A New Framework for Measuring Human Security

SECURITY 4 PEACE

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Overview

Human security is a multifaceted concept that encompasses the **protection of people and communities** from critical and pervasive threats to their **lives**, **livelihoods** and **dignity**. It emphasizes the harmful impact that a wide range of factors, such as violence, crime, wars, epidemics, environmental degradation, economic crises, institutional failures, inequality and discrimination, have on our capacity to enjoy rights and achieve our full potential. Human security captures the complex and varied ways

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people experience insecurity in a rapidly changing world where interconnected phenomena can threaten peoples' well-being. It also offers an approach for designing **integral responses** that **protect people's rights**, **empower communities** and make **institutions more responsive** to their needs.

Human security has often been measured using a top-down approach, relying on national-level aggregated data and a limited range of indicators. However, to truly understand how safe (or not) people are, we need data that reflects the daily experiences of individuals and communities in their local contexts, and indicators that consider the various forms of insecurity they face. The framework summarized here offers an innovative way to **measure security 'from below'**, this means, capturing the **multidimensional**, **differentiated**, and **context-specific experiences of security** as experienced by people on the ground.

This framework forms the basis of the **Glocal Human Security Index**[1], a tool that uses survey data to measure security across **nine dimensions** of people's lives. Using quantitative models informed by systems thinking, this innovative index measures the intensity of security or insecurity people experience based on indicators that capture their **vulnerability** to multiple threats, and their **ability to exercise their rights**. The index enables the monitoring and comparison of security situations across different communities and cities while accounting for the unique characteristics of each context and the diverse life experiences of people based on gender, age, residence, and other factors.

Guided by five principles –**people-centred**, **comprehensive**, **rights-based**, **context-specific** and **focused on the most at-risk populations**– the index is informed by over a decade of participatory research on security with communities, youth, women, children, minorities, practitioners and officials from various regions. Through its innovative approach the index generates detailed insights and a **comprehensive picture of security** useful to design and implement strategies that enhance security and community well-being.

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[1] **Glocal** refers to the ability to compare levels of human insecurity *globally* while taking into account the characteristics of different *local* contexts.

What does the Glocal Human Security Index measure?

The index measures levels of security and insecurity in communities, neighbourhoods, or cities across **nine dimensions**. **Security** is defined as people's low exposure to threats that endanger their lives, livelihoods, and dignity, along with reliable access to effective protection mechanisms and the capacity to exercise their rights in all of the following dimensions:

Personal Security

Protection of individuals from physical harm and any form of violence, including interpersonal and community violence, armed conflicts, gender-based violence, state or police violence, violence linked to criminal groups, and self-directed violence such as suicide.

Food Security

Protection of people's reliable access to food and adequate nourishment, which can be threatened by factors such as food shortages, food price inflation, droughts, poverty, and more.

Economic Security

Protection of people's livelihoods from threats such as economic crises, dependence on precarious wages and informal jobs, unemployment, and lack of employment opportunities, among other factors.

Health Security

Protection of people's mental and physical health and their access to quality healthcare services, which can be threatened by epidemics, poor-quality health-care, high cost or shortages of medicines, environmental degradation, malnutrition, and other factors.

Community Security

The capacity of communities to manage conflicts peacefully and serve as support systems for all members, which can be undermined by factors such as racial tensions, racism, fear and mistrust of neighbours, lack of conflict resolution mechanisms, and competition for resources.

Environmental Security

Protection from disasters, environmental threats and hazardous conditions in the built environment, such as neglected infrastructure for essential services like water, electricity, waste disposal and sewage systems.

Political Security

Protection of fundamental rights, including the right to participate in public affairs, which can be threatened by corruption, suppression of political views, nepotism, and a lack of consultation and participation mechanisms, among other factors.

Ontological Security

Protection of people's dignity and sense of social relevance, which can be threatened by discrimination, disrespect, exclusion, neglect of needs, and lack of social connections and support networks.

Technological Security

Access to the benefits of technology and protection from its risks. This security is threatened when people lack internet access, when digitalization, automatization or surveillance technologies are used to harm or discriminate against certain groups, or when digital technologies contribute to mental health issues or facilitate exploitation.

The index uses **three categories of indicators** in each of the nine dimensions to measure people's security:

People's **exposure to threats.**

People's **access to protection mechanisms against those threats**

People's **capacity to exercise their rights**

By considering the imminent risks people face daily and their capacity to respond in their own contexts, the index determines how vulnerable people are to multiple threats that can endanger their life, livelihood and dignity. It also evaluates people's freedom to enjoy their rights as the ultimate demonstration of optimal security levels. This approach recognises that security is not just **freedom from threats**, but also **freedom to fully exercise one's rights.**

The index uses a **people-centred** and **comprehensive approach** to recognize the complexity of individual's security experiences and needs. It acknowledges that threats and situations can simultaneously impact multiple dimensions of human security and that these nine dimensions are interconnected. As demonstrated by the Covid-19 pandemic, this interconnection lies at the heart of contemporary security challenges. For example, an epidemic can have immediate and lasting effects on people's physical and mental health, livelihoods, and access to basic services like education, while also exacerbating inequality, poverty and tensions between citizens and institutions. The index employs a systemic approach to offer a holistic account of these multidimensional and interconnected impacts.

