

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative that international health security policies are amended to combat current and future repercussions of this. The pandemic has proven that threats to security can be faceless and require preventative measures be taken instead of relying on reactionary responses to possible wide scale health emergencies. Health security is defined as, “the activities required, both proactive and reactive, to minimize the danger and impact of acute public health events that endanger people's health across geographical regions and international boundaries” (Health Security, World Health Organization). Health security is a matter of international concern because of its ability to affect the global population as a result of widespread population growth, environmental degradation, pandemics, and global chemical dependence. Health security is directly related to human security. The World Health Organization fights to protect health security globally by ensuring universal health coverage, protecting individuals from health emergencies, and providing generally better health and well-being globally. Partners in Health is a boston-based nonprofit healthcare organization that stands on the idea that no human life is more deserving than another (What Drives Us, Partners in Health). They work towards equal-opportunity healthcare and share this mission with the World Health Organization.

Health security is one aspect of the broader idea of human security. Human security is the idea of protecting fundamental freedoms. This also includes protecting humans from critical and pervasive threats. Human security is broken down into three types of protected freedoms: freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom from indignity (What is Human Security?, IIHR). Freedom from fear relates to the protection from physical threats or violence that comes from external States, States against their own citizens, and groups or individuals that aim to harm other individuals. Freedom from want refers to the satisfaction of basic human needs in terms of social, environmental, and economic aspects of life. Freedom from indignity relates to the overall improved quality of life that allows humans to seek opportunities and make choices for themselves for their own betterment. Human security differs from traditional security in that traditional security focuses on infrastructure, such as state's boundaries, people, institutions, and values. Traditional security utilizes military power and national defense, and aims to protect interstate stability and order. The focus is primarily self-preservation and the state (Adapted from Thomas, ResearchGate). Human security relates to the liberalist paradigm goal of global social justice and emphasis on individual freedom and protection. While human security seeks to protect human rights, it is not the same. Human rights are separate from state interests and exist as the status-quo of basic human freedoms, regardless of governmental involvement. Human security is the relationship between the state and its people and its core source of motivation stems from the protection of human rights (Human Security and Human Rights Harmonious to Inharmonious Relations). Human security is a widely criticized concept, as it's believed that the more components included within the concept, the less useful it actually is. Alternative proposals

of the definition of human security have been offered and one includes the opinion of one of the founding members of the “Human Security Partnership”, the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. He says, “Human security means safety for people from both violent and non-violent threats. It is a condition or state of being characterized by freedom from pervasive threats to people’s rights, their safety, or even their lives ... The litmus test for determining if it is useful to frame an issue in human security terms is the degree to which the safety of people is at risk” (Human Security: Continuing Debates: Freedom from “Want”). He sees the framework of human security as a more simple concept of protecting people from basic threats and currently includes unnecessary protections. The advantages of human security stem from its preventative and resilient nature as it relates to protection of individuals. The United Nations claims human security strengthens local capabilities and advances respect for human rights and dignity (What is Human Security?). It is important that state’s not only recognize human rights, but also have policies in place to protect them and showcase their concern for preserving individual freedoms.

The United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are eight goals agreed upon by UN member states that aim to combat poverty, illiteracy, environmental degradation, discrimination against women, hunger, and disease. These were originally set to be achieved by 2015 once the United Nations Millennium Declaration was signed in September of 2000. MDGs are targeted at developing countries and each goal has achieved varying degrees of success since being implemented (Millennium Development Goals, World Health Organization). Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a call to action by all countries, regardless of their wealth or level of development, that aim to create a prosperous world for all while also striving to protect the planet. There are seventeen sustainable development goals targeting economic, environmental, and social issues that were adopted in 2015 by the UN member states. Millennium Development Goals are generally viewed as a great global success. The largest indicator of this is the impressive projected 21 million lives that were saved due to accelerated progress in these goals (How Successful were the Millennium Development Goals?). Traditional international commitments may be an effective display of global development, but MDGs are set apart in their effectiveness due to their targeted approach in areas of the world that are disproportionately affected by these circumstances. While the MDGs were largely viewed as a success, there were many challenges to their achievements. For example, MDG Goal #7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability was met with pushback in the majority of developing countries. In the 2008 Briefing Paper on the progress of MDGs, only East Asia was successfully progressing towards sustainability. Six other regions were off track or were entirely unsuccessful in achieving this goal. Because this goal includes the target of ensuring safe drinking water and basic sanitation, poorer countries were extremely lacking in resources to make this happen, by no fault of their own. Not only this, but many countries were already regressing in environmental sustainability due to deforestation, overfishing, droughts, or floods, so little progress was made once the goal was created because of unforeseen circumstances (The Millennium Development Goals: Facing Down Challenges). Another MDG that made little international progress was Goal

#3: Gender equality and empowerment of women. According to the UN, “gender inequality persists in spite of more representation of women in parliament and more girls going to school. Women continue to face discrimination in access to work, economic assets and participation in private and public decision-making” (MDG Failures). One major pushback to achieving this goal was religious or regional traditions due to lack of human security towards women specifically. Not only this, but lack of progress in other goals had an adverse effect on gender-equality in regards to health. Women’s health, a part of MDG #3, is directly affected by the progress of MDG #7. The statistic that we see this impact is in the lives of pregnant women due to lack of clean water and sanitary environments for childbirth. It was estimated in 2008 that complications during birth and pregnancy due to lack of accommodations would take the lives of a half-million women (Progress for Children: A World Fit for Children, UNICEF). Not only do the water conditions adversely affect women, but so do the declining availability of natural resources, also a result of the failure of MDG #7. Women and girls must walk greater distances and spend more time searching for firewood just for survival. Time that could be spent resting, pursuing economic opportunities, or learning is robbed from women and children due to the time and energy spent simply collecting basic needs (World Resources 2005: The Wealth of the Poor: Managing Ecosystems to Fight Poverty).

While MDGs have worked towards preventing and combating health and social emergencies, there is work to be done towards achieving other goals related to the global betterment of humans. Health security awareness has grown over the past two years and further exacerbates the need for human security policies as they relate to protecting individuals from threat and the fear of threats (How COVID-19 Could Reshape International Security Policy).

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