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Non-state Actors and the Diffusion of the Human Security Agenda

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Abstract

Diffusion literature in International Relations (IR) has mostly focused on explaining patterns of convergence among states and international organizations. While numerous studies have revealed that ideas, norms, institutions, and practices often vary as they diffuse, the perspective of those people who experience the diffusion of global agendas at the local level is still under-researched. The diffusion of the human security agenda is explored in this article with a focus on how it is perceived in different sociocultural contexts. The positive and negative roles that non-state actors play in building human security are also addressed in order to shed light on the opportunities they have to become more effective in promoting the human security agenda. I argue that when non-state actors focus on solution-oriented research, improve communication, and foster interactive and interdisciplinary practices with other members of civil society, they are in a better position to understand and promote people's development and security in a holistic and sustainable fashion.

Keywords: Diffusion, human security, non-state actors, sociology of knowledge, communication, legitimacy.

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Introduction

After the traumatic experiences of the First and Second World Wars, a series of global initiatives emerged which included the foundation of the United Nations (UN) system and the International Criminal Court (ICC). The trend towards greater prominence for humanitarian discourses gathered pace after the end of the Cold War as ideas about security expanded beyond a focus on the military with the state as its referent object.¹ Indeed, during the 1990s, humanitarian ideas became a principal normative reference for states and organizations as they sought to clarify their international responsibilities and obligations.² It was in this context that the contemporary human security agenda came to the fore. The idea of human security did not emerge from the non-governmental community or from within a state but became evident instead in international organizations such as the UN and, later, the European Union (EU).³ In any case, both state and non-state actors have been crucial to its subsequent evolution and also to the diffusion of the human security agenda.

Much of the literature on diffusion in International Relations (IR) has focused on explaining patterns of convergence in the work of states, international organizations, and transnational organizations.⁴ In addition, research on norm diffusion has tended to concentrate disproportionately on the provider of norms.⁵ While these shortcomings have been addressed in IR and sociological research that focuses on processes such as synchronization,⁶ localization,⁷ subsidiarity,⁸ or collective learning,⁹ still little attention has been paid to the viewpoints and experiences of those people who experience the diffusion of global agendas within their respective local contexts. To help address this gap, this article will briefly review the diffusion of the human security agenda in different sociocultural contexts with special focus on how human security is understood in those contexts. It will also answer questions about how non-state actors might become more effective in promoting the human security agenda in order to broaden discussion on this issue.¹⁰

This work draws on insights informed by the sociology of knowledge, and in particular on the ideas set out in Berger and Luckmann's definitive work *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966).¹¹ The article will explore the positive and negative roles that non-state actors play in building human security, and it will also shed light on the opportunities that they have to become more effective in promoting the human security agenda. A broad range of agents are collected under the term "non-state actors," but the scope is limited here to scholars and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) given their strong potential for helping the UN as well as both state and other non-state actors to promote the human security agenda more effectively. The human security agenda is understood for the purposes of this article to refer to a global plan of action, based on the UN's human security approach and on its inter-linkages with the recently established 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, which seeks to address the multiple threats posed to human security in a holistic and sustainable fashion.¹²

I begin by introducing the concept of diffusion and discussing the emergence as well as the dissemination of the human security agenda. Next, I present an illustrative analysis of how



human security is perceived in three distinct sociocultural contexts, and I then briefly analyse both the positive and negative roles played by non-state actors, and particularly scholars and NGOs, in building human security. Finally, I discuss the opportunities that exist for them to become more effective in promoting the human security agenda. On the one hand, I argue that more solution-oriented research on human security is needed and that new channels of communication between NGOs, scholars, and other members of civil society should be fostered. On the other hand, I claim that it is counterproductive to focus on individual human security concerns and that is necessary to understand and promote people's security in a holistic and interdisciplinary fashion. Last but not least, I discuss the limitations as well as the potential of this work to inspire further research into the diffusion of global agendas across distinct sociocultural contexts.

This paper contributes to the literature on human security by advocating the importance of a broad, interdisciplinary and solution-oriented approach. The work involved in improving awareness about human security and facilitating the empowerment of individuals and communities to build it effectively relies on inclusive, democratic communication and constant interactions among distinct international and local agents such as intergovernmental organizations, policymakers, scholars, NGOs and other civil society groups. The article also seeks to encourage the development of empirical research and cooperative actions on human security, both within and beyond the academic realm. This approach is relevant, not only for non-state actors and civil society, but also for state actors and for UN authorities, as it offers opportunities for a range of global and local actors to reflect on how they might promote the human security agenda, along with its vast objectives, more productively. The issues raised and the challenges identified by this work may also inspire a general reflection on the crucial roles played by non-state actors in the diffusion of the human security agenda.

The diffusion of the human security agenda

Diffusion is conceived as a process through which ideas, practices, normative standards, or policies and institutions spread across time and space.¹³ The process of diffusion takes place within and across societies, countries, or other jurisdictional units, and among a wide range of public and private actors.¹⁴ Social science scholars have developed and/or advanced numerous approaches to diffusion research.¹⁵ For reasons of space, however, this article is focused on the emergence of distinct understandings of "human security" and on how they might influence the diffusion of the human security agenda worldwide.

