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Article

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ADVANCING SECURITY DISCOURSE THROUGH CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH HUMAN SECURITY

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Abstract

The monumental rate at which lives are lost daily in a more fragile and crises-torn Global System has turned a new leave for growing concerns of a new orthodoxy that arose in security studies. This complements the old thought of the state-centric traditionalism through the debate that sparked intellectual controversy on security between the narrow school and their counterparts from the broad school. For broadened analytical knowledge, this paper investigated why security studies had required a critical engagement with the human security paradigm, as against traditionalists' claims called the narrow school in order to build a strong, virile state through research and policy reframing. Building on key theoretical explorations, in particular those of Newman, (2022) and Hama, (2017), a debate between these two schools had grown dissention on why human security should be a material object in the state. According to the contemporaries, if this becomes attainable, the institutionalization and operationalization of human security at all levels in governance will be valuably justifying. The people-centric approaches cited the protracted humanitarian crises in Gaza, Sudan, and the Ukraine, aside the migration and boarder crises and the ones generated by the COVID-19, Ebola and other crises in the health sector as paramount issues on the global landscape, which need a people-centric approach. As a theoretical-empirical paper, that synthesizes existing scholarship and recent policy/field reports for an updated analytic and policy toolkit on human security, the paper employed the descriptive-exploratory methods, combined with comparative political analysis grounded on relevant literature on security. This provided balanced report that are value free and analytically objective. Findings indicated that human security is a new orthodoxy that embraces the

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people-centric approaches with individuals as referent objects of the state. This contradicts the narrow-based thinking that has become inadequate if not obsolete in deepening the understanding of the notion of security that justified state security as paramount and total. The study concluded that, for broadened knowledge and deepened insights to security, both the state-centric and the people-centric approach analyses should be embraced for a context-sensitive and multi-purpose study objective that are mutually exclusive.

Keywords: Security, Human Security, Traditional approaches, Non-traditional approaches, Narrow-Based Theory, Broad-Based Theory, Critical Engagement, Intellectual Debate.

Introduction

Traditionally, security had been conceived primarily in terms of security of states from military attacks by other states. This expression, coming from Hawre Hasan Hama in his analysis of state security, societal security and human security, was a comparative survey of meanings to the terms security and human security with a new paradigm of 'human security'. The conception knocked on human security as a material project for national security (Hama, 2017). According to him, revitalizing security studies would mean embarking on critical engagement with the human security paradigm that both retains its normative emphasis on individuals and adapts its methods for policy traction in contemporary crises analysis. (Hama, 2017; Easton, 2025). Newman, (2022), observes that, a pragmatic critical approach to human security as both normative framework and diagnostic tool is that 'capable of operationalizing and institutionalizing security for context duality. Newman's later work on human security and pandemic responses infers analytical clarity combined with institutional realism leading to increases in policy resonance. (Newman, 2022; Hama, 2017; Tanaka, 2015; Waever, 2012; Buzan, 2000).

Statement of the Problem

This research explored on the intellectual debate between the state-centric paradigm and the human security thinkers on the one side and on the other, the narrow school scholars and their broad counterparts including the traditional and non-traditional lenses to human security. The idea of critical engagement, which is about what to preserve and what to adapt, is that which revolves around human security as both normative framework and diagnostic tool that can be operationalized through mixed methods, multi-scalar governance, and targeted advocacy. Thus, the study interrogates "Critical engagements with human security in advancing security discourse for it to retain its normative value while becoming more analytically and practically useful for rigorous underpinning (Newman, 2022). Therefore, this study synthesizes the core critiques and defenses of human security, by drawing on Hawre Hama's institutional critique and Edward Newman's articulation of the concept of political sociology with a synthetic contemporary case material (Newman, 2022; Hama, 2017; Tow, 2001).

Methodology

As a theoretical-empirical paper, that synthesizes existing scholarship and recent policy/field reports for an updated analytic and policy toolkit on human security, the paper employed the descriptive-exploratory methods combined with a comparative political survey analysis grounded on relevant literature on security and human security that are balanced and objective.

