

Human Security and International Contributions by Civil Engineering

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Background of "human security": From a report by the Commission on Human Security

In activities for international contributions, there has been a shift away from Cold War era demands centered on state security and economic growth; and there is now an increasing focus on ensuring safety in the midst of crises and other pressing demands, going beyond issues of an optimistic nature which are based on ensuring equity in the midst of growth, such as basic human needs and human development. People displaced by crises of local conflicts, refugees placed in vulnerable situations during periods of reconstruction after conflicts or disasters, unemployed persons, and the poor are chronically faced with risks and uncertainties; and it is increasingly recognized that their needs must be addressed directly.

In a 2003 report, the Commission on Human Security stated that "The international community urgently needs a new paradigm of security." In the past, it was thought that national governments held the exclusive authority and means to protect their citizens, and that order and peace could be maintained by establishing and expanding state power and state security. But in the 21st century, although the state is still positioned as the primary entity to provide safety for people, national governments are often unable to fulfill

their responsibility to provide safety in the face of risks such as civil war and poverty. They may even become a source of threats to the safety of their own people. The concept of state security has only an indirect relationship to the safety of people living in those regions. Therefore, according to this report, it is necessary to shift the attention away from state security to the safety of people, or "human security."

Human security complements state security in four ways. First, it focuses on the individual and society rather than the state. Second, threats to people's security include factors that have not necessarily been classified as threats to state security. Third, it involves a wide range of actors besides national governments. And fourth, it goes beyond merely providing protection and requires that people be empowered so that they can protect themselves.

Human security is a very broad security concept, but it particularly emphasizes protecting people from downside risks (risks of a worsening situation), capacity-building to enable people to cope with problems, and developing the latent capabilities of individuals and communities so that they can make well-informed choices and take action on their own behalf.

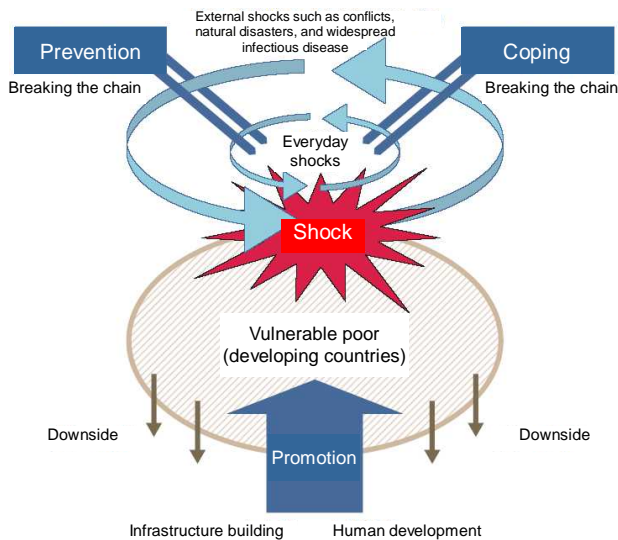


Fig. 1. Directions for aid and the vicious cycle of poverty and risk (Source: Poverty Reduction and Human Security, JICA 2005)

What does it mean to focus on people?

The concept of human security needs to be embodied in actual international contributions. One way to identify the social role that Japan's civil engineers and civil engineering industry should play in international contributions is to anticipate the risks that people face in relation to specialized fields of civil engineering, based on the goal of human security. For example, to make contributions using Japan's disaster reduction technologies, one approach would be to determine the disaster risks in advance through hazard mapping and risk mapping; evaluate factors such as the anticipated scale of damage, geographical distribution, difficulty of evacuation, and potential for fires; and take measures in advance to prevent major damage, particularly in regions inhabited by vulnerable poor households.

As the report by the Commission on Human Security states, it is important to focus on people. To support this focus, it is necessary to take a comprehensive view of the

risks that people face and to look at more varied, changing risks. We must use a broad and comprehensive approach to identify the groups of people who are most exposed to risks, as well as the types of downside risks that they face.



Photo 1. A meeting of Muslim and Tamil residents in a reconstructed housing village in Trincomalee. (June 2005, JICA, photo by the author)



Photo 2. An elementary school destroyed by the tsunami along the coast in Ampara, eastern Sri Lanka. This school, located less than 200 meters from the coast, is expected to be relocated. (January 2005, photo by the author)

For example, the Tamil and Muslim people who were victims of the tsunami disaster in northeastern Sri Lanka already faced the reality of losing their homes and property because of evacuation related to civil war and ethnic conflict, even before the crisis of loss of life and property in the tsunami disaster, which caused further deterioration in an already unstable infrastructure of daily life. If

nothing is done about this situation, there is a downside risk that the situation could become even worse, leading to dissatisfaction and distrust of the central government and the rekindling of ethnic conflicts, in addition to the harsh conditions of poverty. In providing support for reconstruction in this region, it is essential to consider ways to overcome ethnic conflicts, in addition to disaster reduction and other considerations for regional reconstruction.

In June, about six months after the tsunami disaster, I visited Trincomalee in northeastern Sri Lanka. Regarding the allocation of land for relocation of homes, the people are clearly dissatisfied that land has not been granted as promised to refugees who have been internally displaced because of the civil war, and there has been a backlash against plans that would have Muslims and Tamils living together in the same planned housing reconstruction sites. Also, in regions where many residents depend on fishing for their livelihood, it is difficult for them to get back to earning a living if their housing is located far away from fishing areas. The problems faced by tsunami victims cannot be solved by an approach that considers housing and the fishing industry as separate issues. The victims' psychological concerns and trauma are additional factors that cannot be separated from housing and livelihood issues. Because of the nature of these problems, they cannot be resolved through unilateral support by the government alone. The residents themselves must also take an active role in reconstruction, including participation, thinking, discussion, and consensus building; and this will influence the success and sustainability of

reconstruction.

Support for peace building and disaster recovery includes the provision of support for infrastructure restoration, reconstruction of housing and cities, and industrial revival; and civil engineers are expected to play an important role as overall coordinators at the center of reconstruction planning. The example I mentioned involves ethnic conflicts, which are a political problem. It is important first of all to determine an overall picture of the risks that people face, and then on that basis, to ascertain what kinds of support are needed and what kinds of contributions can be made.