Human Security and Development in Cambodia

Peter Quinn
Faculty of Asian Studies
Australian National University
Peter.quinn@anu.edu.au

Introduction

There were two main aspects of the debate on the concept of human security which attracted my attention several years ago and prompted me to pursue research on human security which had been defined by the UNDP in 1994 in the broad sense of freedom from want and freedom from fear (UNDP, 1994).

The first issue was the existence of widespread scepticism among international relations and security scholars of the prospect of including individuals and groups as referents in disciplines which were traditionally state centric and oriented to balance of power dynamics. The second aspect of the debate that attracted my attention was that among proponents of the concept of human security there was division. Some arguing that the concept should be limited to a narrow definition concerned with war and violence. Others supported a broad definition including economic, social, political, environmental and cultural security as proposed by the UNDP.

Cambodia provides an opportunity to study human security through a range of situations from interstate war, state violence, civil war, conflict resolution, to democratisation and development. It also demonstrates that there is no simple point in conflict resolution processes where human security can be said to be achieved.

Cambodia's poor performance in poverty reduction, rule of law, job creation, health and education have left many rural people with uncertain futures and their livelihoods threatened.

This paper aims to discuss the relationship between human security and development in rural Cambodia. To do so I will briefly introduce a definition of human security. I will then touch on Cambodia's experience of conflict and war to demonstrate the need for human security to become integral to international relations and state based security deliberations. The main part of the paper will examine conditions in rural Cambodia and discuss the linkages between human security and development. It identifies governance as a key factor for achieving human security. Finally, the paper suggests some preliminary findings as to how the human security concept could become a powerful tool in the quest for people's freedom from fear and want.

Definitions

There is not space here to discuss the various definitions that have been proposed and their worth. The general criticism seemed to be that while the concept may be useful for advocacy purposes, it was not a useful analytical concept for rigorous academic theorising. It was too broad, it included everything and risked "meaning all things to all people". Some debated the question of how human security could be measured and thresholds of criticality could be defined (Mack, 2003; Owen, 2000, 2003). Some considered it to be a useful analytical tool, however, if it were limited to notions of conflict and violence while issues such as food, health, economic and environment security left to the domain of human rights and human development.

The difficulty I had with this, however, was that while both human rights and human development are powerful concepts, their achievement was not being assured by present development approaches. Human security, as a concept that embraces both

human rights and human development, offers the promise of a new approach in the quest for people to live in security and to have the opportunity to realise their full potential free from the threat of hunger, disease, ignorance and intimidation.

I have chosen to adopt a broad definition of human security and for the present purpose choose the Commission for Africa definition that people-centered "human security becomes an all-encompassing condition in which individual citizens live in freedom, peace and safety and participate fully in the process of governance. They enjoy the protection of fundamental rights, have access to resources and the basic necessities of life, including health and education, and inhabit an environment that is not injurious to their health and wellbeing" (Commission for Africa, 2005)

Conflict and Human Security

Human Insecurity from Violence and War

Freedom, peace and safety did not describe the condition of most Cambodians more than three decades from the 1960s. Cambodians in fact lived with war and violence of various forms throughout the period, caused by a complex interplay of domestic, regional and international factors. Internally, there were deep divisions and corruption within government, growing rural discontent and rebel groups (dubbed the Khmer Rouge by Sihanouk) active in the countryside, some with Vietnamese communist support. In 1968, conditions in the countryside were desperate enough for a rebellion to break out in Samlaut in Battambang province and spread to other parts of the country (Kiernan, 1982; Kiernan & Chanthou Boua, 1982). Regionally, Sihanouk was faced with North Vietnam use of Cambodian territory to move supplies to its troops in the South, and to secret US bombing inside Cambodia. Although he tried to maintain a policy of neutrality to keep Cambodia out of the Vietnam war, a new government formed in 1966 sought to replace his politics of neutrality with a pro-

US stance and to subdue the rebels. Conditions, became increasingly difficult in the countryside with rising levels of conflict and violence.