Literature review and theoretical framework

Human Security: A Historical Emergence

Although, narratives of human security has been widely adopted and adapted within the academic and policy communities (Christie, 2010; Tanaka, 2015). It has attracted open discourse on the terminology and its essence for human protection. This arguably has arisen through the dual- paradigm on the state-centric conception and uses of security, which is the military and 'traditional-based' and its human-face, that centers on the 'individual' and the direct threats to his/her existence on "Wellbeing, Want, Rights and Freedom", aside violent attacks (Kerr, 2013; Chandler, 2008; 2010). Parr and Messineo, (2012), suggests that "While human security is now used as a general term with a wide range of meanings in many contexts from domestic violence to migration, it originated in many debates about 'collective security' around the end of the cold war. Human security as a contemporary approach to governance has played a significant role in the global development discourse since the term was introduced in the 1994 Human Development Report for the diversification of thinking approach to security in global governance. The United Nations through the 1994 UNDP Report established the concept of human security to increase attention and resources on development and to assist the vulnerable people who are victims of vicious internal conflicts (Kerr, 2013). The political objective was to shift financial and human resources away from the traditional security agenda on win-win grounds that this was good for the people in the Global South and good for the security of the Global North (Kerr, 2013). Today in the post-cold war era, the concept has gone viral and wide as a new orthodoxy for keeping the world safe and together from ashes of perils to human life.

A good illustration here was the case of Japan, where the Development Cooperation Charter has seen human security as "the guiding principle that lies at the foundation of Japan's development cooperation" (Tanaka, 2015; Shepherd 2013; Newman, 2010). Chandler (2008) says, "The debate over human security approaches appears to have changed substantially since the 1990s". In the 1990s debate, the advocates of human security posed a radical challenge to the state-based frameworks of traditional security approaches. In the year 2000s, the radicals are on the other side, critiquing human security as the ideological tool of bio-political, neo-liberal global governance. Both approaches counter pose human security to state-based frameworks. Both posit the discourse as the project of new global agency. For liberal advocates, this is global civil society; and for radical post-structuralists and critical realists, this is US hegemony or neo-liberal Empire. They see in it, the centrality of the struggle between Realist, traditional, state-based, interest-based, approaches and new, Liberal cosmopolitan, de-territorialized, value-based approaches, which focus on individual human needs. Pauline Kerr in Collins (2013: 104), posits, "human security as an example of the deepening and broadening of security, believed to have taken place for use since the end of the cold war". To him, "human security takes the individual as the referent object and therefore challenges the traditional view that the state is the referent object". Kerr sums that human security is a concept saying that individuals rather than states, as the traditional view prescribes, are the referent object of security or the entity to be protected in the state (Kerr in Collins, 2013: 104).

Human security lays claim to a spectrum of arguments by different advocates or group of scholars with divers of opinions on what constitutes threats to human lives. They raise such questions as: Is human security just security from wants, freedom and good governance and/or do those threats include diseases and natural disasters like volcanic

eruptions, floods (as has been recorded in Mexico and Guatemala), Tsunami (as in 2012 Japan)? Can violent attacks trigger threats, arising from maladministration rights abuses? The imperative of prioritizing or even securitizing human needs in the context of state protection gingered widening the philosophy human security theory. Efforts to clear all these misconceptions and ambiguities in scholarships by examining the views of all the advocates constitute our object to study in this aspect of the work (Kerr 2013; Chandler 2008; 2010). According to Holliday and Howe (2011) and others, Human Security (HS) is an international security theory which experienced global proliferation in the aftermath of the cold war and which attempts to comprehensively address and widen present day security problems and challenges. It is a response to critical intellectual reflections on international politics and by extension the global security networks, how it can be enhanced, expanded and for what purpose. The HS approach and method is a reflection of significant developments in the international system like the relocation of violent conflicts from the inter- to the intra-state level, the proliferation of human rights norms and the growing sensitivity of states to the feedback and critique of the global community, including both other states and the civil society (Gracious, 2008; Holliday and Howe, 2011; Gomez and Gasper, 2013; Breslin, 2014).

