

Reconceptualising Human Security in Jordan

A policy lab for the project
**“Towards More Effective Human Security Approaches
in the Context of the Emerging Threat of Violent Radicalisation
in Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia”**

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1 Introduction

On 12 July, 2018, the WANA Institute organised a policy lab with 40 government officials, academics, and managers of CBOs and NGOs working across all governorates in Jordan. The policy lab was organised as part of the project “Towards More Effective Human Security Approaches in the Context of the Emerging Threat of Violent Extremism in Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia” implemented by the WANA Institute, Mercy Corps, and ACSIS. The event was designed to arrive at a reconceptualisation of human security based on Jordanian national priorities in a way that repositions human security at the centre of efforts to enhance resilience to conflict and to counter violent extremism.

The policy lab succeeded in exposing the knowledge gap and the lack of consensus among key policy-makers on the definitions of key terms like human security, violent extremism, and radicalisation. Through a participatory approach and comparative learning from different government and civilian experiences, the one-day policy lab succeeded in generating a discussion on the main challenges and exposed differential understandings of human security. The policy lab concluded with an agreement on a definition of human security.

Human Security is a state of individual and communal peace achieved through an environment that meets the basic needs of individuals and through legislations that guarantee the rights and duties of all citizens.

2 Problematising Definitions

The policy lab exposed the knowledge gap in how policy-makers and civil society actors understand human security. Most were unable to offer a definition; instead they pointed out gaps in the basic definition that was offered by the WANA Institute to start the day's discussion. The cornerstone of disagreements during the day points to the starting point of defining human security. First, is human security an outcome in the form of a state of being or an environment in which individuals live? If it is the latter, how can this environment be achieved? Or is human security a process of enabling and empowering? If so, what are its target indicators?

There was no clear-cut line in how policy-makers or civil society actors perceived human security. Generally, policy-makers favoured a definition of human security as a process that evolves through practice and previous achievements. Yet other stakeholders stressed on how the government fails to provide the necessary legal and strategic infrastructure to improve human security. This refers to slow government progress in policy design and implementation of projects on employment, education, social justice, gender equality, and environmental security. As these shortfalls are mostly felt by local communities, civil society actors were quick to blame policy-makers for aspects of human insecurity in Jordan.

At the end of the day, all participants agreed that human security is to be defined as a state of individual and communal peace achieved through an environment that meets the basic needs of individuals and through legislations that guarantee rights and duties of all citizens. By adopting this definition, participants identified the government as the central actor in safeguarding human security before civil society offers a supporting role to maintain human security and contribute to it. Therefore, this definition is not one without problems as it ignores the required balance between the government on the one hand, and civilian stakeholders on the other.

3 Positive Peace, Basic Needs, and Human Security

The concept of positive peace was first introduced through the work of Johan Galtung who argued that peace is not merely the absence of physical violence. Rather, peace is enabling people to reach their full potential. This is achieved by meeting basic human needs detailed in Maslow's hierarchy, and eliminating forms of structural violence through the rule of law and equal rights for all citizens. This should lead to a state of peace *with* justice, or positive peace, for all.¹ A representative from Generations for Peace argued that human security should be understood through the concept of positive peace or at least by drawing awareness to the cross-cutting links between the two concepts.

¹ Johan Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization* (Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, 1996).

Human security is usually defined through its seven pillars: economic, food, health, environmental, personal physical, communal, and personal political security.² The UN Trust Fund for Human Security also asserts the two principles of protection and empowerment as key denominators when defining human security. In this sense, the human security scheme encourages all stakeholders to prioritise these seven areas in their efforts. Human security empowers people to avoid or contain threats to their livelihood and dignity.³ Therefore, human security with its seven pillars and two principles contributes to positive peace, but we would argue that both should not be used interchangeably due to conceptual variations underpinning each.

The discussion on human security with participants in the policy lab and during field research activities in local communities usually lead to a discussion of Maslow's hierarchy of human needs to highlight how human security should be understood as meeting these basic human needs. In the local perspective in Jordan, this understanding of human security underscores all other conceptual variations and nuances in relation to the concept of human security.

4 Religious Nuances on Human Security

It was interesting to note how religious nuances shape local definitions of human security. For example, a CBO-manager defined human security by referring to the Quran verse “Let them worship the Lord of this House, Who has fed them, [saving them] from hunger and made them safe, [saving them] from fear.” (Quraish: 4) For him, it is the fulfilment of basic needs — food in this example — that leads to a state of security. This line of argumentation dominated the discussion that human needs are to be met before a state of human security is achieved. However, some interpreters of the Quran argue that the “and” in this verse does not indicate a hierarchy but rather indicates a combination of both needs since food will not meet human needs if it is provided in a context of physical insecurity.

In this context, and although the Quran verse refers to safety from fear, it is interesting to note that none of the 40 participants in the policy lab connected the concept of human security to freedom from want and freedom from fear, which are usually used in defining human security in policy circles and academia, along with the two other freedoms points by Roosevelt: freedom of speech and freedom of worship.

The religious nuances of human security were also explained through the five Maqasid of sharia. The Maqasid refer to the purpose of religion: protecting life, wealth, intellect, faith, and honour (progeny). This includes providing the basic minimum protection, and then enhancing the level

² United Nations Development Program, “Human Development Report 1994”, (New York: UNDP, 1994), 24-33, http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/255/hdr_1994_en_complete_nostats.pdf

³ UN Trust Fund for Human Security, Human Security Handbook: An Integrated Approach for the Realization of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Priority Areas of the International Community and the United Nations System (New York: UN, 2016).

of protection in each of these five areas.⁴ For the religiously-oriented participants, these purposes of religion are the Islamic manifestations of human security.

Regardless of how resonant this argument is for other participants and/or international actors, this discussion provides an insight into how human security can be introduced to stakeholders who place more emphasis on religion.

5 Gender and Human Security

The policy lab included a heated discussion on gender empowerment as one aspect of human security. An official from the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation offered an understanding of how gender issues are mainstreamed through the ministry to achieve higher gender equality indicators across all sectors. The ensuing discussion evolved around the tension between advocates for traditional gender roles and advocates for more comprehensive and well-designed approaches to women empowerment and gender equality. No agreement was reached during the discussion, but it exposed the persisting wide gap in perspectives between government officials and civil society actors.

6 Recommendations

- Conduct capacity-building activities for policy-makers to explain and introduce them to the concepts of human security, radicalisation, and violent extremism and the policy design implications based on the definitions.
- Conduct capacity-building activities bringing together policy-makers, civil society actors, and academics to raise awareness on the partnerships and shared responsibilities between policy-makers and civil society as equal partners in human security programing
- Capacity-building activities should be based on the understanding that human security can act as a broader umbrella for all short-term PVE efforts.
- Encourage a discussion and adopt a definition of human security that includes religious — or Islamic — concepts to improve local ownership of the term in local communities and among some religiously-oriented policy-makers.
- Raise awareness of the gender dynamics in a programme-oriented direction highlighting specific areas through case studies from Jordan on how women empowerment can contribute to human security.

⁴ Ibrahim Abiodun Oladapo and Asmak Ab Rahman, "Maqasid Shar'ah: The Drive for an Inclusive Human Development Policy," *Shariah Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (2016), 287-302, and Salman Syed Ali and Hamid Hasan, *Towards a Maqasid al-Shariah Based Development Index*, IRTI Working Paper Series, Islamic Research and Training Institute, September 2014, <http://www.irti.org/English/Research/Documents/WP/WP-1435-18.pdf>