Kingler-Vidra and Schleifer point out that norms, ideas, and practices can be reframed, reinterpreted, and modified in order to increase their fit with a particular local environment.¹⁶ While norms may influence the behaviour of states on a global scale, it is also true that they are likely to be misinterpreted or discarded in the absence of social recognition.¹⁷ Research on norm diffusion in International Relations should, therefore, focus not only on those actors who establish and promote normative standards but also on those people who experience them. As far as the human security agenda is concerned, the sociocultural contexts in which its norms and practices are promoted must be taken into consideration in order for us to analyse and better understand the diffusion of this global agenda.

The first steps were taken toward the creation of the contemporary human security agenda during the 1990s, and they were accelerated after 1994 when the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) issued a *Human Development Report* (HDR) in which human security was, for the first time, explicitly and somewhat systematically articulated.¹⁸ This report marked a significant turning point in the trajectory of international development



and security agendas as it expanded the notion of security and placed special emphasis on human security as a new framework for understanding development and security issues in relation to seven key dimensions of human experience; these were categorized in terms of food and health, as well as economic, environmental, personal, community, and political needs.¹⁹ Human security later evolved into an even broader approach that incorporated three freedoms (freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom to live in dignity) as well as five principles (human security is intended to be people-centred, comprehensive, context-specific, prevention-oriented, and concerned with protection and empowerment).²⁰

Although the human security agenda was initially articulated as part of efforts to influence debates and state policies during the preparatory phase of the 1995 UN Conference on Social Development in Copenhagen, neither the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development nor the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development assigned much relevance to the idea that human security could be a guiding principle for security and development.²¹ Since then, there has been little consensus on how to promote and translate the human security agenda into practice. As a result, different approaches have been employed over time.

The Canadian and Norwegian governments, for instance, have adopted narrow definitions of human security, focused on the idea that the term should be understood in terms of “freedom from fear.” This approach was reflected in the operations of the Human Security Network which emerged out of a Canadian-Norwegian partnership and involved 12 other nation states working with them to influence the international security agenda.²² Meanwhile, the government of Japan, the UNDP, and many prominent scholars have advocated a broader understanding of human security which would be attentive to many aspects of people’s security and not just to their physical safety and survival.²³ The government of Japan and the United Nations Secretariat also launched the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security (UNTFHS) in March 1999 with the aim of translating the UN’s human security approach into practical actions. In a similar vein, initiatives such as the Friends of Human Security forum have called for a comprehensive approach to human security focused on its three main aspects: “freedom from fear”, “freedom from want” and people’s ability to “live life in dignity.”²⁴

The concept of human security places people at the centre of development and, in doing so, makes an innovative contribution to the UN’s and its Member States’ development and security agendas. Moreover, it recognizes and encourages the participation of non-state actors in the process of implementation of these global agendas at the local level.²⁵ Human security also involves a fundamental departure from an orthodox international relations security analysis as it gives primacy to human beings and their complex social and economic relations instead of focusing on the state as the exclusive primary referent object.²⁶ This does not mean, however, that the human security agenda ignores the role of the nation state. At the same time that it accommodates the significant involvement of local communities, civil society, and other non-state actors, it embraces the state’s importance, and these actors are expected to work together on developing long-lasting solutions to the interdependent threats that affect human security.²⁷

Indeed, as Krause reveals, a wide variety of non-state actors have been inspired by the human security agenda.²⁸ Prominent NGOs such as the Arias Foundation, Oxfam UK, and the Worldwatch Institute have been working with the concept of human security. Furthermore, numerous university-based research centres and study programmes on human security have been established,²⁹ and multiple reports have been published.³⁰ Human security has been also the object of numerous recent debates and studies on global governance and world politics.³¹ These developments reflect a growing understanding of the salience of the

discourse of human security. It is clear, therefore, that the concept has been widely disseminated as one of the key ways of framing and describing the insecurities that individuals face both domestically and internationally.³²

Although the human security agenda has been widely diffused throughout the last two decades, and notwithstanding numerous efforts to promote the human security agenda at the field level, the number of UNTFHS projects has dramatically decreased in recent years (Chart 1).³³ In the academic debate, many scholars have been criticizing the role and/or the significance of human security.³⁴ Indeed, considering the difficulties faced by the UN in designing a systematic definition of “human security,”³⁵ criticism of and differences in its interpretation are to be expected. In order to understand the diffusion of the human security agenda and the potential that the UN and non-state actors have to promote it more effectively, it is therefore important to analyse the ways in which it is perceived in distinct sociocultural contexts. The next section provides a brief review of the ways in which human security has been interpreted in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Southern Africa.