These scholars noted with concern about the dimension of violent conflicts in the world today, particularly, those going on in The Democratic Republic of the Congo with the Rwanda-Backed M23 rebellion, the Sudan worsening crises, the Rohingya conflict, the Gaza conflict, the war between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the ones between Thailand and Cambodia and India and Pakistan, are testimonies for human security crusade. These conflicts and wars, some of which are more internally-based rather than between states have resulted in humanitarian crises that have subjected vulnerable people to human rights abuses, worsening economic conditions, hunger and starvation, homelessness, deprivation and other societal dangers. This has resulted in the louder voices calling for concerns for human security discourses. This has put a searchlight and resort to use of force by the international community on the need for the application of 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P) (Holiday, 2011; Newman, 2022). R2P is a norm in the context of International Humanitarian Law that puts it to the states to protect their own citizens from violence and its and other menace and where there is a failure to do so, the international community has an obligation doing that for them (Glacious, 2008; Newman, 2022). With no sight to ending of wars and the enormous internally-displaced crises generated in countries, Kofi Annan, the former United Nations Secretary General in 2005 compelled it upon the General Assembly not just to consider debate on the R2P, but to consider implementing its use as a force to protecting human lives from unlimited violence. In 2011, a crusade intervention in the internal crisis in Libya, as was the case in Iraq in 1993 to quell internal insurrections on the account of RTP applications by North Atlantic Organization (NATO) led by the United States of America and Britain Newman, 2017). In broad terms, Newman asserted that if human security is all about "freedom from want" and "freedom from fear". its ethical values must be upheld by nations to protect the individuals in their territories from dangers of perils and wars. He remarked, that, this phenomenon is normative because it holds that there are ethical responsibilities to re-orient, redirect and refocus or even rebrand security around the "individual" in line with world widely recognizable standards of human rights and governance, and, it is empirical as its applications are being subjected to scientific analysis through intellectual discourses (Breslin, 2014; Newman 2017).

Research claimed that human security extends downwards “to the security of groups and individuals;”, upward, “to the security of international systems;” horizontally, from military security “to political, economic, social, environmental and all sorts (Rothschild 1995). All these inform the efficacy of the centrality of HS as a new orthodoxy in human security theory/school (Rothschild, 1995; Par et. Al, 2012). The concept of human security was conceived as an extension of the old tradition in the context of a broader security scholarship . Indeed, older studies and international policy landmarks – particularly the Palme Commission and the Brundtland Commission – paved the road for the emergence of human security thought. It problematized the conventional normative view and encouraged new thinking by extending it to feminist and gender conceptions, which argued that conditions of security and insecurity are indivisible from masculine power structures and gendered institutions. The changing context brought an increased opportunity to address a more complex nontraditional security agenda – including civil war and state failures, environmental degradation, HIV/AIDS – at the international level, within a wider conception of peace and security. (Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues 1982; Buzan, 1983; Ullman, 1983; Mendlovitz 1975; Brundtland Commission, 1987; Newman, 2010; Newman, 2010; Enloe, 2014).

Apart, globalization stimulated this broadening discourse, through the deregulation and marketization of national economies, in the context of networks of international rules and standards, which has encouraged security discourse expansion and brought social and economic insecurities in the destabilized impact of market disruptions, especially in the Global South like Africa. Thomas, (2002) and Newman, (2010) indeed had linked the emergence of the human security concept with the emerging “instability arising from the application of the neoliberal development vision” The Normative changes have underpinned and resulted from these developments, bringing about expectations and standards human rights in governance (Newman, 2010). The growing prominence of transnational norms is extending political discourse beyond the territorial scope of the state; caving in to internationalization of ethical standards as they increasingly impinge upon “national” laws and norms (Newman, 2010). In the context of various political, social, and technological processes, the boundary between the “national” and “international” is therefore increasingly blurred in a number of areas relating to governance and socioeconomic organization (Newman 2010). As governance and human rights, issues have arguably become internationalized; the cumulative effect is that the human needs and rights that underpin human security are slowly becoming factored into decision-making relating to security issues on the global space (Newman 2010). From the bottom up, as people’s awareness and expectations of rights countrywide is, so demonstrably having an impact, expectations and attitudes on governance and its state institutions expressed and re-consolidated in many different forms (Newman 2010).

