In these contexts they are more appropriate actors than international visitors or many of their local religious and government counterparts. Their proven track record and experience with local communities and the legitimacy they have gained in the eyes of these peoples is therefore a second comparative advantage of NGOs in human security programming.

One last comparative advantage of NGOs is their ability to take risks and innovate in their programming. Not all NGOs are able to take big risks, but large NGOs which are able to fund and develop a significant proportion of their programming can. BRAC or AMREF, for example, have been able to diversify with little risk to the strength of their organisations. This is certainly a part of innovation. Though often thought to be greater among smaller NGOs, in my experience innovativeness is more a characteristic of large NGOs, whose resources and structures make them more able to assume risk and to cope with failures. Governments suffer political consequences for taking risks with their initiatives and failing, and many multilateral and multinational agencies are too confined by the short-term nature of their projects or by the bureaucracy of their massive organisations to be truly innovative in their programming. In a world where meeting basic social service needs and ensuring basic human rights are already challenges which occupy countless resources, addressing human security effectively requires organisations that can afford to take risks and think of new ways of countering the growing list of potential threats to human security. NGOs have shown themselves to be particularly adept at undertaking such initiatives.

3. *A Willingness To Address Threats To Human Security That Other Groups Overlook*

Engaging with threats to human security that other organisations do not recognise or are unwilling to confront, is a third way in which NGOs can prove to be particularly significant to human security efforts. These threats to human security are not necessarily controversial or newly emerging. Lack of access to basic education and health care are both insecurities which have been aggravated in the post-structural adjustment world. As governments have faced increasing pressures from the international financial institutions to reduce their spending deficits, many have chosen to reduce their investment in basic social services. This has often resulted in chronic and acute underinvestment in schools, training programs, hospitals and primary health clinics. In countries like Kenya and Ghana where this phenomenon has been pronounced, and governments have been unable to prioritise aspects of human security over economic considerations, NGOs do more than just fill gaps in government service delivery. They play a crucial role in reducing the threat of many insecurities. Moreover, while governments must

focus on strategies for whole nations, NGOs are more able to focus on individuals and communities – the level at which human security must be considered.

Through their credit activities, NGOs made a similarly positive contribution to human security in a field in which few other actors were active. Recognised as a significant risk for banks and established financial institutions, poor or self-employed workers were traditionally unable to access the credit which could insulate them against sudden downturns in their economic situation. The global success of NGOs as providers of microcredit is well-known and credit-based NGOs like SEWA in India have been able to improve not only the capacities of their clients to build better futures for themselves but also their ability to withstand threats to their livelihoods. A 1995 study of the chronic economic difficulties of SEWA members concluded that "women who had been members of SEWA for longer periods, who had savings accounts in the SEWA Bank, and who contributed a greater share to total family income had a lower incidence of [economic] stress".[9] In addition, while existing labour unions were unwilling to recognise the rights of such home-based workers, and government afforded them no legal protections, SEWA's lobbying efforts have forced the Indian government to recognise the labour rights of hawkers, vendors and the self-employed. It has similarly influenced the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) to extend their attention and their protections to self-employed and home-based workers.[10] By protecting the livelihoods of such workers through the provision of credit and lobbying for their labour rights, SEWA and NGOs like it have made a significant contribution to reducing the threats to their security that traditional financial institutions were unable to address.

NGOs also make substantial contributions to human security by addressing threats that other actors are not just unable, but unwilling to tackle. One prominent example of this is the role that NGOs across Africa have played in the fight against HIV/AIDS. In many countries ethnic and religious leaders and government officials were silent about the disease until very recently. It is often still considered an inappropriate topic for public discussions and debates. In Zimbabwe, for instance, it was not until 1999 that President Mugabe first acknowledged the AIDS epidemic,

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[9] Bhatt 1998: 158
[10] For further detail on these campaigns, see Clark 1991, Rose 1992, Datta 2000.

by which time over one-fifth of the Zimbabwean population was estimated to be HIV-positive. Yet NGOs have stepped into the midst of the rampant misinformation and desperation in such countries to teach condom use, educate people on modes of transmission of the disease, and campaign for the rights of AIDS-sufferers.