Full scale war came to Cambodia in 1970 when Sihanouk was deposed in a coup, paving the way for US and allied military operations against Vietnamese forces and the Khmer Rouge. These operations removed any semblance of human security as war brought death and destruction and the US bombing in particular destroyed homes, villages and rice fields forcing many people to flee to the cities as refugees while large numbers, encouraged by Sihanouk from exile in China, threw their support behind the Khmer Rouge.

Upon victory in 1975, however, the new Khmer Rouge regime emptied the cities, eliminated money and instigated a reign of violence in Cambodia—a return to "year zero"—which deprived Cambodians human security through forced labour, purges and disease, causing the deaths of between one and two million people (Kiernan, 1996; Ponchaud, 1978).

Cambodia's domestic turmoil, the activities of Vietnamese supported communist rebels, its location on the perimeter of the Vietnam war and superpower military action, all facilitated the rise of the Khmer Rouge which proceeded to decimate the country and its people (Shawcross, 1984). With the United Nations Security Council sidelined, collective international security mechanisms failed to protect or even consider the human security of the people of Cambodia..

Civil War, Refugees and Peace

When Vietnam invaded Cambodia in December 1978 and installed the new government in Phnom Penh, the possibility of a humanitarian reprieve for the people of Cambodia was soon dashed. The UN General Assembly for the Khmer Rouge regime, despite its appalling record of abuse. to retain Cambodia's seat at the UN.

Any hope of a quick return to human security for the people of Cambodia was lost as China, the US and ASEAN, for their separate security reasons, supported armed opposition from the Thai border, while the USSR backed Vietnam and the government in Phnom Penh. A proxy civil war was thus maintained in Cambodia for the next decade.

Human insecurity persisted for those who fled to camps on the Thai border as well as for those who stayed inside Cambodia and faced the effects of civil war. People crossing into Thailand were classified as illegal immigrants and denied UNHCR protection, many were forced back into mine infested areas of Cambodia while camps were used as military bases by the opposition groups and often shelled. UN and other humanitarian agencies seeking to respond to the humanitarian crisis at the border and inside Cambodia were hampered by states placing sovereignty and perceived national interest ahead of human security (Mysliwiec, 1988; Shawcross, 1984). People inside Cambodia were subject to attacks by opposition forces and to hardship caused by recruitment into the army or into work units to build roads and defences along the border where they regularly endured hunger and disease as well as the dangers of war (Gottesman, 2003). Human security remained elusive to Cambodians. The end of the cold war, however, meant that the lingering conflict in Cambodia became an irritant in relations between the main supporters (Findlay, 1995; Roberts, 2001 p. 30). The three permanent members of the Security Council were then prepared to impose compromise on their clients who signed a Peace Agreement in Paris in 1991. They also continued to ensure a political role for the Khmer Rouge.

From a human security perspective, the Agreement promised a new dawn for the people of Cambodia both in terms of ending conflict and in offering a promise of economic development and human rights. With the Agreement, the place of

Cambodia in international security practice in relation to Cambodia changed from being a pawn in big power cold war confrontation in which its people were the victims, to being a beneficiary of a new post-cold war security cooperation within the framework of the United Nations.

The question remains, however, whether the promise of human security in Cambodia's new constitutional embrace of democracy, human rights and human development, and the massive influx of development assistance has in fact been realized by Cambodia's rural people. It is to this question that the paper now turns.

Development and Human Security

International development agencies and donors have exerted considerable influence on the pattern of development in Cambodia since 1991. They do so largely as part of the international security exercise of states and of the UN. An early focus was on decentralisation activities to bring relief to the majority (85%) of Cambodians living in the countryside, as well as to bypass the inflated, corrupt and ineffective civil service. The UNDP in particular supported what was known as the Seila "experiment" adopted by the government in its first socio-economic development plan, to create participatory development planning and administration processes in local communities in five provinces (Seila Program, 1996). Seila laid the foundations for the eventual formulation and adoption of a legislative framework for elected commune councils with responsibilities for the security and the welfare of villagers and for participatory local development planning. Commune council elections were held in 2002 and 2007 with the Cambodia People's Party (CPP) dominating and, in both cases, 70% of seats and 98% of Commune Council Chief positions.