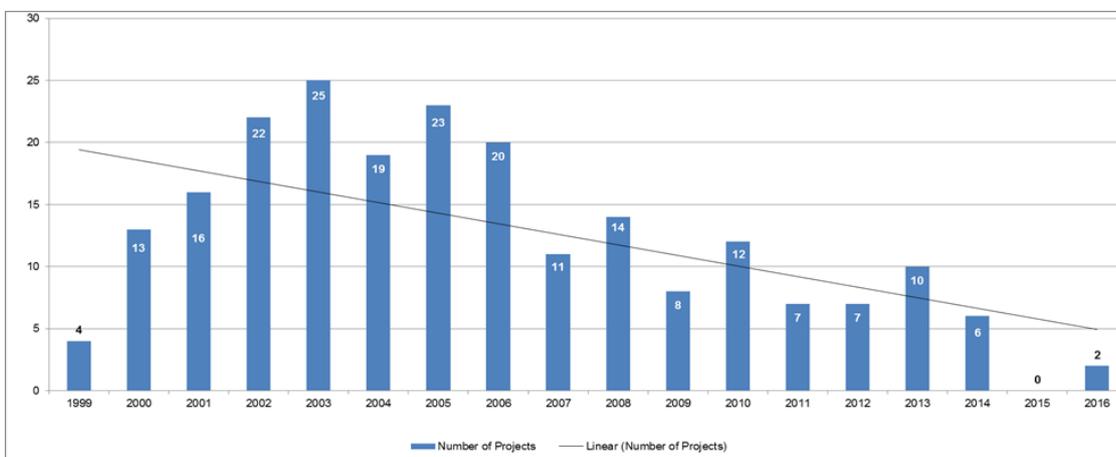


Chart 1. Establishment of human security projects funded and/or supported by the UNTFSH over time

Human security in different social-cultural contexts

Numerous studies have shown that there is significant variation in the diffusion of normative standards across different regional and local contexts.³⁶ Berger and Luckmann understand “humanness” as being variable across different sociocultural contexts. According to their view, there is only human nature in the sense of anthropological constants that delimit and permit people’s sociocultural formations.³⁷ In addition, they demonstrate that the processes of socialization and knowledge transfer are interrelated with the social worlds within which these interactions take place.³⁸ Following this logic, it is to be expected that the persuasiveness and significance of the human security agenda will vary depending on the sociocultural contexts within which this agenda is being promoted. Therefore, any investigation of the diffusion of human security as a global agenda should analyse and take into consideration the respective local perspectives on “human security”.

There are three main reasons for the decision here to focus on how human security is perceived in the sociocultural contexts that exist in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Southern Africa. These post-colonial regions share historical experiences that help to explain some of the current socio-economic patterns and human insecurities they face, which include poverty, high social inequality, and violence, and yet there are fundamental sociocultural differences between them. The diversity of ethnic groups, religions, languages, and traditions



within and across these three regions can be expected to produce different ways of thinking about and acting upon the human security agenda. Finally, these regions are all of strategic importance in relation to UN initiatives on human security, and a large part of the work funded by the UNTFHS is focused on projects in these areas.³⁹

In Latin America, the idea of human security has been contested mainly because of the various security challenges that arise at the domestic level and because of the importance given by Latin American states to the Westphalian principle of sovereignty.⁴⁰ In order to understand how Latin Americans perceive the idea of human security, it is necessary to take into account the continent's recent past during which military dictatorships have subsumed any focus on aspects of social life under policies, such as censorship and suppression of the freedom of association, which prioritized the fight against communism and the need for "national defence."⁴¹ Bonner's study on the Argentinian case reveals that "[s]ecurity [...] has consistently been used by governments and the police in a manner that emphasizes domestic threats."⁴² In addition, the foreign policies of Latin American countries in the twentieth century were largely preoccupied with the value of national sovereignty because of the latent fear produced by the interventionism of the United States (US).⁴³

Resistance to the adoption of a human security agenda as a new framework for dealing with security issues in Latin America also arose because "national security", "citizen security", and other similar concepts were already being used by domestic actors in ways that gave them culturally specific meanings.⁴⁴ Bonner and Gómez further argue that the widely used concept of "human rights" has been found much more persuasive by both states and civil societies in this region than has the notion of "human security."⁴⁵ These views confirm the ongoing validity of Sorj's claim that "the majority of human rights NGOs and the academic community in Latin America have [...] tended to be critical of the concept of human security." Sorj also notes that the human security agenda is often perceived in Latin America as an attempt to locate all social problems within the scope of security, a move that risks leading to the "resecuritization" of social life.⁴⁶

The human security agenda is also perceived with scepticism in Southeast Asia. According to Caballero-Anthony, an alternative, broader view of security is not novel or uncommon among Asian countries, and this is particularly true in Southeast Asia, a region that has, historically, witnessed some of the worst violence (for example, dictatorial regimes, genocides, and internal conflicts) of the twentieth century.⁴⁷ Caballero-Anthony reveals that the concept of "comprehensive security", first developed by Japan, had already been current during the Cold War, and some countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore have even developed their own versions of it.⁴⁸ Yet, the human security agenda has found strong resistance in Southeast Asian states where governments, like those in Latin America, remain strongly wedded to the primacy of national or state security.⁴⁹

Another reason for the contestation of the human security agenda in Southeast Asia relates to the fact that some initial Western articulations of the concept associated it with intervention, especially in its humanitarian form.⁵⁰ When this kind of involvement is regarded as a Trojan horse operation rather than as a bid to improve human security, it is easily dismissed on the grounds that it runs counter to the regional norm of non-interference.⁵¹ Against this background, the consequences of the Asian financial crisis, the 9/11 attacks, and other terrorist threats have all strengthened the significance of national security and the centrality of nation states in bids to address security issues in the region.⁵²

This trend notwithstanding, and in contrast to the stance states have taken in relation to the human security agenda, civil-society groups have been actively promoting emancipatory discourses on security, linking security with development and pushing the envelope on

human rights and human security towards the governments of the region.⁵³ The proposals set out by civil-society actors, particularly in relation to human rights and human development, have engaged with the emancipatory idea of security, a broad vision that argues against the divisions and exclusions that other ideas of comprehensive security have been used to justify.⁵⁴