NGOs were also among the first groups to advocate for an understanding of HIV/AIDS as a multi-sector issue. AIDS is often only approached from a health perspective, and anti-AIDS campaigns focus on awareness and prevention, and on providing counselling and care for AIDS-sufferers. NGOs have fought to demonstrate the many other social, economic and political fronts on which the disease must be fought. Large sectors of the labour force are dying. The livelihoods of AIDS-sufferers and their families are threatened. For many this threat is a long-term one, as wives are often unable to inherit the property of their dead husbands. Employers discriminate against HIV-positive employees whose human rights are often not constitutionally guaranteed. Sex workers have little protection from the threat of the disease and yet little attention is paid to their plight. Gender inequality continues to drive the epidemic, and rape and sexual abuse of children is on the rise. In many countries NGOs afford the only protection to people from these AIDS-related threats to human security.

4. *An Ability To Address Political Threats To Human Security*

It is an unavoidable fact that many threats to human security, while often indirect, result from government policies and ineffective political institutions or regulatory frameworks. As has been alluded to in the last three sections, many of these policies have created considerable room for NGOs as agents of human security. Government underinvestment in health care, for example, has made NGOs the largest providers of health services in many countries and has increased the overlap between their traditional projects and the human security agenda.

This type of threat to human security is one that few actors are better placed to address than NGOs, and local NGOs in particular. Dependent on the goodwill of foreign governments to remain and work in their countries, international NGOs can face considerable obstacles when trying to include mass mobilisation, lobbying and advocacy activities against their host

government in their portfolio of activities. As guests in the country, raising the ire of national government would be both a financially and politically costly mistake for international development groups to make, and could spark a higher-level diplomatic confrontation between their home and host nations. Local NGOs, on the other hand, have the local knowledge and experience, ties to local partners (including government agencies), and the freedom to make local governance their concern. While working with government to ensure human security must be a priority for NGOs in the field, reducing some of the most critical and pervasive threats to peoples' survival, livelihoods and basic dignity requires NGOs to advocate for changes in government policy. They must also provide effective opposition to courses of action which increase the threat of insecurity. This role of NGOs is especially relevant in countries where strong opposition parties or independent media organisations are weak or absent.

In addition to confronting the underlying political issues which affect human security, NGOs encourage the popular political participation which reduces insecurities. Where many of the world's most insecure populations struggle to influence national-level debates, NGOs are an outlet through which it becomes possible for these same people to find a political voice. The agency of ordinary people is strengthened by NGOs, which provide a means for them to challenge elite interests and existing political arrangements, and to get a seat at the tables where so much of their futures are determined. In addition to their basic education programming, for instance, a number of Tanzanian NGOs conduct voter education, legal rights and citizenship seminars. NGOs also help to empower and mobilise a range of civil society organisations within their countries. Many have been crucial in developing strong civil society networks and coordinating like-minded groups into coalitions around a variety of threats to human security. In pursuing their goals NGOs inject a pluralism into the political systems in which they work and contribute to the strengthening of civil society. This in turn broadens the range of opportunities for people to bring their political influence to bear, and to see that institutional frameworks and threats to their human security are clearly linked.

5. *An Ability To Address Transnational Threats To Human Security*

Threats to human security fail to respect the sovereign boundaries of states, and many of the most persistent and challenging are transnational. Long-recognized human security threats such as civil war and environmental degradation cross borders, as do emerging threats to human security including organized crime and terrorism. Institutions are at the heart of addressing human insecurities. In order to develop effective strategies to combat transnational threats, transnational institutions must be involved at every level of the process, from planning to implementation. Unfortunately, states are not transnational entities and many government-level regional bodies are unable to institutionalise close relationships between their members. The need for such official-level, cross-border cooperation is most needed in regions where human security is regularly threatened by conflict. Yet these are often the areas in which it is least likely, as state borders and the very sovereignty of nations are under strain.

This situation has created considerable space for NGOs: transnational organisations which are active around the globe and which are already pursuing mandates that include the elimination of threats to human security. NGO offices in individual countries are often only an offshoot of a regional or international NGO structure which is represented in multiple countries. Oxfam, for instance, has offices in over eighty countries. This kind of network enables NGOs like Oxfam to develop a comprehensive plan for human security and simultaneously implement it in countries from Peru to the Philippines. Both at the planning and implementing stage, this makes NGOs crucial actors within global human security initiatives. While a multi-national organisational structure is most often found within international NGOs, a number of local NGOs are now also spawning offshoots, most often in neighbouring countries, allowing them to address similar transnational threats to human security. The NGO Six-S, started in Burkina Faso and active in nine countries in West Africa, for example, has played a crucial role in ensuring human security for farmers and their families in drought-prone areas of the Sahel. Their training programs, water security measures and advocacy agenda have helped to protect both people's survival and their livelihoods. In these areas, governments are unable to provide such services alone, and it is only by working in concert with NGOs that the transnational threats of drought and desertification are being halted.

