Human (In)Security in South Asia

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ABSTRACT

South Asia hosts almost a quarter of the world's population. Despite achieving consistent economic growth, the region is marked by dense poverty and human deprivation. In this article, I discuss the issue of human security and argue that governments of the region need to focus on burgeoning nontraditional security threats to promote well-being of the people and improve the quality of their lives by investing resources in human development and implementing the constitutional provisions needed to protect fundamental human rights and dignity. In order to address political-economic-social-cultural disparities and achieve prosperity, the onus is far more on the countries themselves to prioritize the human security agenda through mutual collaboration.
Key Words:

Introduction

South Asia is among the most populous regions of the world comprising almost a quarter of the world's total population (Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Centre, 2015). Despite achieving consistent impressive economic growth over the last several years and possessing huge potential for regional development and prosperity, the region is marked by severe political, economic, social, and cultural inequalities. Countries in the region are categorized as low or low-middle income countries that produce almost three percent of the global gross domestic product (Chand, 2014; Dutt & Bansal, 2012; Karim, 2014). The general perception is that political and economic policies of the governments in the region continue to draw largely on the traditional state-centric security paradigm to channel the bulk of their resources for state security while paying minimal attention to human development; a policy that contributes to the prevalence of dense poverty and deprivation in the region.

In this article, I discuss the issue of security by focusing on countries in South Asia, many of which, at their inception, actually had constitutions that were closer to or modeled on the principles of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)—unlike the constitutions of many established Western democracies. With provisions of fundamental human rights in their constitutions, it becomes particularly important to *examine* how the countries in the region are dealing with the question of security. Following up on the human rights provisions, I look at the question of security by examining two main security paradigms: state security and human security. I am particularly interested in what kind of resources are being put in state security agenda vs. people security agenda. Within the region of South Asia, I mainly focus on larger states for which data are available. I argue that to address alarming human disparities and to improve the

living conditions of people in the region, the onus is far more on the countries themselves to prioritize human security agenda through mutual collaboration while resolving or setting aside longstanding traditional political disputes.

Human Freedom, Human Security, and the United Nations

On January 6, 2016 the world observed the 75th anniversary of the *Four Freedoms Speech* of Franklin D. Roosevelt (President of the United States) who in his State of the Union Address on January 6, 1941, proposed the following four essential universal freedoms for global peace and security:

> The first is freedom of speech and expression—everywhere in the world.
> The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way—everywhere in the world.
> The third is freedom from want—which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants—everywhere in the world.
> The fourth is freedom from fear—which, translated into world terms, means a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor—anywhere in the world (Voices of Democracy: The U.S. Oratory Project, para. 83-86).

The four universal freedoms were later incorporated as foundational principles in the United Nations (UN) Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 (https://fdrlibrary.org/four-freedoms), and in the 1990s, they also became the core components of the human security paradigm.

The concept of human security attracted global attention in 1994 when it was discussed in the Annual Human Development Report produced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The report (UNDP, 1994) highlighted the following four core characteristics of human security:

  i. Human security is a *universal* concern.
 ii. The components of human security are *interdependent*.
iii. Human security is easier to *ensure through early prevention* than later intervention.
 iv. Human security is *people-centred*. (pp. 22-23)

The report further went on to describe two main components of human security, including protection of people from chronic threats, and sudden disruptions in their everyday lives. Although freedom from want and freedom from fear have been considered the core aspects of human security by the UN, the first aspect has received more attention than the later (UNDP, 1994). In urging the states to shift the focus of security from the traditional narrow defined paradigm of state centric security to the more inclusive concept of human security, the report

highlighted seven major types of human security, including economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security.

In January 2001, the UN Commission on Human Security (CHS), established under the co-chairmanship of Sadako Ogata and Amartya Sen, was mandated to develop strategies and framework to better understand and implement the concept of human security (United Nations Human Security Unit, 2009, 2012). In 2003, the Commission published the report *Human Security Now* that defined human security as:

> …to protect the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfilment. Human security means protecting fundamental freedoms—freedoms that are the essence of life. It means protecting people from critical (severe) and pervasive (widespread) threats and situations. It means using processes that build on people's strengths and aspirations. It means creating political, social, environmental, economic, military and cultural systems that together give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood and dignity. (p. 4)

Subsequently, in May 2004, the Human Security Unit was established to manage the UN Trust Fund for Human Security (UNTFHS) and develop practical tools in collaboration with stakeholders to apply human security concepts into practice. The UNTFHS has been financing different projects to promote the agenda of human security and protect vulnerable people across the world. (For a brief of human security projects sponsored by the UNTFHS in different South Asian countries, please see http://www.un.org/humansecurity/trust-fund).