The decentralisation model was provided by the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) which directly linked development and security, maintaining that

"sustained peace in Cambodia can come only through equitable development to raise the standard of living for all citizens by strengthening the bonds between civil society and the State and by empowering rural Cambodians to participate fully in the development process" (UNCDF). Today, decentralisation is also considered by the government and donors to be an element of good governance and is enshrined in the government's Rectangular Strategy (Royal Government of Cambodia, 2004).

A key function of the Commune Councils is the preparation of Commune Development Plans based on village development plans prepared in accordance with defined processes which are intended to engage civil society in a participatory and empowering democratic process for deciding on village and community needs. While there is some scepticism among villagers that councillors may influence decisions in favour of families and supporters, surveys suggest that, on the whole, villagers have been satisfied with the outcomes of the small infrastructure improvements (mainly local roads and canals) that have been funded by the small budget allocated directly to Communes (around $8-10,000) (Biddulph, 2004; Holloway, Chom Sok, & et. al., 2005; Kim Ninh & Henke, 2005).

Commune Development Plans are, however, also presented as a list of priority projects to District Integration Workshops where provincial and line department officials (or donors) select projects consistent with their strategies to be implemented by the line departments. What happens in this process, however, is that only 30% of the projects eventually agreed upon for funding come from the commune priority lists (Seila Program, 2005). Instead, line departments introduce a range of mainly training projects which are accepted for funding. There is, thus, a breakdown of the supposedly participatory and empowering processes of local governance. It has also become the norm that the Communes fund infrastructure projects while the line

departments focus on capacity building (Biddulph, 2004). But there are limits to these processes of governance in meeting rural needs.

<u>Problems of insecurity</u>
There was a considerable consistency in the sort of issues and problems raised in the villages I visited in 2005. Fishing villagers claimed seasonal incomes were being curtailed by variations in the seasonal flooding; the loss of some fish species and lower quantities of others due to environmental impacts on spawning as well as modern fishing gear being too efficient and "catching everything"; illegal fishing and changes in the river flood flows; loss of access to certain areas (often illegally) by fishing lot owners. Many violent incidents have been reported between villagers and illegal fishermen along with the failure of authorities to police the fishing practices.

The major problem for the villagers from a human security perspective is not only the loss of seasonal access and income, but the risk they face in attempting to assert their rights, or in attempting to prevent illegal activities. The law specifies their rights and those of lot owners (whether these are fair and equitable is another matter). It is thus the management of the resource by those legally responsible—department officials, police, the courts and local commune representatives—that determines whether peaceful and sustainable access to these resources is maintained. But police and fisheries officials may be in the service of powerful people; issues do not get to court and Commune Councils may be hampered by political association with powerful people. The threat to human security in terms of food, income, safety and freedom to exercise their rights, is thus a consequence of the failure of governance, both local and line department.

Villagers were concerned that income was considerably curtailed, even for those who had land, in the dry season when ponds dried up (partly due to illegal fishing in some

areas), pumps were not available to use available water, and there were no irrigation schemes. Low prices for vegetable and fruit produce; and lack of capital and knowledge of techniques for vegetable and fruit production; limited government agricultural services were all issues affecting livelihoods. The landless and those with small landholdings were especially vulnerable and although poverty reduction policies continued to favour agricultural improvement, largely through commune programmes, the current agricultural system has been shown to be unable to generate employment. (Lundström & Ronnås, 2006; Ramamurthy, Boreak, & Ronnås, 2001). This was compounded by the absence provincial employment generation strategies in industrial, agricultural or other sectors.