In Africa, Beebe and Kaldor argue, perceptions of security have been very different from those in other parts of the world and differ especially from those developed in the West.⁵⁵ Beebe and Kaldor argue that Africans understand security in a very particular and immediate way which sets aside the military notion of security; instead African concepts of security and insecurity are best defined as being conditions-based thanks to their focus on issues like security-sector reform, health, food shortages, poverty, and the environmental shock caused by climate change.⁵⁶ Bah reveals that this broad view of human security, which is particularly diffused in Southern Africa, is closely associated with the recent history of struggles against white-minority rule as well as with the numerous political, economic, and social challenges that the region faces.⁵⁷

In the 1990s, even before the 1994 UNDP report was published, Southern African governments adopted a new security paradigm which closely associated security with development.⁵⁸ In 1993, the member states of the South African Development Community (SADC) published a *Framework and Strategy* document which called for the building of common political values based on democratic norms and for the establishment of what was called a “non-militaristic security order”; the document also stressed the need to address non-military sources of conflict and threats to human security, such as poverty and domestic political repression.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, according to Beebe and Kaldor, the many and persistent social challenges that African societies face—as well as the use of inadequate approaches, often compounded by a lack of political will—expose both the powerlessness of NGOs and of African states and their inability to address threats to human security.⁶⁰

The human security agenda offers an alternative and holistic approach, one that focuses on the security of individuals in their respective local environments in its efforts to address threats to human security worldwide. Yet, while the human security agenda makes for a compelling normative framework within which human insecurities can be addressed, states and non-state actors do not automatically enact it at the domestic level. The promotion of the human security agenda undoubtedly represents an enormous challenge for both state and non-state actors in all of the regions highlighted above, and possibly in all other sociocultural contexts worldwide, because threats to human security are complex and extend over multiple borders. A declining number of projects are being supported and/or funded by the UNTFHS (Chart 1) and, at the same time, increased attention is being given to non-state actors as strategic partners at the local level. In this context, it is important to reflect on both the positive and negative roles that non-state actors play in building human security as well as on how they can become more effective in promoting the human security agenda.

The role of non-state actors in building human security

The human security agenda emerged as a response to the traditionally realist understanding of security in International Relations. In its promotion of an alternative set of norms and practices that are engaged with the security of individuals and communities, the agenda eschews the traditional sole focus on the security of states, and, as a consequence, both state and non-state actors are implicated in the agenda and are expected to be involved in its dissemination and implementation. Nation states are often the cause of human insecurities or limit the introduction of innovative policies associated with the human security agenda,⁶¹ and so non-state actors are arguably in strategic terms crucial promoters of the human



security agenda. Although they do not always play positive roles in building human security and frequently reinforce old mindsets about sovereignty and security concerns, non-state actors are, nevertheless, flexible, multifaceted, and far-reaching and they have enormous potential to challenge top-down approaches and help locals build human security through innovative practices.⁶²

For the purposes of this article, I define non-state actors simply as individuals, organizations, or any other agents, outside the realm of the state. The focus here is limited to those non-state actors engaged in scholarship or operating through NGOs because of the strong potential of their work to help both state and other non-state actors as well as the UN promote the human security agenda and foster initiatives that can address human insecurities worldwide. In this section, I critically explore the positive and negative roles that these non-state actors play in building human security, and afterwards I assess the opportunities that exist for them to become more effective in promoting the human security agenda.

Scholarship plays a number of fundamental roles in the development of human security. Not only do scholars produce concepts and diffuse knowledge; they also promote debates and provide society with valuable information. Prominent academics such as Mahbub ul Haq, Amartya Sen, Des Gasper, and Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh have been fundamental in shaping and promoting the idea of human security to the extent that we can recognize the human security agenda as the product of academic work as well as of international relations. Moreover, empirical studies on human security produced by academics have shed light on the types of progress, as well as the limitations, and challenges that have had an impact on the human security agenda worldwide.⁶³

Notwithstanding the positive roles scholarship can play, it can also hinder the human security agenda if its focus on detail encourages actors to consider human security concerns in terms of discrete issues at the expense of a more holistic approach. Many academics advocate narrow interpretations of human security⁶⁴ and, as a result, they reinforce old mindsets and ineffective approaches to addressing human insecurities instead of taking advantage of innovations in the human security agenda and pursuing systematic solutions to address its shortcomings.

Drawing on Bourdieu's theory about the social role of scholars, Golsorkhi *et al.* emphasize that social researchers should take responsibility, not just for developing complex knowledge, access to which is likely to be limited for non-specialists, but also for diffusing this knowledge.⁶⁵ Scholars, as experts with significant social legitimacy, have power, but they also need to weigh important responsibilities when they are advocating one approach or another. When academics promote narrow understandings of human security or simply disdain the idea without providing alternative solutions, they have a negative effect on the building of human security because they restrict awareness of more positive aspects of the human security agenda which can encourage and promote the holistic understanding of people's security and the issues that affect it in various contexts.