Human Security Paradigm: People-centric

No society is immune to internal or external threats caused by natural or man-made disasters or combination of both. The concept of security has been traditionally associated with a state's ability to protect its territorial integrity and actions deemed important (e.g., investing in army or strict border control) to fight (external) threats. The narrow concept of traditional security, Khosla (2003) argues, revolves around the military and the state both as a source of threat and protection because the state mainly perceives threats to security from foreign military forces and the defense against them rests in the military strength of the state.

According to scholars (MacFarlane & Khong, 2006; Chari & Gupta, 2003; Khosla, 2003), the conventional security paradigm was challenged, especially after the end of the Cold War, by rising concerns about who needs to be secured—geographical territory or human beings or both. Feeling the need to move beyond military issues or warfare, the scope of the concept of security has been extended

to embrace other non-military issues, like health, economy, gender, for the well-being and protection of human beings. The approach of human security places human beings as the main focus of security rather than merely the state. Unlike traditional security framework that relies on building armies and use of force to safeguard territories, the human security emphasizes on development and protection from the perspective of individuals and assumes that all other security concerns derive from the sovereignty of people (MacFarlane & Khong, 2006; Liotta & Own, 2006; Okubo, 2007)

Mahbub ul Haq, a champion of human security approach, considered human security a revolutionary notion that re-oriented the concept of security and protection rooted in everyday life of people and noted that:

> The world is entering a new era in which the very concept of security will change—and change dramatically. Security will be interpreted as: Security of people, not just territory; Security of individuals, not just of nations; Security through development, not through arms; Security of all the people everywhere—in their homes, in their streets, in their communities, in their environments. (Haq, 1995, p. 115)

The prime concern of those espousing the human security concept is protecting human life and promoting dignity. The concept of human security is not limited to mere physical survival of people in conditions of war or peace, but is equally concerned with the realization of basic needs of people while protecting their human dignity. Moreover, the approach of human security is protective not reactive, which means it is also cost effective as it prevents threat(s) from occurring or addresses it in the initial stages rather than waiting or delaying the response until the time the threat might become widespread and pose serious risks to humans. As Alkire (2003) states, individuals and communities are constantly at risk of life-threatening situations that might be caused by factors beyond their control and many sudden calamities e.g., earth quakes, could be more destructive. Likewise, Liotta and Owen (2006) and Dutt (2012) argue that the prime purpose of security must be to protect people not only from conflicts or wars but also from other (non-military) threats, like hunger and diseases. Hence, human security requires institutionalized arrangements not only to prevent occurrence of threats but also to foresee any possible threat e.g., famines, floods, and make advance arrangements or have intuitional mechanism in place to minimize the damage caused by sudden disruption of people's everyday lives.

Links between Human Security and State Security

The human security approach does not undermine the agenda of state security. In fact, according to the CHS (2003), human security reinforces or compliments state security in multiple aspects. While the significance of national security cannot be denied, Soherwordi (2005) argues that problems arise when states invest too many

resources on militarization for national security at the cost of human deprivation and misery. Historical evidence suggests that just spending the bulk of resources on military or border protection while undermining the other forms of welfare of people could endanger national security. For example, Soherwordi (2005, p. 39) observes that countries that had the highest ratio or gap between military spending and social spending in the 1980s e.g, Iraq (8:1), Somalia (5:1), could neither protect their national security nor security of their people from external and internal threats. Thus, sole reliance on traditional security remains inadequate to protect people and territorial integrity.

