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Seminar on Human Security and Health

May 14, 2010, New York

Summary of Discussion

On May 14, 2010, the Japan Center for International Exchange (JCIE) organized a seminar on human security and health in collaboration with the permanent missions of Japan and Norway to the UN, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and the Institute of International Education. The event was organized just one week prior to the formal debate in the UN General Assembly on the secretary-general's report on human security, which provided a basis for some of the discussions. The strong interest in the seminar, which was attended by more than 130 people of diverse backgrounds and expertise from within and outside of the UN, illustrates the growing interest in human security and the hunger for new approaches to the challenges that individuals and communities around the world face on a daily basis. Although it is by no means a new concept, human security offers a promising framework for making the UN more effective at responding to the complex, interrelated, and transnational challenges that the world faces in the 21st century and impacting the lives, livelihood, and dignity of the people it has been designed to serve. The seminar approached human security from the perspective of the health field in order to discuss application of the human security framework in a concrete field that affects everyone around the world in one way or another.

Definition and distinctions

Human security has been defined broadly as the freedom from fear, the freedom from want, and the freedom to live in dignity, and health was acknowledged by Robert Orr and other speakers as a critical resource for achieving these three goals. At the more practical level, Lincoln Chen summarized five elements of a human security approach, as defined by the Commission on Human Security, on which he served: (1) it is people-centered; (2) it is integrated with human development and human rights; (3) it deals with a comprehensive set of threats; (4) it engages actors beyond the government; and (5) it proposes a bi-modal strategy of protection from above and empowerment from below.

As Yukio Takasu and Saad Houry emphasized, by focusing attention on the "human" dimension, human security is a valuable and crucial tool in helping us achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which also ultimately aim to enhance the freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom to live in dignity of all people. As Morten Wetland pointed out, without a new approach to accomplishing these goals that the international community has set for itself, we will fail future generations. It is hoped that human security can provide that new approach.

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Speakers also touched on the distinction between human security and the responsibility to protect (R2P), which the secretary-general's report on human security also highlights. While both concepts deal with the security of people within national borders rather than the strict protection of those borders themselves, R2P implies defining security from the perspective of outsiders and ultimately relies on the threat of force as the mechanism for ensuring security. Human security, on the other hand, implies defining security from the perspective of those individuals and communities whose security is in question. And, it can be more effective at dealing with many of the key challenges facing the world today, particularly those relating to health, because of its reliance on community empowerment and engagement as the mechanism for ensuring security.

Resilience

One of the key components of human security is “resilience,” a theme that was brought up throughout the seminar. As Saad Houry described it, we need resilient systems that will bring us sustainable results that can stand up to future threats. Lincoln Chen described Amartya Sen's characterization of human security as providing some level of protection in a downturn or crisis. In other words, we cannot prevent all new threats from emerging or disasters from happening, so our focus should be on building communities' resilience to such existing and potential threats so that the negative impact on their lives, livelihoods, and dignity is reduced. Laurie Garrett brought the idea to a more practical level, highlighting the fact that one can observe that some countries and communities are able to successfully limit death tolls and human suffering caused by natural disasters and other crises while others—even those with very similar socio-economic and geographic conditions—are not. Why are those places more resilient to disasters? One explanation is that areas that have been more successful are those whose communities are already mobilized and engaged in their own protection.

Sigrun Møgedal offered a concrete example of the way in which engaging and mobilizing communities has helped bring about sustainable positive health impacts in societies. In Norway and Japan, two countries now known for their effective health services for mothers and children, systems for providing those services were originally built up largely as the result of communities—particularly women—organizing to help themselves and others to fill the gaps in existing service provision. At the same time, she also pointed out that it is a two-way street and health can be used as a tool for mobilizing and change at the community level.

Global governance

The old paradigm of relying on external funders, technological fixes such as new medicines, and the emergency mobilization of outside agencies to deal with health crises is no longer sustainable because of funding limitations and the “quick-fix mentality” of such approaches. Moreover, changes in global governance, particularly the declining relative influence of the G8 and the global financial crisis, make it more difficult to mobilize resources in an equitable manner from around the world to deal with health crises. This makes it essential to focus more on mobilizing and empowering communities and individuals to make them more resilient to health threats. This is at the core of human security approaches. In this context, one theme that was repeatedly brought up was the importance of reducing the distance between where challenges present themselves in people's daily lives and where decisions are made for how to respond to those

challenges by working to devolve decision-making authority from headquarters closer to the community level.