Strong NGO networks are an additional way in which NGOs are well-equipped to address transnational threats to human security. Unlike their government counterparts, who must wait for biannual regional summits to address relevant issues, many NGOs are part of well-resourced networks that meet regularly and have the capacity and untraditional approaches necessary to make a significant contribution to combating insecurities. Many such NGO networks are particularly strengthened by the diversity of their members. Networks of NGOs which address child abuse and trafficking, the situation of refugees and various forms of environmental degradation, for example, have members from across the North and the South. The mandates of these member organisations range from conducting research to lobbying and advocating for legislative changes to providing front-line services to affected individuals and communities. Few government networks can claim to have the same strengths.

The Beyond Inequalities project, started in 1999 by a network of NGOs organised by the Southern African Research and Documentation Centre (SARDC), is one example of a network initiative which could prove invaluable to human security planning.[11] These NGOs produced comprehensive profiles of the position of women in twelve countries in the region, addressing such issues as health, education, poverty, violence, the law and legal systems, and power and decision-making structures. With the security of millions of women and children threatened by gender inequalities in decision-making and access to resources, the work of NGOs in addressing gender disparities represents an international contribution to human security that few other actors could make. While governments are often constrained by their territorial boundaries, these examples illustrate that both international and local NGOs can provide the transnational perspective that is required to address the many threats to human security which have no origins or boundaries and which, in the current climate of globalisation, are only likely to spread.

6. *An Ability To Make a Long-Term Contribution To Human Security*

While human security is fundamentally about short-term changes in people's situations which threaten their lives and their livelihoods, its achievement requires a longer-term perspective and institutional arrangements. Most human security initiatives tend to react to immediate human

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[11] For further detail on this initiative, see Kethusegile et al 2000.

security concerns: how to protect lives during civil conflicts, how to feed the starving during droughts, how to rescue the threatened during natural disasters. Short-term interventions by temporary coalitions of international agencies and governments are crucial. Yet the long-term preventative measures which can diminish threats to human security are equally important. NGOs are critical to ensuring such long-term goods. They predate emergency relief organisations and continue their work long after such groups have moved on to other crises. In the field of health, for instance, as the main advocates and distributors of condoms and mosquito nets in many countries, NGOs reduce the threats of diseases like AIDS and malaria on an ongoing basis. In helping communities to locate or build safe sources of drinking water, they protect against the many-water borne diseases which threaten lives. Similarly, by making accessible technologies such as fuel-efficient stoves and solar cookers, NGOs help to prevent the insecurities of deforestation and desertification years down the road.

The work of NGOs also goes beyond stemming threats to human security to address the institutional changes and processes for social change which will make a long-term impact on human security. Included in this set of processes are governance, popular participation, transparency and capacity-building. As discussed in the last few sections, these are established goals to which NGOs as diverse as multinational giants Amnesty International and Transparency International, large national organisations like Ain O Shalish Kendra in Bangladesh and Madres de la Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, and smaller, local human rights NGOs are all committed. Whatever their developmental focus, few NGOs shy away from confronting underlying questions of rights, access and inequality. They link the developmental goal of "growth with equity" and the security goal of "downturn[s] with security".[12] It is precisely in their attempts to further human development that NGOs generate the means, in the shape of vocal and politically effective people, with which to assure long-term fulfilment and long-term human security for millions.

Section 3: Current Barriers to NGOs Playing These Roles

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[12] Sen 2000 as quoted in Alkire 2002: 6

In the last section I outlined the six main ways in which I believe NGOs can make a significant contribution to human security. While this contribution is potentially great, several obstacles exist to ensuring the effective participation of NGOs in human security endeavours. In this next section, I will try to explain and address the three most common and problematic of them.