Moreover, the conventional security framework mainly draws upon protection against external threats or interstate conflicts. Sadako Ogata, co-chair of the CHS, also observed, "In the past, security threats were assumed to emanate from external sources. State security focused mainly on protecting the state—its boundaries, people, institutions and values—from external attacks" (CHS, 2003, p. 5). However, the longitudinal data of the International Peace Research Institute has revealed that after the World War II the dominant form of conflict has been intrastate conflicts rather than interstate conflicts (Gleditsch et al., 2002). Further, Singh (2015) notes that disintegration of several countries (e.g., Yugoslavia) due to internal conflicts and increasing number of civil wars make clear that nonconventional threats can be equally, or in some cases even more, detrimental to the national security of states. In addition, analyses of global conflict-related casualties of the post-Cold War period reveal that a substantial majority of victims of conflicts are civilians (Roberts, 2010; Dutt 2012).

Some scholars (Chari & Gupta, 2003; Karim, 2013) argue that if states do not effectively address the nontraditional threats to national security, they could lead to future traditional threats or conflicts because investing resources on militarization cannot provide protection against growing nontraditional issues, for example, rapid depletion of natural resources, that are posing serious threats to human survival. Moreover, because such threats to human security are universal and their effects transcend geographical boundaries, they need to be addressed through developing global or regional cooperation.

In this paper, I discuss the human security in South Asia and argue that governments of the region need to focus on burgeoning nontraditional security threats to improve the lives of people by investing resources in human development and implementing the constitutional provisions to provide basic needs for the people through mutual collaboration.

Security Perspective in South Asia

The region of South Asia, according to many scholars (e.g., Dutt, 2012; Mufti, 2013; Sabur, 2009; Soherwordi, 2005), provides an example of stark imbalance between human security and state security as the governments dominantly focus on conventional security, rather than social development, and spend billions of

dollars annually on the military-related expenditures, which also makes this region one of the most militarized parts of the world (Karim, 2014).

According to Dutt and Bansal (2012), roots of the contemporary state-centric security framework in South Asia can be traced to factors associated with colonization of the region. As a British colony, the particular security framework of the subcontinent was designed by the British Empire for its own political and economic interests and to counter threats to the Empire. Consequently, after decolonization and partition of the region in 1947, amidst several political disputes, newly emerged independent states relied on that inherited state-centered security agenda. In addition to the common colonial legacy, Karim (2014) notes several other significant historical factors that have contributed towards igniting mistrust and lack of integration among the regional states, including influence of global powers on this region during the Cold War era, and longstanding intra and interstate political, socioeconomic and religious conflicts.

Despite rapid changing global perception of security over the last a couple of decades, Singh (2015) argues that the governments in South Asia continue to focus on external military threats, especially from other countries in the region. On the other hand, internal political and economic instability, growing poverty and extremism have posed serious threats to the security of many countries of this region that have become more vulnerable. For example, due to violent conflicts and natural disasters, millions of people in the region, especially in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India, are living as internally displaced persons or refugees and their protection and reintegration have become a serious issue in the region (Dutt, 2012)

One of the serious limitations of traditional national security approach adopted by those states, Singh (2015) describes, is that despite investing huge resources on modern warfare equipment neither the big states nor the small states feel secure. The two largest countries of the region, India and Pakistan, which possess nuclear weapons, have hostile relations with each other and fought several wars. The territory of Kashmir has been an issue of conflict between the two countries since independence. The traditional rivalry and frequent cross-border skirmishes between the two states have put them into an increasing arms race in order to deter each other; one which has had significant detrimental effects on regional prosperity.

Human Security and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation

On December 8, 1985, seven South Asian states signed the charter to establish the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to promote peace and prosperity across the region through mutual collaboration and peaceful settlement of all disputes. However, unlike many other regional organizations (e.g., The European Union), SAARC has had little effect in promoting regional prosperity and well-being of the people through improving the quality of their

lives. This is true mainly because conventional issues overshadow nonconventional issues.

Ironically, several countries within SAARC have some of the most comprehensive constitutions with fundamental rights modeled on the principles of the UDHR (Basnet 1997; Hamdani 2014). For example, constitutions of all countries in the region (with some variations/exceptions) guarantee equality before law, right to freedom of thought, freedom of expression, and freedom of movement, right to fair trial, right to association, protection against forced labor and slavery, right to universal education (for a detailed commentary on fundamental rights in the constitutions, please see Hamdani, 2014). In addition, countries in the region have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) that comprehensively addresses discrimination against women in all key areas (http://cedawsouthasia.org/).