As an illustration of the importance of focusing decision making and attention as close to the communities in question as possible, the activities of a Haitian health NGO, GHESKIO, were presented by Daniel Fitzgerald. While GHESKIO's primary focus since its founding in 1982 has been dealing with AIDS and opportunistic infections, the fact that it already had strong connections with the local community (and is made up almost entirely of Haitians) meant that it understood the needs in the community as well as the opportunities for mobilization, and, very importantly, it had the trust of the communities in Port-au-Prince that were most in need of health services after the devastating earthquake on January 12. Since people knew and trusted GHESKIO, they came to the organization, not only for health services but also for food, water, and shelter, and GHESKIO was able to leverage its community orientation to link those in need with those who were coming from outside to provide various forms of support.

Protection and empowerment

So, human security seeks to engage and empower communities to build their own resilience to threats at the same time that it attempts to strengthen global, national, and local governance structures to protect and provide services for individuals and communities around the world. In other words, it attempts to link top-down protection with bottom-up empowerment strategies.

As Robert Orr pointed out, efforts to achieve MDGs 4, 5, and 6—those on maternal and child health and on infectious disease—highlight the importance of linking protection and empowerment: government services are needed to ensure that people have accurate information and access to preventive and treatment services, but health will continue to be affected unless people take the initiative to protect themselves and those around them from infection and to seek treatment when it is needed. Purnima Mane discussed the issue in the context of focusing not just on the supply side of health services—ensuring, for example, that health services are available and there are people in place to provide those services—but also on the demand side—breaking down the attitudes and social and cultural barriers that often prevent people from accessing the services they need.

Next steps

The speakers all agreed that the discussion on human security is a very timely one. The current global financial crisis illustrates very tragically that, despite all of the economic growth and progress, technological advances, and talk among wealthy countries about increasing development aid, too many people around the world are still suffering an exasperation of threats that they already face on a daily basis as a result of the current crisis. We urgently need a new paradigm to help build resilience to these threats.

JCIE proposes that the international community consider several concrete steps in order to develop and implement this new paradigm:

1. Incorporate the principles of human security throughout the work of all agencies and bodies in the UN and encourage similar mainstreaming among partner institutions at the international, national, and local levels. The UN has already made a good start at

beginning to incorporate human security approaches into its activities, but more needs to be done.

2. Allocate more resources—financial and human—to integrating human security approaches into existing UN activities.
3. Begin applying the principles of human security—people-centered, integrated, multidisciplinary approaches that engage communities link them more effectively to policymaking at the global, national, and local levels—to activities aimed at achieving the MDGs and explore the linkages among the eight goals.
4. Focus on the MDGs not as one-time macro-level goals to be met by 2015 but as a process for building resilience to the global challenges that have been defined by the MDG targets.
5. Explore ways to encourage UN agencies to work together in a more integrated manner, reflecting the interconnections among various human security challenges.
6. Encourage UN agencies to work more closely with other sectors to ensure that all of the relevant actors are engaged in efforts to enhance human security.
7. Engage communities as partners in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of programs aimed at improving the lives of communities in developing countries, based on the recognition that programs that do not effectively engage communities are rarely able to respond to the real needs and opportunities on the ground and are generally less sustainable than those that are tailored to and by the communities they are meant to serve.
8. Undertake an analysis of those cases in which countries, or particular groups within countries, have been able to weather natural disasters or other crises despite severe underlying challenges and disadvantages and identify lessons that can be applied in those places that have experienced less resilience to such threats.
9. Focus on how global governance can be linked more closely with local-level challenges and create mechanisms for decision making that takes place as close as possible to where those challenges actually take place.

Seminar on Human Security and Health

Friday, May 14, 2010

Institute of International Education, NY, USA

Co-organized by

Japan Center for International Exchange

Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations

Permanent Mission of Norway to the United Nations

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

Co-sponsored by

Institute of International Education

Opening Session

Tadashi Yamamoto, *President, Japan Center for International Exchange (JCIE)*

Yukio Takasu, *Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations (UN)*

Morten Wetland, *Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations (UN)*

Briefing on the UN Secretary General's Report on Human Security

Robert Orr, *Assistant Secretary General for Policy Coordination and Strategic Planning*

Keynote Speeches

Moderator: Allan Goodman, *President and CEO, Institute of International Education*

Human security and global health governance:

Sigrun Møgedal, *HIV/AIDS Ambassador of Norway; Chair, Global Health Workforce Alliance*

Relationship between human security and health:

Lincoln Chen, *President, China Medical Board; former member of the Commission on Human Security*

Panel Discussion: Added Value of Human Security Approaches to Health Challenges

Moderator: Allan Goodman

Panel:

Saad Houry, *Deputy Executive Director, UNICEF*

Purnima Mane, *Deputy Executive Director, UNFPA*

Laurie Garrett, *Senior Fellow for Global Health, Council on Foreign Relations*

Presentation from Haiti

Human security in Haiti before and after the earthquake:

Dan Fitzgerald, *Haitian Group for the Study of Kaposi's Sarcoma and Opportunistic Infection (GHESKIO)*