

ASIAN DIALOGUE SOCIETY

MEETINGS ON HUMAN SECURITY PROJECT

KOLKATA, INDIA – 18TH – 19TH MAY

The Asian Dialogue Society (ADS) launched a new project on Human Security in India. Specifically, this project will focus on the Northeast Region (NER) of India. The project is funded by the Sasakawa Peace Foundation of Japan.

To lend substance and direction to the project the ADS set up an advisory group comprising several well-known experts on the subject. A project planning meeting of the advisory group of the Asian Dialogue Society's human security cell was organized in Kolkata, India, on 18 May 2007. The ADS invited observers to this planning meeting.



A second workshop, the “Regional Dialogue on Human Security in Northeast India: Role of Media” was held back to back to this meeting on 19th May. This workshop was held in cooperation with The International Centre, Goa and the Centre for Media Research &

Development Studies, Kolkata. The objective of this workshop was to sensitize the media in the NER and Kolkata about the project and the concept of human security.

The planning meeting was attended by ---persons (list attached at the end of this report). Mr. Rajaretnam of the ADS painted a broad picture of the ADS and its project on human security. The meeting, he said, was to examine the idea of having a human security index for the NER, and eventually in the long term, an index for Asia. He wanted the group to explore the feasibility of a research project on human security. In the second year, the project could focus on a second region in India – Orissa – while in the third year; it will focus on a Southeast Asian country.

He also explained that a project such as this can have many stakeholders and that was the reason that he had wanted observers at this planning meeting and the workshop.

Dr Surin Pitsuwan, said one of the main aims of the meeting was “to produce the piece of the mosaic that would be the indicator for the measurement of Human Security.”

He contended that nations could not cite the question of sovereignty to stop outside agencies and entities to help people in tremendous challenge and danger. Highly centralized governments and those that were not open to participation viewed the issue with great suspicion according to Dr Pitsuwan. Hence a lot of clarity was needed on the issue of Human Security. The question of human security according to him, hence had to be handled sensitively so that different issues could be resolved.



The conceptual framework that would help analyze and promote human security would have to be innovative and sensitive.

He spoke of Andrew Mack's indicators where he did a survey of those affected by direct violence. Mack's study showed that the incidents of violence around the globe had actually gone down and hence indicated an increase in Human Security. Policy initiatives that enable the individual to stand on his own and move ahead to fulfill his own potential was another way of looking at the issue according to the speaker. He cited the Japanese example, which put more stress on the issues like poverty, illiteracy, disease etc which were more related to the Human Development indicators and which would provide the policy makers better references. An example was the question of the refugees. Many governments refused to deal with the refugees thus inhibiting their access to opportunities. An approach that would provide concepts and indicators that would help measure the Human Security of the people would be more helpful as it would let the people know the deficiencies and remove them to move forward.

Dr Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh, said that though the concept of Human Security index was desirable it was not feasible. But a Human Security Index would help generate knowledge, shape relevant actions to fight human insecurity and also facilitate public debate concerning human security. The huge explosion on the different approaches to the question of Human Security was the biggest problem in conceptualizing the issue. “Many more solid groups have tried to do it and failed,” she said. She said Dr Amartya Sen too had given up the idea of a Human Security Index. She cited the example of the Human Development Index and said that it had in many cases turned out to be a vacuous exercise where nations were more concerned about its position on the list and those of its neighbours and its enemies.



A number of issues needed to be pondered upon and these included:

1. Broadness of the definition: A whole lot of issues including the freedom from want, freedom from fear and life of dignity were related to the concept. According to the speaker there needed to be proper clarity from the “mountain” of definitions.
2. Universality: Whether there would be a threshold for different cultures.

3. Subjectivity: The HDI was based on data provided by the governments and which was relatively easier to collect and access. However the question of Human Security was related to the people and their subjective feelings about security and hence quantifying them would be complicated. Finally aggregating them and correlating them would be even more difficult.

The other important thing was in working out the sample size for such an effort. She floated the idea of indicators as compared to index which was in turn related to the quantitative versus the qualitative approach. She cited the fallacy of drawing different correlations between factors such as GDP, per capita income, level of education and the possibility of conflict.

Prof Mukul G. Asher, interjected with his comments that most of the statistical data available were not reliable. Even in the data that are available there are sub regional differences.



Mr Sanjoy Hazarika, said there were more than 220 ethnic groups in the Northeast and mapping them was an anthropologist's delight but a project administrator's nightmare.

Dr Amitav Acharya, said though the data were not always reliable they gave a broad trend of the issues involved. They also provided a base for the policy makers to take decisions.