However, provision of fundamental rights in the constitutions or ratification of international conventions is not enough for the people to actually enjoy the rights. Unfortunately, individual South Asian governments have shown little political commitment to actually implement the constitutional provisions to provide basic needs for their people and protect their human dignity. Moreover, at the SAARC level, there is no treaty or mechanism that exclusively focuses on the protection of fundamental human rights in the region. Hamdani (2014) urges the states to develop a regional human rights agenda to promote peace and prosperity of the people as included in the SAARC charter.

In the following sections, due to space limitations, of seven main categories of human security identified by the UNDP (1994), I discuss human (in)security in South Asia focusing on the first three categories: economic security, food security, and health security.

Economic Security

According to the UNDP (1994), "Economic security requires an assured basic income—usually from productive and remunerative work, or in the last resort from some publicly financed safety net" (p. 25). While elaborating the concept of economic security, the International Labour Organization (2004) has further identified seven (associated) types of work-related security. As the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (2011) notes, people who are marginalized or lack economic security are also more vulnerable to other threats e.g., natural disasters.

Although over the last several years South Asia as a region has been able to achieve significant economic growth, common people have not been able to receive benefits of the growth for improving their lives. The World Bank (2015) indicates that although South Asia has shown consistent rapid economic growth that places this region among the highest-economically growing regions of the world, high economic growth has not reduced the dense poverty in the region that

comprises 40% of the poor people in the world, highest in any region, who barely survive on less than $1.25 a day. Not surprisingly, therefore, more than 200 million people in South Asia live in slumps lacking basic facilities.

Economic development across nations in South Asia has also been asymmetric. High economic growth of the region is mainly attributed to an impressive economic growth of the largest country in the region i.e., India that according to some estimates has become the world's third-largest economy based on purchasing power parity (The Economic Times, 2014). According to the Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Centre (MHDC), particularly economic growth in Pakistan and Nepal has been instable mainly due to political and economic instability in these countries (MHDC, 2015). In order to promote regional trade in South Asia and make it a free trade area, while keeping in view the uneven development pattern in the region, in 2004, the South Asia Free Trade Area (SAFTA) Agreement was signed that entered into force on January 1, 2006 (http://saarc-sec.org/areaofcooperation/detail.php?activity_id=5). However, that agreement has not yet produced any significant results in enhancing the intra-regional trade or its share of global trade mainly owing to conflict between countries, primarily India and Pakistan, over tariff-related issues (Karim, 2014). The countries of the region prefer to trade outside the region as is evident from the fact that intra-regional trade compromises only less than five percent of total trade—lowest intra-regional trade in the world (The World Bank, 2008). Ironically, in 1948, soon after the independence, intra-regional trade was officially recoded as 19% (World Bank, 2004); a figure that has declined significantly with the passage of time.

South Asia also has the highest share of nonagricultural informal work employment in the world; with almost 82 percent of the people who are engaged in nonagricultural work being employed in the informal sector without any social security or income security (UNDP, 2015, p.63). Owing to the lack of economic security, informal workers remain vulnerable and might not be able to even meet their basic needs when they lose job or income (Dutt, 2012). In addition, MHDC (2015) reports that there is widespread working poverty in the region with 64 per cent of total workers living on less than $2 U.S. dollars per day.

Despite the fact that the constitutions of South Asian countries specifically prohibit forced labor and slavery, the lack of economic security in South Asia has made it one of the leading regions in the world for labor exploitation, including child labor, forced labor, and bonded labor. For example, according to the estimates of Walk Free Foundation's Global Slavery Index Report (2014), three countries in South Asia, including India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh are on the list of top ten countries with highest number of people living in modern-day slavery, and the numbers of enslaved people in these three countries add up to near half (17.024 million) of the total number of people enslaved in the world (35.8 million).

While statistics of economic growth might be very important to showcase rising economies, from the perspective of human security, development should be reflected in the quality of life of people. As Haq (1995) notes, economic growth might not always be associated with human development because the former focuses only on the expansion of income or production (in aggregate) while the latter is concerned with human prosperity and expansion of human choices that are economic, social, cultural, and political. Likewise, Sen (1999) argues that poverty cannot be simply defined in terms of lack of income but it also includes capability deprivation.