Another argument, which arose in contemporary studies, was the view that post-Westphalian world provided where norms of inviolable and equal state sovereignty did not rest solely on the individual states. This suggests that states are no longer the sole or even the most important actors in certain areas of international politics. It means states cannot be seen to assume viable or autonomous agentic role of security where insecurity and conflict are primarily characterized by civil war, internal insurrections, banditry and insurgency. Crises of violence resulting in humanitarian quagmires on the international system, and pinned on the incidences of governance and leadership failures and other internal compromises as we have in Nigeria’s banditry and insurgency cases, as well as the political

interregnum in Guinea Bissau and Guinea Conakry in West Africa,, breaking down domestic efforts to guarantee order and justice, the international community through the security council resolutions could re-visit the norm on Responsibility to Protect for international peace, order and justice to be guaranteed (Newman 2010). The international discourse of democracy, information technology, the acknowledgement of the contributions of civil society to domestic and international politics are pointing evidences to the evolving and unfolding international pragmatism on human rights advocacy for discourse in human security to be sustained (Newman 2010). The Jubilee movement working for debt relief, the movements for the Ottawa Convention banning landmines and in the International Criminal Court, and the opposition to the draft Multilateral Agreement on Investments have all justified necessity for the diversification of security dilemma and broad prism on security studies (Newman 2010). Interest in human security is therefore a response to perceived emerging human security threats against vulnerable individuals, and, if this trend is to be addressed, advancing discourses on security studies to human security is imperative and justifying (Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues 1982; Buzan, 1983; Ullman, 1983; Mendlovitz 1975; Brundtland Commission, 1987; Newman, 2010; Newman, 2010; Enloe, 2014).

However, in a negative sense, certain institutions or values – such as the neoliberal market – appear increasingly in tension with human security. A vocal body of opponents argues that globalization, resulting from technological revolution and emancipation and presumed pivotal among the fundamentals, de-empowers weaker communities, threatens indigenous economic practices, perpetuates patriarchal domination, and results in social inequality heralding emancipation from oppressive power structures and necessitating human security impulses, both in academia and socio-political communities (Thomas and Wilkin 1999: 3). As Roland Paris puts it, human security is the latest in a long line of neologisms- including common security, global security, cooperative and comprehensive security, which encourage policymakers and scholars to think about international security as something more than the military defense of a country's territorial integrity and national government (Paris 2001). In spite of these contrasting views and the multifarious and multidimensional definitions of HS, most formulations still and continue to emphasize the welfare of the ordinary people as germane in HS (Paris 2001). Canada, Norway, and other governmental and non-governmental bodies that have become vocal in the orthodoxy of HS and its promotion and institutionalization and operationalization, have helped to make the concept more or less become an interdisciplinary study in most western and world class universities (Paris 2001; Newman 2010).

Justifications for Human Security Discourse and the Need for Common Ground

The body of knowledge as a critical and astute approach to the pursuit of global security and peace, by reinventing human society in a safer environment, through collectivist-principles, resonates and triggers the narrow school and the broad school debate. This thought, which invents a new approach actually stresses the significance of the individual as the fundamental part of each social unit and calls for a concern for the safety of individuals, who constitute the largest moral human community. This inspired advocates of the schools to engage in an intellectual battle that spurs discountenance among major contemporaries; warranting the need for a common ground on what human security in international relations and diplomacy should be (Akinboye and Ottoh, 2007:59; Holliday and Howe, 2011; Kerr, 2013). Proponents of the narrow such as Mack, (2004) have argued the threat of political violence and internal banditry to people by the state or any other organized political actor