1. The first and potentially most serious obstacle involves the nature of donor aid. The perpetual cycling of donor funding priorities, the standard short-term and contract-based funding of NGOs and the funding restrictions which prevent NGOs from receiving core funds and accumulating savings all affect the ability of NGOs to be flexible, to adopt inventive strategies to combating insecurities and to respond rapidly to emerging threats. While few NGOs would be beholden to donor interests in an ideal world, or subject to their own set of insecurities based on the nature of the aid industry, there are still only a handful of NGOs which are financially secure enough to ignore aid donors, whether governments, private foundations or bilateral and multilateral agencies. This is a particular problem for Southern NGOs. It is exacerbated by the lack of local donors in many of the poorest countries in the world, both in terms of a donating public and a commercial sector able to fund, endow or co-finance NGO initiatives.

The resulting influence of donor organisations on NGOs has meant that donors exert considerable control on the sectors in which the NGOs they fund are active, and on the kinds of projects and programs they undertake in these areas. In Senegal, for instance, donor pressures had encouraged one local NGO I met to deviate from its stated mandate of providing education and training services to variously focus its work around gender issues, environmental conservation and economic development in order to reflect the changing priorities of its donors. Similarly, the reluctance of some donors to get involved in highly charged political areas where conflict with government is possible has also meant that NGOs can face a stark choice between fulfilling increased demand for advocacy and empowerment activities from their beneficiaries, and losing funding because of the proclivities of their donors. In order to encourage NGOs to explicitly include human security in their mandates and to develop effective programming around it, donors must be convinced of the importance of spending their aid dollars on programs focused on human security. They must also be convinced of the importance of funding NGOs as agents of human security, and of the many distinct contributions that NGOs can make to human

security initiatives.

The small size of donor funding contracts and their short duration, often of only one year, must also be changed if NGOs are to make a real contribution to human security. These trends have meant that "many NGOs find themselves scaling down projects to match funding patterns and abandoning more ambitious projects".[13] In addition, the reluctance of donors to fund non project-related or overhead expenses, whether salaries, rents or research, further limit the ability of NGOs to work on human security. In fact, the greatest financial difficulty of the many local NGOs I have interviewed across Africa was that of finding donor funding for their core or overhead expenses.

To make a long-term and significant contribution to human security, donor organisations must diverge from conventional wisdom and expand the support they offer NGOs. Firstly, they must extend the length of their funding contracts. Secondly, donor funds must encourage NGOs to build on their comparative advantages and to increase their expertise in order to develop inventive and multi-sector strategies which address the sudden and transnational nature of threats to human security. Lastly, these donor funds must be ready at a moment's notice, which means that donors must allow NGOs to accumulate savings for such events or to divert their funding from its stated objectives to aims that arise suddenly but are of primary importance. Moving from short-term project-based funding for NGOs to longer-term program-based funding would be one possible approach for interested donors to pursue. By helping to increase the security of NGOs, donors will help NGOs to improve human security for the people they work with.

2. The inspiration for this paper originally came from a colleague's question about the role that I thought NGOs could play in interacting with governments to reduce insecurities. I decided to take a broader view of the problem and to focus on the whole range of contributions that NGOs can make to human security, both within and outside of government frameworks. In my experience, the majority of these contributions tended to take place outside of government partnerships. Part of the reason for this is what I see as the second major obstacle to effective NGO participation in human security: government antagonism towards NGOs.

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[13] Moyo 2000: 72

This conflict between governments and NGOs is often unintentional and just a by-product of the many pressures faced by governments. Many governments, particularly in the South, are currently experiencing a financial crisis and lack the money with which to support NGOs or to incorporate NGOs into government programs. In many of these countries, it is NGOs which provide the basic social services that governments are unable to provide. In other contexts, government skepticism over the abilities of NGOs or unfruitful past experiences lead them to overlook NGOs as project partners. Some governments prefer instead to implicate local-area collectives or religious groups as their project partners, or to hire consultants when they require external experts to train government employees, undertake research contracts and oversee or monitor and evaluate government projects or programs. Yet NGOs are among the most highly-skilled and experienced actors on human security within many fields and in many countries. By patronising such groups, where they offer high standards of service, governments will contribute to the strengthening of these NGOs and consequently promote a more harmonious relationship between governments and NGOs within the field of human security.