The governments in South Asia have not efficiently used economic growth to enhance human security of people. The MHDC (2015) analysis shows that between 1980 to 2010, the per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in South Asia has grown by 214 percent, whereas the Human Development Index (HDI) value has grown only by 54 per cent. This indicates that income inequality has increased in all countries of South Asia and undermined the positive impact of growth on the alleviation of poverty or economic insecurity.

Despite the ratification of CEDAW and constitutional provision of fundamental rights that prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, countries in South Asia fare poorly in terms of reducing gender gaps and women and girls in the region particularly remain highly vulnerable to economic insecurity and poverty. The recent report of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (2015) on "Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016" documents that a significant majority of women in South Asia are informally self-employed (64%) or work in informal agriculture sector (71%). The informal sector, as I have mentioned before, lacks social or income security. That report also shows that women and girls in the region are far more likely to engage in unpaid care and domestic work than men. The situation is not much different in formal sector/paid work as is evident in the fact that the gender pay gap in the region is 33 percent as compared to the global 24 percent. Although some non-governmental organizations in the region, like Self-Employed Women's Association in India, have been engaged in organizing for economic security of women in informal sector, the governments have not yet paid much attention to addressing gender gaps in labor participation. Not surprisingly, owing to pervasive gendered disparities, South Asia also lies at the bottom in terms of the UNDP's (2015, p.59) Gender Development Index (0.801)—ratio of male to female HDI values.

Although some efforts have been taken to design and implement interventions at the SAARC level to address economic disparities and promote social development in the region, they remain inadequate to improve the lives of people in the region. To tackle the grave problem of massive poverty across the region, an *Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation* was created in 1991. With the efforts of the Commission, in April 2002, SAARC prepared a *Plan of Action on Poverty Alleviation* which was formally endorsed by its leaders in the organizations' 12th Summit in 2004. The plan included several significant

measures to alleviate regional poverty and inequality through mutual collaboration and investing resources on social development. Further, to achieve the objective of poverty free South Asia, SAARC Development Goals (SDGs), including twenty-two goals and seventy-five indicators, were adopted and intended to be achieved in the period of 5 years i.e., 2007 to 2012 (Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation, 2007).

Despite having series of official meetings and impressive plans, none of the targets set to alleviate poverty could be achieved (Kelegama, 2014). The governments in the region have shown little commitment to invest resources for improving the situation of human development and continue to spend bulk of the resources for military-related expenditures while cutting budgets on social spending. For example, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's (2015) analysis of global arms import during the five-year period (2010-2014) shows that India remains the largest importer of major weapons with 15 percent of global arm import, whereas its traditional rival Pakistan is also in the list of top 10 highest importers of major weapons with 4 percent of global arm imports. Likewise, the estimates of MHDC (2015) indicate that military expenditure in South Asia increased from 24,326 million US$ in 1990 to 59,804 million US$ in 2010, with an average annual increase of 4.7percent. On the other hand, due to lack of resources invested on human development, no country of the region except Sri Lanka ranks in the top 100 countries in the UNDP's (2015) HDI. Sabur (2009) argues that by investing bulk of resources on traditional security, instead of human security, the states undermine the security of their citizens by exposing them to various (nonmilitary threats). Eradicating severe human deprivation and misery in the region is not an implausible task provided that the governments show enough political commitment to prioritize the human development agenda. Soherwordi (2005) estimates that to effectively address the issue of poverty and provide basic services to the people require only a five percent annual cut in military expenditure in the region. Hence, the choice rests with the governments.

Food Security

Food security, a core aspect of human security, was defined by the UNDP (1994) as, "all people at all times have both physical and economic access to basic food" (p. 27). Elaborating on this concept, the World Food Summit, convened at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Headquarters in Rome on November 13-17, 1996, declared that "Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (FAO, 2008, p. 1). Drawing on the definition, FAO highlights four pillars of food security, including physical availability of food, economic and physical access to food, food utilization, and the stability of the other three dimensions over time. Eradicating hunger was the Goal #1 of the UN Millennium

Development Goals (2000-2015) and is Goal#2 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (2015-2030).