How is the index calculated?

The index uses data collected through surveys conducted with a representative sample of the population within a specific geographical unit（such as a neighbourhood, community, or city）to generate a **human security score**. The survey includes context-specific questions that participants answer based on their personal experiences, covering objective and subjective indicators in each of the nine dimensions and three categories[2]. For instance, to assess exposure to threats, respondents are asked if they have been directly affected by specific threats to their life, livelihood or dignity （objective exposure）, and whether they feel at risk of being affected （subjective exposure）. Regarding access to protection mechanisms, questions include whether essential services[3] are within reach （objective access）, and people's perception of the quality and reliability of these services （subjective assessment）. By incorporating both objective and subjective indicators, the index recognises that security is both an objective reality and a personal perception.

The responses from each participant are translated into numerical scales in a **two-staged process** informed by multidisciplinary research and evidence collected and analysed in each context through qualitative research and systems mapping. In the first stage, the index measures the **intensity of security** or **insecurity** each individual experiences on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 represents severe insecurity and 10 represents an optimal level of security. This **individual score** is the weighted average of values obtained across the nine dimensions, accounting for the greater importance

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[2] The nine dimensions are: Personal, economic, food, community, health, environmental, political, technological and ontological security. And the categories are: 1) exposure to threats, 2) access to protection mechanisms and 3) ability to exercise rights.
[3] For example: police stations, hospitals, schools, community centres and food markets.

that people place on their basic needs（such as access to water, food and shelter）and protection from physical threats to their lives[4].

Scale of Security / Insecurity Intensity Calculated by the Index
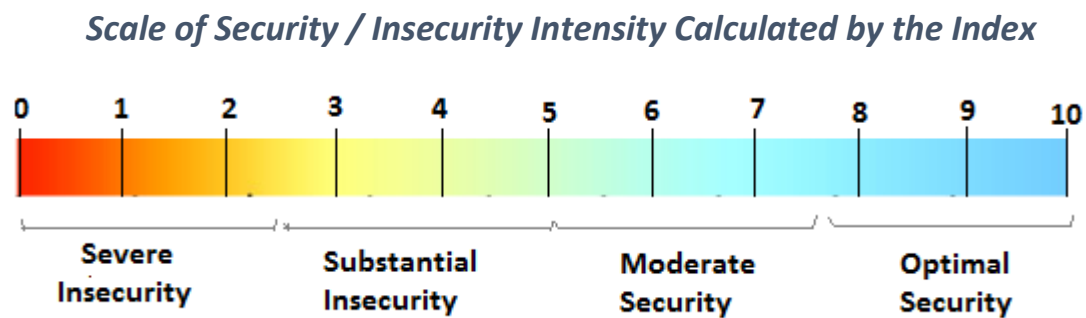
To calculate the individual scores a **general set of 55 indicators is adapted to each context** to reflect the unique characteristics of each community and city. This adaptation is based on **Rapid Human Security Appraisals[5]** and **systems mapping,** which help identify how threats and situations impact different dimensions of human security in each context. This step is crucial as it ensures that human security levels can be compared across different contexts while considering the particularities of each community and city.

The second stage in the process is to generate a **global score** for each neighbourhood, community or city based on the **number of people experiencing insecurity** and the **intensity of that insecurity.** This means that the higher the percentage of the population experiencing insecurity and the greater the intensity of that insecurity, the lower the global human security score will be for that neighbourhood, community, or city.

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[4] Research shows that although people value their social, economic and psychological needs differently depending on their context, culture and personality traits; they consistently prioritise their subsistence and protection from physical harm across various social contexts.
[5] This is a qualitative methodology used to assess local security conditions with the inputs of key local actors such as residents and providers of key services and secondary data.

This two-staged approach allows the index to identify variations in security levels among different groups (by gender, age, residence, ethnicity, etc.) and highlight vulnerable sectors of the population experiencing insecurity. The index recognises that security and insecurity are experienced differently by everyone, even within the same community or city, depending on various individual and social factors. It provides insights not only into who is at risk, but also the nature of the insecurity they face and which dimensions need be addressed to improve security for them, their community and city.

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The index is a tool designed to help policy-makers, practitioners, civil society organisations, development agencies, and citizens assess the impact of policies and programmes on people's lives; identify priority issues, areas, or groups; track changes in security conditions in communities and cities; and advocate for security responses that better protect people's rights.

Steps to Generate the Index

Rapid Human Security Appraisals & Systems Mapping

Identification of local dynamics of human insecurity

1

Adapting global indicators to local context

Set of indicators are adjusted to reflect the characteristics of each context

2

Glocal* Human Security Index

3

Data Collection

Face-to-face surveys are applied in selected areas

4

Producing Scores

Individual scores are calculated based on weighted averages in 9 dimensions & a global score for geographical units based on incidence and intensity of insecurity experienced by the population

5

Validating, Analysing and Reporting Results

Technical check of data and scores and analysis with local actors to identify action proposals

*The Index compares levels of human security **globally** while taking into account the characteristics of **local** contexts.

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