should be the bedrock for human security (HS). This falls in line with the view shared by the Human Security Center with discourse on human security seen as ‘the protection of individuals and their communities’ from war and other forms of violence (Human Security Centre, 2005; Kerr, 2013; Mack, 2004). While Mack and his colleagues acknowledge that there exist other threats apart from systemic violence, their obsession has been on conceptual clarity and analytical rigor, which pose threats of violence, e.g. violence triggered by poverty, starvation and poor governance (Mack, 2004: 367). For Mack, there is advocacy value in expanding the security agenda to include natural disasters, disease contagions/attacks; psychological trauma and many more is imperative and meaningful. Human security discourse was therefore extended to freedom from fear or use of political violence including displacement of people from their place of abode and/or source of living, bodily attacks, killing and deprivation of rights on participatory governance through right to vote and to be voted for in elections (Mack, 2004: 367; Sevic, 2008). Election rigging and the practice of “democracy of the stomach by looting politicians” for personal enrichments as established in the just concluded election failures in Guinea Bisau are justifying reasons for advancing security discourse with critical engagement with human security (Omotosho, 2025; Easton, 2025). Several analytic moves show how a critical human security project advances security studies. These include but not limited to:

- i. Re-situating referent objects and causal chains by which human security pushes analysis from abstract notions of state survival to concrete chains linking structural deficits like (poverty, exclusion), governance failures, and immediate threats to daily life. This reorientation, according to experts, improves explanation and points to interventions at multiple causal junctures, e.g. Responsibility to Protect (RTP).
- ii. Multi-sectoral diagnosis and response logic for human security lens to legitimize multi-sector responses (health, food, protection, livelihoods) and demands interoperability across ministries and agencies. This logic is necessary in the Sahel and pandemic contexts, where single-sector policies fail.
- iii. Attention to institutions and discursive struggle. By advancing human security to engaging with the institutional incentives, that favor state security like budgetary allocations, military influence, and international donor priorities. These narratives securitize or depoliticize human threats, anchoring national boundaries’ security on human security. Hama’s work points to the need for discourse analysis and institutional strategy to shift priorities in practice.
- iv. Operational metrics without de-politicization. One common critique is that operationalizing human security strips it of critique. A critical engagement adopts measurable indicators such as (food security, displacement rates, access to services) while explicitly linking them to power relations and policy choices, preserving normative critique within an evidence base suitable for policymakers (Gomez and Gasper, 2013; Christou, 2014; Hama, 2017).