In many cases, however, NGOs face outright hostility from their governments. Some government officials see the competition for funding as a zero-sum game: funds that donors choose to invest in local NGOs for human security initiatives are funds that the government would have received in their absence. Because of these perceptions, certain government agencies will never suggest to donors and multilateral agencies that local NGOs are better equipped than they to undertake a particular project or are more experienced potential partners. Moreover, many governments see NGOs not just as the competition, but as the opposition. A key advantage of NGOs as actors within the sphere of human security is their ability to challenge existing political arrangements and government policies which pose a threat to human security. Yet governments do not always want to hear such criticisms. Many governments in Africa, for example, have sought to restrict the power of NGOs by creating legislation which limits their sanctioned activity to non-political arenas. In these countries, the valuable lobbying and advocacy efforts of NGOs around threats to human security, whether arising out of government funding priorities, the treatment of minority ethnic groups or state control of environmentally-hazardous industries, are all forbidden by law.

However, many successful examples of NGO-government cooperation around human security issues do exist and should provide a useful model for governments and other interested actors wishing to increase the cooperation between the two groups. While NGOs in some countries face restrictive legislation governing their range of activities, often severely hampering their potential to lobby against threats to human security, NGOs in other countries receive legislative protection from their governments. The national governments of the Philippines, Bolivia, Brazil and Colombia, for example, have all explicitly encouraged an expansion of the space available to NGOs, assuring NGOs the constitutional right to organise and to participate in "all levels of decision-making in that country".[14]

Many resource-poor governments, unable to offer financial support to NGO initiatives around human security, provide NGOs with access to rural government workers. Such partnerships have been invaluable to a number of local NGOs in Zimbabwe. While many NGOs receive technical advice and support from government extension workers, in Zimbabwe, these government employees actually take on NGO project duties, usually training and monitoring, and incorporate them into their regular schedules. This benefits both parties. The government workers are given a small stipend, vehicles, supplies and, (often critically), motivational support. The NGOs gain a field worker with good knowledge, experience and connections in the area, and are able to reach very rural areas at a lower cost than would otherwise be possible.

While conflict between governments and politically-active NGOs over human security concerns may be inevitable at certain times, the length and extent of such conflict can be reduced by strong links, especially at a personal level, built by NGOs to government officials. This is a vital lesson for NGOs to learn. Many assume that to oppose government in a constructive way, they must abandon all links to government and talk at them from a distance. But the government is not a homogenous entity. Different levels and layers of government will respond to NGOs and civil society organisations in different, and often contrasting ways, depending on their individual histories and experiences, as well as on the pressures they face from state and nonstate actors. The local NGOs I have met which have been most successful in engaging with significant

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[14] World Bank 1997: 12

political debates affecting human security are those which have recognised this reality and have worked to develop close, though never uncritical, relationships with the government bodies in their fields.

Governments are perhaps the single most important institution in ensuring the human security of their people. NGOs bring a host of unique assets to human security initiatives. Yet regardless of the strengths of each set of actors, neither will alone be able to protect against the whole range of threats which can impact on human security. Protecting the vital core of human lives requires government to work in partnership with relevant organisations like NGOs. While many governments do present considerable obstacles to NGOs in their countries and to successful NGOs interventions around human security, there are several strategies which NGOs can pursue to minimise the impact of these. Other relevant actors, including donor agencies interested in promoting human security, the Commission on Human Security and the Canadian Government's Human Security Program will also be critical in encouraging strong ties between governments and NGOs working in human security. Financial support for cooperative endeavours in particular, can help to buffer the relationship between governments and NGOs and encourage their cooperation at the planning, implementation and evaluation stages of human security endeavours.

3. A third major obstacle to effective NGO interventions in human security is the difficulties inherent in building NGO networks. Threats to human security are multi-dimensional and transnational, and effective campaigns to reduce such threats will require the involvement of many different actors, government and civil society-based, local and international, working together. Regular networking can be a difficult and costly venture, however, particularly for NGOs outside of urban centres. Travel across Africa, for instance, is very costly and communications infrastructures and access to communications tools like the internet are poor in many nations. So while addressing transborder threats is something within the mandates of many NGOs, it falls beyond the budgets of many.