NGOs also play very important roles in building human security as they draw attention towards, provide information about, and lobby for appropriate responses to human insecurities in various parts of the world.⁶⁶ Furthermore, NGOs offer services that governments and international agencies are unable to provide. NGOs have also become significant political actors in international politics and, at the individual level, help to provide information, consciousness-raising education, and resources to individuals that can then support and sustain them in their efforts to live better lives.⁶⁷ Among the achievements associated with the role of NGOs in building human security is, for instance, the ratification of the Ottawa Treaty which sought to ban the use of anti-personnel land mines worldwide.⁶⁸

NGOs may, however, also play negative roles in building human security. According to Beebe and Kaldor, NGOs are frequently associated with problems that include those generated by inefficient approaches, lack of transparency and accountability, and even their bad reputations which arise because “not all NGOs are purely humanitarian.”⁶⁹ Beebe and Kaldor also criticize what they call the “artificial NGOs based on Western models” which use top-down approaches and are, therefore, unable or unwilling to understand the demands of locals.⁷⁰ To put it differently, NGOs that act on the basis of old mindsets and security paradigms and fail to take into consideration the perspective of local agents in relation to issues such as security and development are bound to fail when they try to build human security at a local level.

Indeed, the challenges that non-state actors encounter as they strive to build human security are numerous, and they include issues related to accountability, communication, legitimacy, resources, and other factors. In addition, Schittecatte insists that the inclusion of non-state actors in intergovernmental settings only occurs in areas that do not challenge dominant economic world views and their attendant policies.⁷¹ Nevertheless, non-state actors have been challenging the dominant idea of state-centric security and raising issues of human rights protection, social justice, and equitable development.⁷² In fact, non-state actors—and particularly scholars and NGOs—have enormous potential in terms of their ability to improve the viability and levels of adoption of the human security agenda as a framework for promoting security and development in distinct sociocultural contexts. But how can non-state actors become more effective in promoting the human security agenda?

Promoting the human security agenda more effectively

The challenges and opportunities involved in promoting the human security agenda are interrelated. Problems posed by poor or non-existent resources, communication, and accountability, as well as the advocacy and use of inadequate approaches, thwart both the diffusion and the promotion of the agenda. However, these drawbacks can be mitigated in three ways. Firstly, while critical perspectives are, of course, vital to the further development of “human security” as a concept and agenda, and indeed might lead to the establishment of alternative valuable approaches to security and development, there is a strong need for more solution-oriented types of research into human security. Secondly, improvements in communication and the fostering of interaction in various forms between policymakers, NGOs, scholars, and other members of civil society would be hugely positive; and thirdly, non-state actors should avoid any practices that shrink or segregate human security concerns into fragmented compartments; instead, it would be more productive to understand and promote people’s security in a holistic and interdisciplinary fashion.

In a nutshell, solution-oriented research, improvements in communication strategies, efforts to understand the perspective of local agents and to interact with them, and the use of a comprehensive and interdisciplinary framework for addressing human insecurities are fundamental actions that can be leveraged to promote and then build human security in any sociocultural context.

Writing in the 1960s, Berger and Luckmann claimed that science, as one of the most historically dominant forms of conceptual machinery, had become the property of specialist elites whose bodies of knowledge were increasingly removed from the common knowledge of the society at large.⁷³ If scholars constantly criticize or even disdain the human security agenda instead of thinking of it as an opportunity to achieve social progress by providing societies with knowledge and guidance, the “distance” between the academic world and society at large might grow further. Bearing in mind that academics need to balance the requirement to disperse their research knowledge with their efforts to maintain the



complexity of its reasoning,⁷⁴ more solution-oriented research on human security can provide an optimal solution to address these gaps.⁷⁵

Interaction between NGOs and scholars, as well as between them and other non-state actors, the UN, and policymakers, will, like any social interaction, produce knowledge.⁷⁶ According to this perspective, communication is the bridge between knowledge and legitimation and can play a crucial role in the diffusion of normative standards. After all, local actors may want to understand why, and to what extent, specific (and often “foreign”) norms and practices are relevant to them before they implement them and make changes to the status quo. In this sense, only through inclusive and democratic communication can global norms be better assimilated, improved, and legitimated at the local level. Initiatives that aim to promote human security should create new channels whereby local actors can, not only make their voices heard, but also participate in implementation processes as well as become more conscious of the social structures in which they are implicated. Moreover, dialogues on specific norms and practices have to consist of horizontal interactions among “promoters” and “beholders” and to situate them both as “learners.”⁷⁷

Beebe and Kaldor argue that to build human security it is necessary to promote a “community social conscience” as well as to secure the participation of civil society actors who are “key to understanding what is happening” because security-building is “about communication and knowledge and helping to establish a common basis for legitimate governance.”⁷⁸ Berger and Luckmann emphasize the importance of language as an essential means for any understanding of the reality of everyday life.⁷⁹ Accordingly, I claim that to promote the human security agenda effectively, NGOs and scholars should interact with other members of civil society and make sure they are “speaking the same language” as the people their work affects.⁸⁰ Improvements in communication may empower non-state actors to promote the human security agenda more effectively and can help too as they press governments to help them build human security according to the demands of locals.

According to Tadjbakhsh, policymaking can make use of a networked, flexible, and horizontal coalition of approaches that correspond to complex situations and account for their specificity: “to hierarchize and prioritize among human insecurities may be a futile exercise, as threats are interdependent and the eradication of any one of them in isolation is of little effect.”⁸¹ Amartya Sen also argues that fragmented responses to human insecurities cannot be effective, insisting that stronger and more integrated responses from communities and states around the globe are necessary to build human security.⁸²

Given that the human security agenda is focused on diverse, situation-specific, and interacting threats and how they affect the lives of ordinary people, human security requires a holistic and, at the same time, context-specific approach that attends to how things are seen by people “on the ground.”⁸³ An interdisciplinary framework is also required then, and in fact the promotion of the human security agenda should involve a wide and interdisciplinary range of non-state actors from different fields of expertise. Academics working in different areas of expertise, and representatives from NGOs working on issues such as the environment, education, poverty, and refugees, among other salient topics, are among those who need to be involved. This level of engagement is imperative if we are to capitalize in a holistic way on the innovations and insights enabled by the human security agenda.