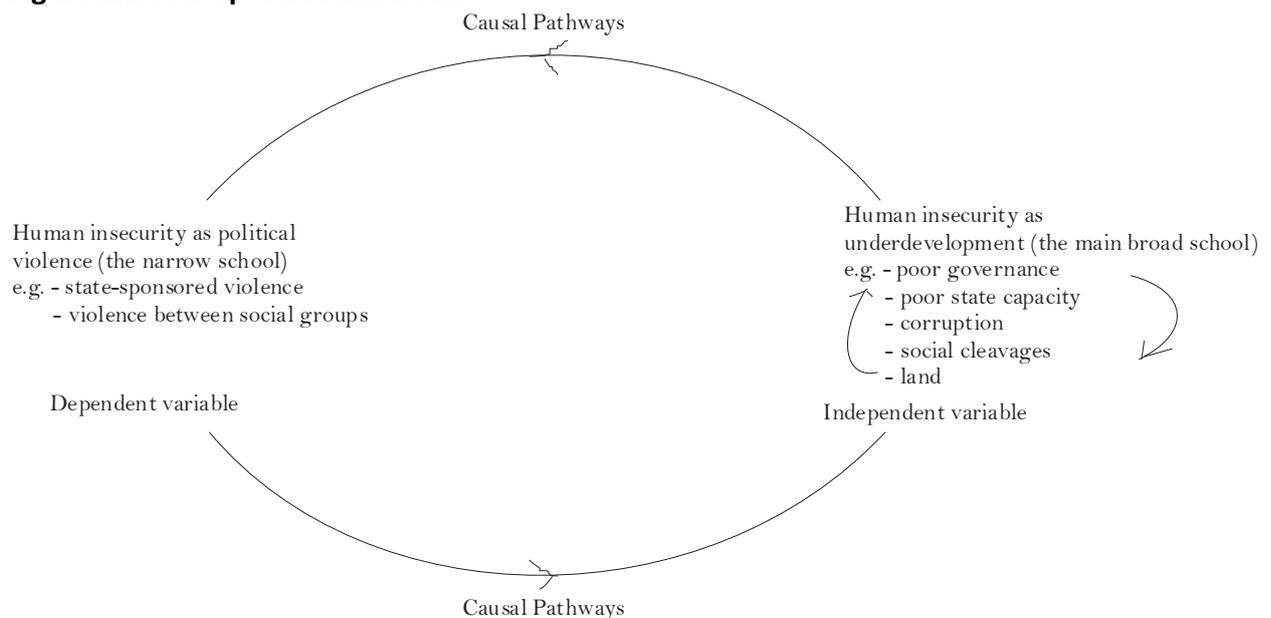
On the broad plane, according to its own proponents, HS transcends mere concern for a threat of political violence to individuals. It is both freedom from fear and want. This position is credited to Human Development Report by UNDP (Bellamy et al., 2002; Kerr, 2013; Newman, 2010; Service, 2008; Thomas, 2000: 114). The critical broad scholars on HS suggest that freedom from Want and other “critical life threatening catastrophes” which are caused by problems of underdevelopment in South-South like The Gambia underscore why engagements with human security become paramount. Notwithstanding, if those threats are rooted in anthropogenic activities and/or natural events outside or within the shores of

any nation. They can be direct or structural, discreet or apparent. To them, HS is principally human-centered and its focus is on the people and their communities. (Kerr, 2013; 107) posits it as “security orientated”, in that its focus is on freedom from fear, danger and other critical life threatening issues. In Kerr (2013, 107), Thakur, however attempts to install some limitations to the broad schools by referring to life-threatening situations culminating from crises and by situating those not in the broader development agenda like that proposed by Alkiri. According to him, the objective of human security is ‘to protect the vital core of all human lives in ways that advance human freedoms and human fulfillments’. Thakur posits that, “these broad conceptualizations on the grounds that, though, analytical rigor may be lost, there is inherent value in having inclusive definitions. For Paris, (2001) human security encompasses all forms of abuses up to genocide. This view has led to further critiques by skeptics and anti-behaviorist scholars like Barry Buzan, who critique human security as problematic in the context of international security thought, rendering the entire exercise of human security orthodoxy defense an abstract than empirical (Acharya 2008; Buzan, 2001; Kerr, 2013; Paris, 2001; Thakur and Newman, 2004). These antagonisms cause some limitations for the emphasis on the critical engagements emphasis human security (Kerr, 2013, 109).

Nonetheless, in spite of the differing opinions on the normative mainstream and critical security study, the fact still remains that, none can be discountenanced as they are mutually relevant for in depth and critical investigative research (Kerr, 2013).