The consequence that most concerned villagers and officials, was that villagers, especially the young, were forced to search for work elsewhere. Research has confirmed that the reasons for migrating are overwhelmingly economic and represent a survival strategy in the face of expanding populations, reduction in access to commons, poor prices for agricultural produce and lack of access to capital which leaves people facing food shortages for several months of the year (Acharya, 2002; Lundström & Ronnås, 2006; So Sovannarith, 2001). Up to 40% of women between 20 and 40 in one Battambang village had left for work on the border and in Thailand (American Friends Service Committee, 2000). Those who migrated for work domestically and often illegally to Thailand, where vulnerable to exploitation, drugs, sickness (HIV/AIDS) and girls sometimes became sex workers.

Labour migration can be beneficial as well as risky. But forced or push migration is not a solution to the lack of income opportunities and highlights the failure of government to address fundamental economic and social development issues. It also brings to the fore the lack of political avenue for civil society to pursue such issues

with authorities. Local government can do little for job creation with their meagre resources.

More generally, there was criticism by the people of the poor level of health services and in particular the informal costs charged which excluded the poor and risked impoverishing others. Primary schools were relatively accessible for most, but again there were costs as many teachers showed more commitment in their paid private tutorial classes than in normal school hours. Agricultural extension was also limited and people looked to the NGOs for assistance.

Gangs were seen as a problem in some villages while the proximity of military camps also brought fears of gambling, drunkenness, prostitution, and even seizure of land and property which villagers were powerless to challenge.

Questioned about how the Commune Councils addressed villagers' concerns, the people were basically sceptical saying the councillors only looked after their own, had no power over police and military, and were not interested in the villagers – especially the poor. People felt that without the protection of NGOs and SEILA they would be left to their own devices and unable to push for even the smallest changes. Agriculture department officers were seldom seen and health service officers were considered similarly unresponsive without special payments, as were teachers. Judicial system protection for villagers was non-existent at the village level.

Villagers presented many of these concerns about the poor services reaching villages, informal payments and exclusion from proper health care, to provincial officials in a public meeting in Battambang in April 2005. Officials were defensive and reiterated policy statements, noting that delivery of services was not always perfect and all were learning. The responses of military, police, health, agriculture and education officials

all recognised their responsibility to provide services and an awareness of shortcomings in service delivery, but also conceded a lack of control over the performance of their personnel. In large measure the line departments are dysfunctional at the local level and as a consequence people's human security is threatened.

Governance

For the purposes of this paper, governance refers to the way in which the state manages the institutional environment which governs the relationships between the public, civil society and the private sector, to carry out state's responsibilities to the nation. It is concerned with how institutions ensure transparency, accountability, predictability and participation in their dealings, and how state responsibilities may be shifted to local organizations through decentralization, to the private sector or to international governance organizations such as the WTO or the IMF. Good governance adopts these principles as necessary ingredients for economic development and democratisation. It purports to set a framework of opportunity for the government and non-government sectors, civil society, NGOs and individuals to engage freely and innovatively in economic market activitiesfor the benefit of all. It also purports to promote participation and empowerment in ways that enhance the delivery of social and other services to meet the local needs of people, disadvantaged or otherwise.

In a governance framework, the government becomes the enabler, providing the regulation or steering of the economy and society to meet its policy directions (whether democratically determined or not). But the government is also in part the implementer of policies and programmes through the various sectoral institutions of state. Line departments thus have a big responsibility in relation to ensuring justice,

that regulations are adhered, economic opportunities are created and quality health and education provided. Line department functioning is therefore an important factor in creating conditions for human security.

What we have seen above in brief is that decentralised commune councils in Cambodia, although seen as an element of good governance, are simply not resourced to provide the level of service that would ensure human security. They are well placed to provide participation and empowerment within their own boundaries but depend also to a large extent on the performance and support of line departments.

We have seen too that in terms of the priorities expressed by commune councils through the participatory village development planning process, line departments are largely unresponsive and more inclined to pursue their own preferred activities. The justification for this is not clear, but it is important to recognize that the line departments do need to implement national and provincial strategies and not simply respond to locally expressed needs. It would make more sense for line departments to identify their priority programmes, including funded projects, for national, provincial and regional development strategies, as well optional services which are available to councils before commune councils prepare their development plans. In this scenario, health programmes for AIDS, bird flu, malaria or dengue control, or agriculture programmes to promote particular crops or agriculture techniques in certain areas would be known to commune councils and would enable them to concentrate on more particular local issues—including poverty.