Building strong NGO networks is a key strategy for addressing human security concerns. Close, institutionalised ties to other like-minded organisations allow NGOs to pool their labour to

undertake large-scale initiatives, such as those that will be required to ensure human security in some of the most risk-prone countries in the world. They also enable NGOs to react quickly and in coordination to sudden changes in human security. Networking with other NGOs and local groups like labour unions, religious organisations and the media further strengthen the voice of civil society organisations in national-level debates and policy discussions. By increasing the visibility of NGOs, and allowing them to tackle issues as a group rather than as individual organisations, networking helps to change national perceptions of the realms in which NGOs are relevant and makes NGOs more effective advocates against political threats to human security.

The gender budget initiative recently undertaken in Tanzania is one significant example of how networking can enhance the NGO contribution to human security. Working together, local Tanzanian NGOs convinced the government to consider the gender implications of the national accounts. In doing so, these NGOs have changed the government's perception of the human security impact of its budgeting process, particularly with respect to the impact of gender inequity and threats to women's human security. Henceforth, the government's annual creation of a national budget will be a process in which local NGOs are invited to take part and are assumed to have a substantial contribution to make. Yet the Tanzania Gender Networking Program, (TGNP), one of Tanzania's largest and best-resourced NGOs, highlighted the fundamental importance of networking to the success of this initiative. As one of its program officers told me, "We couldn't have managed to work without the networking and the coalition" (December 8, 1999, Dar es Salaam).

To help NGOs to capitalise on the benefits that strong networking can bring to NGO human security initiatives, donor agencies and other interested actors will need to begin to explicitly fund the travel, communications and administrative expenses inherent in networking. Despite their current country-by-country funding focus, donor agencies will need to create pools of funding for transnational NGO activities and NGO networks. They will also have to address the needs of NGO coordinating bodies. Coordinating bodies can play a key role in organising NGO networks and in ensuring the development of these important resources. Yet in many countries, these associations lack the funding required to be effective actors in their own rights. With increased funds, NGO coordinating bodies can seek to redress this imbalance, thereby supporting

increased networking among their member organisations, working with them to develop a strong and united voice in lobbying and advocacy work, and helping NGOs to translate these into increased effectiveness around human security.

Section 4: Reasons Why NGOs Will Want To Be Involved in Human Security Work

Another of the questions that was put to me when I began considering the potential role of NGOs in meeting human security needs is why NGOs would be interested in participating in such endeavours and in engaging with questions of human security. Most NGOs have made names for themselves through their human development and human rights portfolios. This range of activities already occupies their time, energies and resources, and NGOs face a number of upward and downward pressures around them. Based on my experience with NGOs, however, there are three main reasons why I believe that the majority of them would be ready to commit to addressing the human security agenda through their activities.

The first and most fundamental reason is that human security is often concerned with issues that NGOs already hold dearest: health, education, economic development, peace-building. Many NGOs have a tremendous amount of experience in these fields. They are already likely to recognise the range of threats which affect the human security of their clients and beneficiaries and the shortcomings of existing programming in planning for and ensuring human security. While none of them will want to completely modify their focus away from the development issues to which they are committed, this work will have helped several NGOs to develop creative ideas for addressing human security concerns. NGOs will seize upon opportunities to enact these solutions and to address a wider range of the concerns that are most important to the people they work with. Participating in human security initiatives is one means for NGOs to make this contribution.

Secondly, being implicated in human security initiatives will help NGOs to gain the ties that are critical in building their reputation and gaining additional supporters. At the national level, these initiatives increase the interaction between government agencies and NGOs in a mediated

situation where the relative expertise of both organisations is recognised and respected. Spread across regions and sectors of activity, human security endeavours also benefit NGOs by increasing their access to international contacts. Links to academic institutions help NGOs to develop their research capacity, get the results of their research published, and further train and educate their employees. Alliances with non-operational NGOs, international organisations and multinational corporations can be similarly important, providing NGOs with project funds and equipment, professional and technical expertise and international support for local development campaigns. Relationships with the international media help local NGOs to develop a name and reputation in the countries where donors and donating publics live and where most development policy is determined. These ties to the international press often also help to ensure the safety of an NGOs' staff and beneficiaries in times of conflict with the government.