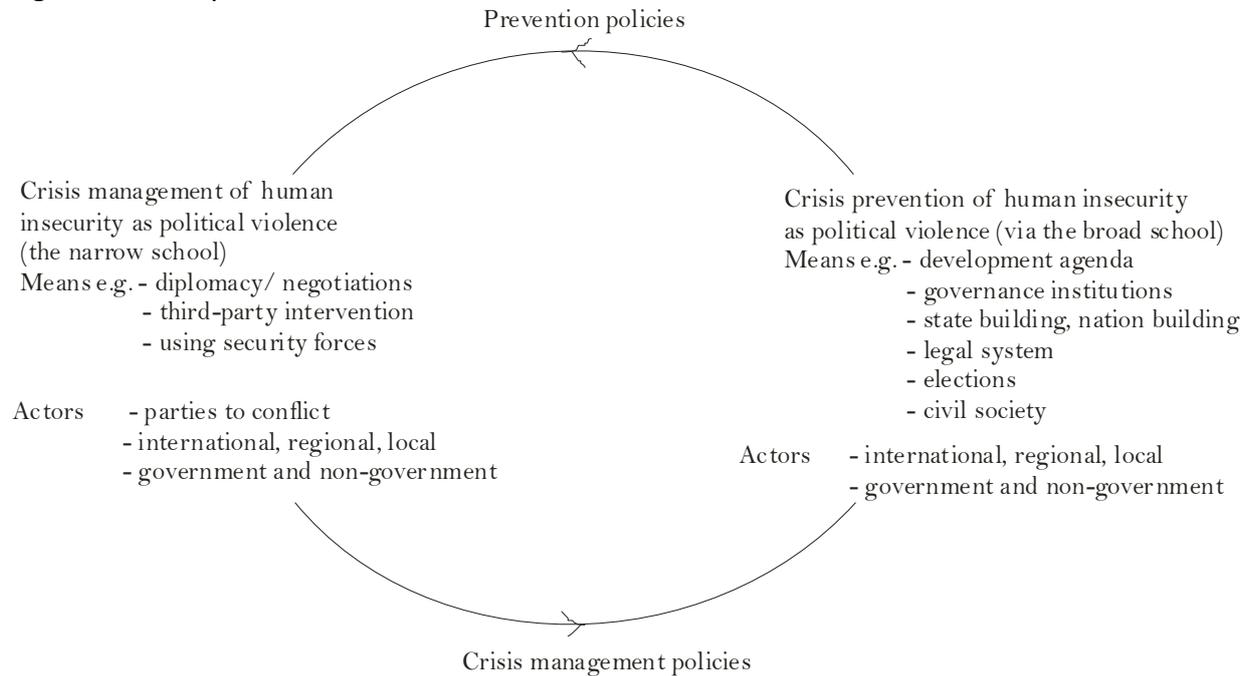
Figures 1.1 and 1.2 below explain the causal variables and the preventive variables to human security: The diagrams are useful for policymakers and academicians to understand how to underpin variables causing insecurity in the states and what variables are considered fundamental to prevent insecurity through advancing discourse on security with critical engagements with human security in contemporary political analysis: Figure 1.1 – Conceptual Frameworks and Fig. 1.2 – Policy Frameworks for the diagrammatic/graphical overlapping explanations of both the conceptual and policy frameworks of human insecurity.

Figure 1.1 Conceptual Frameworks



Source: (Kerr 2013,109)

Figure 1.2 Policy framework



Source: (Kerr 2013,110)

Conclusion

This study delved on human security discourses built around individuals' well-being, incorporating economic, health, environmental, and political threats against it. Its principal strength is normative breadth linking human rights, development, and protection but that breadth was not without its critique. According to the study, conceptual indeterminacy risks policy diffusion and co-optation. Scholars such as Newman, (2022) have argued that reconciling the critical aspirations of human security with political realities requires attending to political incentives and institutional constraints that deprive people their basic constitutional rights and protections rather than treating security on the surface is not just purely ethically rhetorical but outmoded. Study in security ought to be re-fashioned and re-packaged to meet present security challenges currently experienced in the world. Hama, (2017) offered a useful corrective measure by juxtaposing state, societal, and human security traditions and interrogating the institutional logics that privilege state security in policymaking. He demonstrated in his thesis that without engaging the institutional and discursive mechanisms that underwrite state priorities, human security remains marginalized in practice. This underscored the need for methodological pluralism by combining normative argumentation with institutional and discourse analysis if human security is to inform real-world policy. Therefore, both the traditional and the contemporary studies are useful and none is to be discountenanced but mutually exclusive, if security challenges in the states and across the global community is to be adequately.

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