Finally, it is vital to consider local perspectives on human security because “sustainable security in particular areas can only be established by people who live there.”⁸⁴ Outsiders working in a specific territory can at best facilitate people’s empowerment and establish safe spaces, setting preliminary conditions in order to mitigate insecurities that inhibit people

from freely determining their own futures. If non-state actors want to retain relevance and legitimacy in the eyes of the locals, they must be aware, before they come into the field with “turnkey solutions,” that local people should be consulted and their perspective and participation taken into consideration.⁸⁵ When this participatory approach is taken, outsiders can contribute in a positive way to alleviating the security challenges faced by individuals and communities in their everyday lives.

Conclusion

Two decades after its international debut, there is no doubt that the concept of human security has been widely used by state and non-state actors around the globe. The diffusion of the human security agenda is real, notwithstanding the declining number of UNTFHS projects and significant variations in the agenda’s definition and implementation. However, as Alpaslan Özerdem mentioned in his Welcome Note at the Istanbul Human Security Conference in 2015, many people are still unaware of issues of human security, and the role of non-state actors in promoting and building human security has been neglected.⁸⁶

I present my arguments and recommendations mindful of several limitations. I shall cite three. First of all, this study does not provide detailed empirical research into the diffusion of the human security agenda in distinct sociocultural contexts. Instead, the analysis here is based on case studies that illustrate how human security is perceived within specific sociocultural contexts. Secondly, my critiques of the negative roles played by scholars and NGOs are based on a limited range of studies and debates and should not be generalized. Finally, the recommendations provided here should be understood, not as definitive claims, but as the source of inspiration for further research and other concrete actions that will address human security both within and beyond the academic realm.

This article has reviewed the diffusion of the human security agenda and analysed how human security is perceived in three distinct sociocultural contexts: Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Southern Africa. Although limited by its illustrative analysis, this review generates four interesting findings. First, while human security is often perceived with scepticism in Latin America and in Southeast Asia, it has not been highly contested in Southern Africa, because in Africa security was understood in a broad sense even before the 1994 UNDP report was published. Second, while NGOs in Southeast Asia have been engaged with broader ideas of human security, Latin American NGOs tend to be critical towards the concept of human security and focus instead on the concept of human rights. Third, in all cases, the use of specific notions such as “national security” and “citizen security” (Latin America), and variations on “comprehensive security” (Southeast Asia) and “non-militaristic security order” (Southern Africa), indicate that the concept of “human security”, though widely diffused, is still not persuasive in the eyes of many people. Finally, the scepticism towards the notion of “human security” or the use of alternative concepts in these regions, where the majority of human security projects funded and/or supported by the UNTFHS were established, might offer a plausible explanation for the decline in the establishment of such projects throughout the last decade (Chart 1).

To translate global normative standards into practice at the local level is a very challenging task, but the opportunities that arise from the diffusion of the human security agenda are numerous. While state actors often cause human insecurities or limit the development or implementation of innovations in relation to the human security agenda, non-state actors are strategically important promoters. The roles that non-state actors can play in helping to build human security, discussed here in relation to just two types of non-state actors, are myriad and have great potential. However, in order for this potential to be realized, more solution-oriented research on human security as well as multi-stakeholder initiatives involving NGOs,



scholars, and other members of civil society should be fostered. Scholars and NGOs need also to articulate human security goals in an interactive and intelligible manner if they want to facilitate the empowerment of individuals and communities and promote the human security agenda more effectively.

A broad view of human security has numerous advantages over a narrower perspective because it creates strong potential for security concerns to be addressed in a holistic and systematic fashion in any sociocultural context.⁸⁷ In addition, the interconnectedness of issues and solutions relating to human security has gone beyond the academic realm and involves a wide range of agents.⁸⁸ A holistic and interdisciplinary framework is therefore ideally suited to addressing human insecurities as it looks at specific people's lives and vulnerabilities and, at the same time, takes their interconnections and the ways they intersect into account.⁸⁹ Governments and non-state actors should therefore stop trying to impose the ideas that they perceive to be "right" about security.⁹⁰ Instead, they must, first and foremost, listen to what local people have to say, understand their perspectives and demands, include them in implementation processes, and promote the human security agenda in ways that are responsive to their hopes and needs. Only then can human security be built effectively.