The access to international conferences that being a part of large-scale human security initiatives offers NGOs is an additional benefit which will attract NGOs. While many NGOs have little money budgeted for international travel and limited access to the communications infrastructure that organisations in the North take for granted, such international conferences are invaluable to NGOs who, over a few days, are able to double or triple their international contacts. The links and experience gained during such conferences can be parlayed by NGOs into greater international publicity for their work and to consulting and research opportunities with international development groups eager to learn more about their countries. So while international development conferences are often considered as little more than a holiday by some development actors, they can play a critical role in helping NGOs – and particularly those from the South, to gain valuable skills and a place in the wider international community.

Finally, becoming explicitly involved in human security offers NGOs the opportunity to change the way they do business. Most NGOs are currently involved in short and mid-term initiatives. Addressing human security issues, however, will require NGOs to increase their focus on preventative measures and develop longer-term and less-structured plans which allow them to react to sudden downward turns. In adopting such plans, NGOs will begin to benefit from multi-year, multi-sector funding contracts for full programs and not just for isolated projects. They will also have access to pools of funding over which they have complete spending discretion.

NGOs have long lobbied their donors for just such types of funding. Human security initiatives, which offer relevant NGOs the opportunities to enjoy the kinds of flexible, multi-dimensional support which many of them have only dreamed about, will therefore attract a number of innovative and experienced NGOs. In short, while NGOs are still likely to be most concerned with the essentials of improving human development, becoming involved in human security initiatives helps to strengthen them as organisations and to reinforce and extend the contribution that they are able to make to the people with whom they already work.

Conclusion

Human security concerns are increasingly becoming a priority across the globe. Of the range of actors which stand to make a positive contribution to improving security for people around the globe, governments are often the most able and the most appropriate. Yet in many countries and in many contexts, governments are unable to address certain insecurities or are themselves the root cause of these threats. In these situations, NGOs can be of crucial relevance, supplementing or replacing the efforts of government bodies.

Of course, not all NGOs will be able to make a significant contribution to human security or will even be interested in engaging with questions of human security. The lot of local NGOs in sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, is not an easy one when viewed from the inside. Telephones and internet connections are unreliable and expensive. People do not keep appointments and disappear upcountry for weeks. Equipment breaks down and takes months to fix. Seasonal rains wash out roads and bridges and isolate entire regions of a country. The working environment for these groups is not easy, and is a world away from the ones we are used to in New York, London and Geneva. Many African NGOs are overcome by the bloodiness of this environment and remain small, disorganised and unremarkable. The miracle is that some of them do overcome their environments to become high-quality, relevant organisations capable of mounting effective projects and of making significant contributions to human security initiatives around the globe.

Throughout this paper I have tried to illustrate the many ways in which NGOs, in pursuing their development mandates, are already making important contributions to work on human security and must therefore be implicated in any serious program of action on human security. Firstly, NGOs are able to draw on their existing size, reach, flexibility and experience with local communities to make unique contributions to human security programming. NGOs can touch issues that few other actors are interested in addressing. The strong work of NGOs in AIDS education, prevention and treatment is but one example of this trend. NGOs are also able to address the threats to human security that arise from ineffective political arrangements and which, in many cases, are themselves perpetuated by government officials and government policies. While human security is focussed on people, people often have very little opportunity to influence the higher-level processes which affect their own security. By building the capacity of people over time, NGOs empower and enfranchise people to influence their own long-term fulfilment. Lastly, NGOs are able to organise around issues which transcend national boundaries and which require more than short-term temporary interventions in order to be fully resolved. Addressing the plight of refugees is one such area of concern. Truly addressing this problem requires long-term solutions, not just temporary campaigns, and the participation of NGOs and NGO networks working in refugee camps and refugee resettlement in countries from Rwanda and Burundi, to Tanzania and Uganda, to Canada and Great Britain. In all of these ways, NGOs have become indispensable in the field of human security.

The cyclic and unpredictable nature of international aid funding, the conflict with government inherent in addressing political threats to human security, and the costs and difficulties associated with building strong NGO networks are all obstacles to full and effective NGO participation in human security initiatives. Addressing these barriers will be one task for interested actors like the United Nations and the Commission on Human Security and will require the organisation and facilitation of considerable dialogue between NGOs, governments and aid agencies. This will be a worthwhile task for such organizations to undertake, however. Despite the many pressures which NGOs already face on their time, the links which exist between human security and human development, and the connections and resources that NGOs stand to gain from their involvement in human security initiatives will all encourage NGOs to make a full and meaningful commitment to human security.

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