The general criticisms of line departments in Cambodia, however, concern inflated size, corruption, rent-taking and patronage as well as lack of capability of staff and non-merit based appointments. The civil service is also highly politicized and positions may be purchased. These were long standing issues that had emerged

quickly when departments were reformed from scratch following the installation of the Vietnamese backed regime in 1979.

The extent of rent taking in the countryside and elsewhere can be largely explained by the poor salaries of civil servants. The monthly salary for teachers, health workers, police and agriculture and fisheries officials, to name a few, are simply inadequate to make ends meet. Private sector and NGO salaries are at least four times higher. Villagers were aware of this and were not very critical of officers on this account.

Generally speaking, where public service governance reforms have taken place in other countries, it has been recognized that these must be accompanied by culture change within public sector institutions. My own experience is of the Australian situation where each line department engaged in corporate governance reform to meet the wider structural changes. The view taken was that "Public sector governance has a very broad coverage, including how an organization is managed, its corporate and other structures, its culture, its policies and strategies and the way it deals with its various stakeholders" and its objectives were to provide performance in terms of the delivery of goods, services or programmes and conformance in relation to law, regulations, and community expectations of probity, accountability and openness (Australian National Audit Office (ANAO), 2003). It also placed great stress on leadership which "sets the 'tone at the top', and is absolutely critical to achieving an organization-wide commitment to good governance" (Australian National Audit Office (ANAO), 2003).

The recognition of society and community expectations is important here too as in Cambodia these may vary from assumptions in 'universal' notions of good governance. The importance of society and culture is also evident in studies which point to the different governance approaches which arise in Europe for example,

where what applies in England may not be accepted in France or Sweden (Fukuyama, 2005; Pierre & Peters, 2000).

Current debates on deconcentration in Cambodia—formalizing the relationship between central and provincial levels of governance of line departments—will need to address such issues and in particular how they deal with stakeholders, from villagers to civil society organizations and the privates sector. The need for change in the organisational culture of line departments will be a important as structural reforms.

Reforms will also have to address the issue of salaries and status of civil servants, public sector leadership, morale and commitment to the reforms and the manner of their implementation.

Conclusion

The paper has shown in brief how with the expansion of the Vietnam war into Cambodia, domestic and international factors together compromised freedom, peace and safety. It shows, too, the disastrous human insecurity that can be inflicted on people as a consequence of international relations and security practice. Human security needs to be researched further so that it may become an accepted concept within a broad security envelope which embraces global, regional, national and human security. The UN Security Council, which so badly failed Cambodia, could also be urged to recognise the concept in its deliberations.

We have seen that in rural Cambodia there is a considerable probability that the protection of fundamental rights is not assured and that while rural people may have access to basic needs of life, this is tenuous for many who are pushed into migration or the sale of assets to meet their needs. Security, however, is more than simply about today's existence. It is essentially about protection from threat and vulnerability in

the future. To prepare for the future, participation in the process of governance becomes a key element of human security. We have seen that people's participation in governance is somewhat limited to local government, and that participation in the governance of line departments is not in evidence. Also, line departments are not performing their responsibilities to protect fundamental rights, nor are they facilitating access to basic necessities in a way which will cater for future needs and security.

Governance is not a panacea for human security, but it has an important role. Good governance reforms must be supported by changes in organisational culture. Indeed, one suspects enormous advances in human security could be made if current laws and regulations were properly administered. To change the culture of line departments to meet the expectations of government and other stakeholders, a starting point must involve providing a living salary to civil servants.

From a human security perspective, too, governance institutions needs to be more accessible to people and to foster an open and accountable economic environment which facilitates the creation of real income opportunities for rural people.

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