Notes

1. Suhrke, "Human Security and the Interests of States".
2. Ibid., 268-69.
3. Mary Martin et al., *Routledge Handbook of Human Security*, 3.
4. See, for example, Alter et al., "Nature or Nurture?"; Börzel et al., "Diffusing (Inter-) Regionalism" and "From Europeanisation to Diffusion"; Jetschke et al., "Diffusing Regional Integration".
5. Cf. Wiener, "In the Eye of the Beholder", 213.
6. Syväterä et al., "The Construction and Spread of Global Models".
7. Acharya, "How Ideas Spread".
8. Acharya, "Norm Subsidiarity and Regional Orders".
9. Krüger, "The Global Diffusion of Truth Commissions".
10. I am grateful to my colleagues Caio Moreira, Daniel Peters, Fernando Mattos, and Sassan Gholiagha for providing valuable feedback on an earlier version of this article. The article has also greatly profited from discussions at the Istanbul Human Security Conference 2015 and at the Workshop on "Southern Democracies and the R2P" at the Institute for Theology and Peace in Hamburg. The responsibility for the article remains with me.
11. Peter L. Berger et al., *The Social Construction of Reality*.
12. See UN Trust Fund for Human Security (UNTFHS), "Human Security Handbook", January 2016, http://www.un.org/humansecurity/sites/www.un.org/humansecurity/files/hs_handbook_03.pdf (Accessed 21 February 2017).
13. Gilardi, "Transnational Diffusion"; Strang et al. "Institutional Conditions for Diffusion".
14. Gilardi, "Transnational Diffusion", 454-455.
15. Börzel et al., "From Europeanization to Diffusion"; Deephouse, "Does Isomorphism Legitimate?"; Anita Engels, *Die geteilte Umwelt*; Krüger, "The Global Diffusion of Truth Commissions".
16. Klingler-Vidra et al., "Convergence More or Less", 271.
17. Wiener, "Enacting Meaning-In-Use", 179.
18. Although the concept of human security promoted by the UN was first coined in the 1994 UNDP report, the idea of developing and promoting broader understandings of security was not necessarily new. The process of redefining the international security agenda in more humanitarian terms is part of a larger process that began in the 1970s and 1980s. See, for example, Alt, "Problematizing Life under Biopower", 144; UN General Assembly, *Human Security Report of the Secretary-General*, 13.
19. United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report*.
20. UNTFHS, *Human Security Handbook*.
21. United Nations, *Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development*; Krause, "Critical Perspectives on Human Security", 80.
22. Ibid., 85. The Human Security Network was established through the Lysøen Declaration on Human Security which was signed in 1998 by the former Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lloyd Axworthy, and the former Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Knut Vollebæ.
23. Mary Martin et al., *Routledge Handbook of Human Security*.
24. See, for example, Obuchi, "Opening Remarks", 18-19. The Friends of Human Security was established at the UN in 2006. Co-chaired by Japan and Mexico, it comprised 34 Member States and provided an informal forum for the discussion of the concept of human security, as well as for the exploration of collaborative ways to bring it into the mainstream of UN activities. See Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Friends of Human Security", 9 February 2016, http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/human_secu/friends/ (Accessed 19 August 2016).
25. The human security agenda recognizes the crucial role of non-state actors in promoting and building human security and incorporates roles for them in its strategic plans. See,



- for example, Human Security Unit, *Strategic Plan 2014-2017*; UNTFHS, *Human Security Handbook*.
26. Thomas, "Global Governance, Development and Human Security", 161.
 27. UNTFHS, *Human Security Handbook*; Bombande et al. "Can Human Security Drive Global Governance?", 20 September 2013, <http://theglobalobservatory.org/2013/09/can-human-security-drive-global-governance> (Accessed 21 January 2017); Black, "Civil Society and the Promotion of Human Security".
 28. Krause, "Critical Perspectives on Human Security", 81-82.
 29. See, for example, the Human Security Research Group at Canada's Simon Fraser University, the Ford Institute for Human Security at the University of Pittsburgh, the Master's Degree Program in Human Security at the University of Aarhus, and the PhD Program in Global Governance and Human Security at the University of Massachusetts.
 30. See, for example, the reports issued by the Human Security Report Project, an independent research centre that is affiliated with Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada. Human Security Research Project, "Human Security Research Project", <http://www.hsrgroup.org/> (Accessed 22 March 2017).
 31. Black, "Civil Society"; Breslin et al., "Has the Human Security Agenda Come of Age?"; Gasper, "Human Security Analysis as a Framework"; Gasper et al., "Human Security Thinking in Practice"; Murphy, "Dignity, Human Security, and Global Governance"; Tadjbakhsh, "Human Security Twenty Years On".
 32. Krause, "Critical Perspectives on Human Security", 81.
 33. The data was gathered from the UNTFHS website at <http://www.un.org/humansecurity/trust-fund> (Accessed 6-14 June 2016).
 34. See, for example, Buzan, "A Reductionist, Idealistic Notion"; Chandler, "Human Security"; Ryerson, "Critical Voices and Human Security"; Homolar, "Human Security Benchmarks"; Paris, "Human Security" and "Still an Inscrutable Concept"; McCormack, "Power and Agency".
 35. Even the Human Security Unit has admitted that ambiguities exist around the meaning of human security. See Human Security Unit, *Strategic Plan 2014-2017*, 5. Recently, after numerous other attempts to clarify its meaning, the UNTFHS published a *Human Security Handbook*. The handbook treats human security as a practical and policy-oriented approach to supporting Member States in their efforts to address multiple threats to human security and achieve sustainable development. See UNTFHS, *Human Security Handbook*, 5.
 36. See, for example, Börzel et al., "From Europeanisation to Diffusion"; Grugel, "Democratization and Ideational Diffusion"; Domínguez, "Diffusion of EU Norms in Latin America".
 37. Peter Berger et al., *The Social Construction of Reality*, 49.
 38. Ibid., 66-67.
 39. UNTFHS, "Trust Fund Achievements", <http://www.un.org/humansecurity/trust-fund> (Accessed 17 March 2017); UNTFHS, *Human Security at the United Nations*, 18.
 40. Gómez, "Visiones Alternativas Sobre Seguridad en América Latina".
 41. Sorj, "Security, Human Security and Latin America", 43.
 42. Bonner, "Applying the Concept of 'Human Security'", 17.
 43. Sorj, "Security, Human Security and Latin America", 43.
 44. Bonner, "Applying the Concept".
 45. Ibid., 23; Gómez, "Visiones Alternativas Sobre Seguridad en América Latina," 33.
 46. Sorj, "Security, Human Security and Latin America", 43.
 47. Caballero-Anthony, "Revisioning Human Security in Southeast Asia", 160; Amitav Acharya, *Promoting Human Security*, 17-18.
 48. Caballero-Anthony, "Revisioning Human Security in Southeast Asia", 160-61.
 49. Amitav Acharya, *Promoting Human Security*, 19.