He said Human Security was an Asian notion developed by Amartya Sen and Mahboob-ul-Haq. The Canadians took the idea and have never credited the Asians with the concept. It was not a Western ideal that would be showcased for other nations to follow. He suggested means to find a bridge between the Canadian concept of Freedom from Fear and the Japanese concept of Freedom from Want. He spoke of the nexus between ecological stress and conflict, between conflict and education and between conflict and disease. This leads to the vicious circle between conflict and development. Simplistically putting it, the lack of development leads more people to join the conflict. Examples of Kalahandi in Orissa and certain pockets of Philippines were cited in support.



Dr. Mya Than, said three pairs of issues needed to be resolved to arrive at the indicators:

- A) Horizontal and vertical equity.
- B) The issue of Present/Future i.e. the data could be projected into the future.
- C) Qualitative/Quantitative approach. He suggested quantifying the qualitative approach.

Another important element was in determining the different approaches to Human Security which could be listed as follows:

- 1) Security for whom?
- 2) Security of what value?
- 3) From what threats ?
- 4) By what means?

Dr Tadjbaksh pointed out a third element apart from the freedom from fear and the freedom from want concepts i.e. dignity of life.

She also pointed out the participatory approach adopted in compiling the Chattisgarh development report in India was an important example since the wants and aspirations of the people were reflected with greater clarity. Over 30,000 villages participated in articulating their aspirations and the entire report was an aggregation of these reports.

She also said that poverty and conflict were not always directly related and there were issues of greed and grievances (about injustice and inequality involved).

Mr Hazarika pointed out four different avenues of data on casualties that were available about the North-East.

This included the data provided by the Underground who had their own websites.

The data provided by the central and the state government.

Those provided by the NGOs and finally

The data provided by the media.

One suggestion at the meeting was to collect the data from the various sources, verify them or improve upon them and then put it on the ADS website with comments and qualifiers. Another view was that putting the raw data on the web would make it prone to be misused. Considered analysis however would be a better option.

The following areas were identified as topics for papers either from institutions or individuals.

1. The virtuous and the vicious cycles between Human Security and development including issues related to poverty, ecological stress, health and education.
2. Regional Integration: An important issue that came out of the discussions was the Non-traditional security issues peculiar to a region this could include human smuggling, crime, illegal migration etc. Trade both in merchandise and services between the sub-regional entities and the neighbouring countries including ASEAN could be studied.
3. Conflict mapping: Compiling quantitative data and identifying their veracity and authenticity. This would be used to provide the local governments with recommendations as well as provide as an authentic database in addition to those provided by the Amnesty and Human Rights Watch.
4. Participatory Human Security Assessment: Questionnaires to be provided at the micro level and would reach out to people to provide a representative approach. This would include not just identifying the problems faced by the people but also identifying how they contribute to the society
5. Rights: The question of three different issues of freedom from fear, freedom from want and dignity of life along with the Human rights debate not just from the point of view of dissidents but also from the point of view of the governments.
6. A survey of how the states are doing in meeting the Millennium Development Goals.

The indicators identified could be taken from either of the following broad categories without any implicit theorising:

- A) Freedom from Fear
- B) Freedom from Want and
- C) Dignity of Life/Human Rights.

The other approach would include the following eight areas:

- i) Economic security
- ii) Food security
- iii) Health Security
- iv) Environmental Security

- v) Personal security
- vi) Community Security
- vii) Political Security
- viii) Educational Security

A project management committee comprising of Mr M. Rajaretnam, Dr. Shahrbanou Tadjbaksh, Prof Mukul G. Asher and Dr. Amitav Acharya would set the terms of reference for the proposed papers and ensure the qualitative and thematic integrity of the papers.

PARTICIPANTS:-

1. Dr Surin Pitsuwan, Member, UN Commission on Human Security and Former Foreign Minister, Thailand
2. Mr M. Rajaretnam, Executive Director, Asian Dialogue Society.
3. Dr Shahrbanou Tadjbaksh, Director, CERI Programme for Peace and Human Security, Sciences Po, Paris, France
4. Dr Mya Than, Visiting Fellow, Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn Univeristy, Thailand
5. Dr. Amitav Acharya, Deputy Director, Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.
6. Prof. Mukul G. Asher, Professor, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore.
7. Ms Joyatri Ray, UNIFEM, South Asia Regional Office.
8. Mr. Seko Masato, Programme Officer, Sasakawa Peace Foundation.
9. Mr Sanjoy Hazarika, Managing Trustee, Centre for Northeastern Studies, India.
10. Mr Snehasis Sur, Hony Secretary, Centre for Media Research and Development Studies
11. Ms. Sonia Xavier, Research Assistant, Human Security Project, International Centre Goa.