Ironically, the main problem in South Asia is not physical availability of food to fulfil the least food requirement, but physical and economic access to food (Dutt, 2012; MHDC, 2015). For example, India has been able to achieve a significant economic growth, the highest in the region, yet it still has 194.6 million undernourished people—the second-highest in the world (FAO, 2015, p. 46). The availability of sufficient food, as UNDP (1994) notes, is an essential condition of food security, but not enough to ensure people's access to food because they can be hungry even when ample food is available. As I have discussed in the previous section, because of the lack of income security in South Asia, a significant proportion of population cannot purchase food to meet their daily requirement and countries in the region lack targeted programs to address the issue of food security (Dutt, 2012).

Consequently, the world's highest rates of hunger prevail in South Asia where almost 23 percent people (336 million people) remain routinely hungry (World Bank, 2011). While considering food security a pre-requisite for human development, MHDC (2015) provides some implications of food insecurity in South Asia. For example, in the three largest countries of the region—India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh—about half of the women are anemic (MHDC, 2015, p. 85). Further, as reported by the International Food Policy Research Institute's Global Hunger Index (2015)—which was developed from four indicators, including the percentage of population that is malnourished, the percentage of children under five who suffer from wasting, the percentage of children under five who suffer from stunning, and the percentage of children who die before the age of five—Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India have highest hunger levels in South Asia.

A recent report of FAO (2015) on food security in the world also provides some glimpses of food security in South Asia. The report documents that although South Asia has made some progress in reducing hunger in the region, the progress has been too slow to meet the international hunger targets. Despite a significant decline in the prevalence of undernourishment in the region from 23.9 percent in 1990-1992 to 15.7 percent in 2014-2016, due to high population growth rate, 281 million people are still undernourished during the period as compared to 291 million in 1990-1992. The share of the region experiencing global undernourishment has also increased from 28.8 percent in 1990-1992 to 35.4 percent during those years. That report also indicates that significant number of people in the region are exposed to hidden hunger due to the inadequate intake of micronutrients that lead to different types of malnutrition or health issues e.g., iron-deficiency, anemia. The only exception in the region that has performed well and achieved the MDG 1c hunger target is Bangladesh which has brought the prevalence of undernourishment close to five percent.

Despite the fact that agricultural sector's contribution to the total GDP of South Asia has been declining persistently, the majority of workers are still associated with agriculture (Siddiqui, 2015). Scholars (Iqbal & Amjad, 2012;

Mittal & Sethi, 2009) have identified some of the main factors that affect food security in South Asia, including high population growth rate, inflation and fluctuation in food prices, rapid urbanization, low productivity of crops, lack of resources invested for improved technology in agriculture, depletion of natural resources, increasing agricultural population density, and high demand of non-cereal commodities. Although the region's governments have implemented some nation-specific social safety nets, poorly targeted interventions have not been adequate to mitigate the chronic problem of malnutrition in the region (Mittal & Sethi, 2009)

In 2007, SAARC countries agreed to establish the SAARC Food Bank mainly to function as a food security reserve for regional countries during times of food shortage and emergencies. According to Karim (2014), it is a wise initiative because the region has been frequently experiencing the situations of food crisis during both normal times and natural calamities; however, the operational effectiveness of the food bank is yet to be assessed.

Health Security

According to the CHS (2003), "Health security is at the vital core of human security—and illness, disability and avoidable death are 'critical pervasive threats' to human security. Health is defined here as not just the absence of disease, but as 'a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being'" (p. 96). However, despite the growing recognition of health security as a pre-condition to enjoy the other benefits of human security, the concept is used in different settings to refer to different things because still there is a lack of global consensus on the definition of health security (Aldis, 2008). The World Health Organization (2007) defined global public health security as "the activities required, both proactive and reactive, to minimize vulnerability to acute public health events that endanger the collective health of populations living across geographical regions and international boundaries" (p. ix).

Health security is closely linked to economic security and food security. As is true with the other components of human security, South Asia fares poorly compared to other regions of the world in terms of protecting its people from health-related threats. The fact that health has not been a priority issue for many governments in the region particularly is evident from the resources allocation to establish better health care infrastructure to provide at least basic health facilities to the people and protect them from preventable diseases. Obviously with meager allocation of resources to health sector—among lowest in the world—the people remain highly vulnerable to health-related threats.