50. Ibid., 21.
51. Caballero-Anthony, "Revisioning Human Security in Southeast Asia", 170-71.
52. Ibid., 178. See also Pitsuwan and Caballero-Anthony, "Human Security in Southeast Asia".
53. Caballero-Anthony, "Revisioning Human Security in Southeast Asia", 168; Pitsuwan and Caballero-Anthony, "Human Security in Southeast Asia", 203.
54. Caballero-Anthony, "Revisioning Human Security in Southeast Asia", 186.
55. Shannon D. Beebe et al., *The Ultimate Weapon*.
56. Ibid., 171-73.
57. Alhaji M.S. Bah, *Toward a Regional Approach*.
58. Ibid., 6-8.
59. Southern African Development Community (SADC), *Southern Africa*. See also Alhaji M.S. Bah, *Toward a Regional Approach*, 6.
60. Shannon D. Beebe et al., *The Ultimate Weapon*, 176-177.
61. The latter is particularly evident in those discourses around the "Responsibility to Protect" (R2P) which favour the narrow definition of human security developed by the Canadian government. In Canada's pursuit of this kind of human security agenda, the country has taken an ad hoc approach to humanitarian issues and has given little attention to many fundamental aspects of security and conflict. See Shannon D. Beebe et al. *The Ultimate Weapon*, 6; Blackwood "Human Security and Corporate Governance", 87.
62. Shannon D. Beebe et al., *The Ultimate Weapon*, 104; 124-25. See also Shamima Ahmed et al. *NGOs in International Politics*; Pitsuwan et al., "Human Security in Southeast Asia".
63. See, for example, Alhaji M. Bah, *Toward a Regional Approach*; Sorj, "Security, Human Security and Latin America"; Amitav Acharya, *Promoting Human Security*; Bonner, "Applying the Concept of 'Human Security'"; Caballero-Anthony, "Human Security in Southeast Asia"; Liotta et al. "Why Human Security?"; Kim et al., "Human Security in Practice".
64. For example, Paris, "Human Security", and King et al., "Rethinking Human Security".
65. Golsorkhi et al. "Analysing, Accounting for and Unmasking Domination", 790.
66. Shannon D. Beebe et al. *The Ultimate Weapon*, 124-25.
67. Shamima Ahmed et al., *NGOs in International Politics*, 54.
68. Sandra J. MacLean et al., *A Decade of Human Security*.
69. Shannon D. Beebe, *The Ultimate Weapon*, 125.
70. Ibid., 104.
71. Schittecatte, "Toward a More Inclusive Global Governance".
72. Caballero-Anthony, "Revisioning Human Security in Southeast Asia", 172; Black, "Civil Society and the Promotion of Human Security".
73. Peter Berger et al., *The Social Construction of Reality*, 112.
74. Golsorkhi et al.; "Analysing, Accounting for and Unmasking Domination", 791.
75. For interesting insights and arguments on the importance of more solution-oriented approaches in social science, see Watts, "Should Social Science be More Solution-Oriented?".
76. Peter Berger et al., *The Social Construction of Reality*.
77. Paulo Freire, *Extensión o Comunicación?*; Bordenave, "Communication of Agricultural Innovations", 138.
78. Shannon D. Beebe et al., *The Ultimate Weapon*, 104.
79. Peter Berger et al., *The Social Construction of Reality*, 37.
80. Paulo Freire, *Extensión o Comunicación?*, 76. Berger and Luckmann define language simply as "a system of vocal signs" (Peter Berger et al. *The Social Construction of Reality*, 36-37). Without restricting this definition to formal languages, I would argue that "speaking the same language" means, above all, interchanging knowledge and experiences in a mutually intelligible way.
81. Tadjbakhsh, "In Defense of the Broad View of Human Security", 46.



82. Sen, "Birth of a Discourse", 26.
83. Gasper, "Human Security: From Definitions", 39.
84. Shannon D. Beebe et al., *The Ultimate Weapon*, 197.
85. Ibid., 172-177. See also, Ian Smillie, "Whose Security?", 27.
86. Professor Alpaslan Özerdem is Professor of Peacebuilding and Co-Director of the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University, UK.
87. Tadjbakhsh, "In Defense of the Broad View of Human Security", 48.
88. Newman, "Human Security and Constructivism", 250.
89. See Gasper, "Human Security: From Definitions", 37.
90. Shannon D. Beebe et al., *The Ultimate Weapon*; Sandra MacLean et al., *A Decade of Human Security*.



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