

Editors' Note

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ALTHOUGH THE CONCEPT OF HUMAN SECURITY has achieved surprising successes with the International Campaign to Ban Landmines and the formation of the Human Security Network, and has established itself confidently within the lexicon of international development, it has yet to solidify itself within the academic community. Undoubtedly, this is partly due to the concept's inherently interdisciplinary nature. Whether one adopts a broad 'UNDP' or narrower 'Canadian' conceptualization of human security, the issue inevitably crosses traditional academic divides. To the policymaker and the development organization, this is of little concern; indeed, the very malleability of human security is its principal attractiveness – it can easily be tailored to fit a government's foreign policy mandate or a development organization's area of expertise. However, for many academics, this definitional ambiguity is problematic. Perhaps predictably, though, after a few initial publications, definitional and theoretical debates on the subject virtually disappeared.

Does human security have an academic home? What are the critical theoretical issues surrounding the concept? What is the future of human security, at both the practical and the theoretical levels? Can a human security agenda exist in the current global climate? The debate on human security flourished and waned almost before it began.

Not only do empirical studies cast light on the extension of concepts, but conceptual innovation can go far towards opening empirical reality to the eyes of the observer. The dialectic of 'human security' should be no less alluring: The meaning of the concept is not exhausted through its application. Rather, it is shaped by the evolving perspectives forced upon anyone confronted with the wide-ranging forms of security and insecurity. Studying security issues on the ground inevitably leads to the discovery of the inadequacy of our concept of human security, which in turn leads one back to the empirical world with a new and presumably more insightful gaze. It is our

belief that the academic community can and should address the double edge of human security more thoroughly. In the spirit of discussion, we have therefore sought to organize the following colloquium on human security.

Each of the colloquium's 21 authors was given the opportunity to answer the question 'What is human security?' The result is a unique document, one that gives an overview not only of theoretical points of view, but also of value positions, expressions of the ethical responsibilities of the academic in a world of insecurity.

In this academic forum, a non-academic format was used. Each author was enjoined to limit his or her response to a concise text, including commentary on the concept of human security, what it entails, what its limitations are, and what prospects it has in terms of academic study and policy consequences. Prominent voices from around the world were invited to provide their perspectives in the hope of stimulating and revitalizing discussion of what is an exciting and timely topic. Given our belief that study and application of the concept of human security has been hindered by the general disarray surrounding attempts to formulate workable definitions of it, this special section seeks to address the disarray by systematically mapping the variety of understandings of this elusive concept.

The colloquium is followed by a summary and afterword by Taylor Owen.