Although life expectancy in the region has improved and crude death rates have declined, overall health-related progress is very slow as compared to other regions of the world. According to the estimates of MHDC (2015, p. 17), the average life expectancy (at birth) in South Asia was 55 years in 1980 that has

increased to 66 years in 2010, and infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births) was 117 in 1980 that declined to 48 in 2010. However, UNDP (2015) reports, despite some improvements, the life expectancy and infant mortality rates in the region are only better than those in Sub-Saharan Africa. South Asia also continues to have the world's highest rate of child-malnutrition with 45.1 % children (under age 5) in the region being malnourished (UNDP, 2015, p. 241).

Because of malnutrition, low immunization rates, illiteracy, and poor and unhygienic living conditions, the people remain at high risk of acquiring preventable infectious diseases (Ghose, Ide, & Ghosh, 2014; Muniruzzaman, 2014; Siddiqui, 2015). Communicable diseases remain a main cause of death and ill health, especially in South Asia that has the highest number of people in the world living in poverty. The WHO's *Global Report for Research on Infectious Diseases of Poverty* (2012) showcases strong links between poverty and infectious diseases because people living in conditions of socioeconomic deprivation are more vulnerable to infectious diseases. In addition, for the working poor, the economic consequences of living with chronic infections are more grave because they might not be able to work even to earn little wages. As I have mentioned earlier, due to the lack of targeted social security nets in South Asia and poor health infrastructure, the socioeconomic impact of infectious diseases can be catastrophic.

Moreover, because of the porous borders in South Asia an epidemic outbreak in one country poses high risk to the entire region's health security (Karim, 2013). The region has one of the highest rates of communicable diseases, e.g. HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis (Ghose et al., 2014). The analysis of MHDC (2015, p. 251) shows the emergence of HIV/AIDS a severe risk to the health security in South Asia as the data indicate that in 1990 only 96,000 persons were HIV/AIDS infected in the region, but the number increased to 2,198,000 in 2010.

In 1992, the SAARC Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC) was established to develop programs for the prevention and control of those diseases in the region with the collaboration of governments in the region. Although SAARC/STAC has produced several regional strategies, the region has not been very successful in controlling the infectious diseases.

Although the environment is intrinsically related to the human security issues I have discussed so far, because of space consideration, I am not discussing the issue of environmental security in detail in this article. While I have discussed the three categories of human security in the article, it is also important to highlight that discussions of and data on the categories of human security tend to be based on a kind of assumption of a normal state of being. But, once we add environmental disasters to the process, the insecurities are heightened multiple times. South Asia is among the world's most disaster-prone regions. According to the International Disaster Database, compiled/maintained by the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (n.d.), during the period of 1970 to 2015, 1589 natural disasters in South Asia caused more than one million human deaths and affected more than two billion people. The data also indicate rise in natural disasters. There were 12 disasters reported in 1970, but the number

increased to 53 in 2015. For example, the Integrated Regional Information Networks (2010) reports that in Pakistan 73,000 persons were killed and more than 3.3 million people became homeless in 2005 earthquake, and the worst floods in the country during 2010 caused 1600 deaths and affected six million people. Likewise, the recent earthquakes in Nepal in 2015 killed more than 8500 people and dislocated millions of others (Reuters, 2015). Those who are already marginalized become more vulnerable to such natural disasters. The frequent episodes of natural calamities and absolute devastation require the governments to also think about human security in South Asia beyond normal conditions of life.

Conclusion

In this article, I have examined the issue of human (in) security focusing on South Asia. Despite burgeoning global shift in security paradigm, countries in South Asia continue to overwhelmingly rely on traditional security instead of human-centric security. Although the region has achieved a persistent economic growth, it has not been able to improve the lives of common people and remains one of the most deprived regions of the world with pervasive inequalities. In South Asia, the issue is not really about lack of resources to promote well-being of the people, but it is more about inequality and preference of the governments to channel bulk of the resources deemed important for state-centered security rather than social development to effectively utilize available human resource. As threats to human security transcend geographical boundaries, governments of the region need to work together to improve the people's everyday lives. However, regional collaboration, like SAARC, cannot work efficiently and produce meaningful results without the true political commitment of the governments. Hence, the responsibility lies with the governments to focus on human development and invest resources on human security to provide basic needs for the people and protect their human dignity—enshrined in the constitutions of many states in the region.

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