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Non-governmental organizations and human security: a study in concept and relationship

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Abstract:

This research paper aims to explore the concepts of human security and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). NGOs have prioritized security issues on their agendas, playing a crucial role in promoting the concept of human security within international relations through their voluntary humanitarian initiatives across various fields, including human rights, international humanitarian law, the environment, and other fundamental concepts in most human security discourses.

The study concludes that NGOs are among the most important actors in human security, offering an agenda based on three key efforts: prevention and risk assessment, protection, and compensation.

Keywords: Non-governmental organizations; human security; relations; threats; missions.

1. INTRODUCTION

The major transformations that marked the end of the Cold War had a direct impact on international debates and the assumptions underlying the dynamics and processes of international relations. They also led to the emergence and alteration of many concepts prevalent during the Cold War. Many political analysts and researchers considered the post-Cold War era to be one of new trends toward restructuring traditional norms in accordance with modern international realities. This period witnessed the rise of new threats and forms of conflict, all of which raised numerous questions about the actual ability of states to guarantee their stability and security by focusing solely on securing their borders and strengthening their military or economic capabilities.

Security is a concern for individuals, groups, and nations, and everyone strives to achieve it in various ways. It is considered the fundamental factor that preserves human existence and allows people to live with dignity, which is linked to the urgent need to achieve security in its various dimensions. The concept of human security has come to encompass addressing multiple types of challenges and diverse sources of threats. Human security includes economic, food, environmental, social, political, and personal security(Selam, 2018, page 20).

The importance of this study lies in its attempt to determine the extent to which non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as non-state actors, contribute to activating human security -a level of security- by describing and analyzing the relationship between the evolving roles of NGOs and human security, particularly in light of the expanding threats and risks targeting individual security, and the indicators of state inadequacy and its repercussions on individual security. This analysis is based on the nature and effectiveness of NGOs' operational mechanisms.

Therefore, the following questions arise: What do we mean by NGOs and human security? What is the relationship between them? And have NGOs truly contributed to protecting and promoting human security?

We will address these questions according to the following axes:

2. First axis: The concept of human security and non-governmental organizations

First, we must address the concepts of both non-governmental organizations and human security in order to understand the relationship between them.

2.1 The concept of human security

The post-Cold War international environment produced concepts that differed from the system of concepts that prevailed in the Cold War era, where we find the concept of globalization versus particularism, the concept of international humanitarian intervention versus the concept of national sovereignty, and the

concept of human security versus national security (Al-Ali, 2017, p. 216).

2.1.1Definition of human security

Most researchers agree with the definition of human security provided by the United Nations in its 1994 Human Development Report(Reklouli, 2023, P 1783): "Human security is much more than the absence of violence and conflict. It encompasses human rights, good governance, access to education and health, ensuring the safety of individuals, achieving economic growth, and preventing conflict."

This definition reveals that human security is based on a single point of reference: the individual and working to ensure their security.

The 1994 Human Development Report identified seven dimensions of human security, as follows:

• **Economic security:** This includes the importance of individuals having sufficient income to meet their basic needs and desires. It also relies on taking measures to protect the national economy, as any deterioration in the economy will negatively impact individuals' ability to secure their basic needs.

• **Food security:** This refers to ensuring that all people at all times have physical and economic access to basic food. It can be defined as: "The ability of countries and societies to provide for the objective or potential food needs of their members, enabling them to live healthy and active lives, while also guaranteeing access to food for those whose income does not allow them to

obtain it, whether through domestic production or imports, relying on domestic resources".

• **Environmental security:** This involves working to protect people from environmental damage and preserving environmental resources from pollution.

• **Health security**: This involves providing healthcare and appropriate medicine to all individuals and working to prevent the spread of diseases and epidemics.

• **Personal security**: This focuses on how to ensure the physical and psychological protection of individuals, whether by other individuals or the state, and to ward off threats against them.

• **Community security**: This is the security that an individual derives from their belonging to a family, local community, or ethnic group, which can provide them with a cultural identity and protect the identities and cultures of communities. Political security involves respecting human rights, including the right to express opinions, fostering a democratic environment, and protecting individuals by ensuring their equality (Salem, 2020, pp. 125-126).

Regarding its characteristics, the 1994 Human Development Report, published by the United Nations Development Programme, identified four key characteristics of human security:

• Human security is universal and comprehensive; it is a right for all people everywhere.

• The components of human security are interconnected and interdependent.

• Human security is achieved through early prevention, which is easier than subsequent intervention.

• Human security is people-centered and relates to the quality of life for people everywhere (Selam, 2018, p. 20).

2.1.2Threats to human security

Human security threats reflect a shift in the functioning of a range of human variables and factors, leading to a weakening of the existing security system (Al-Dae'jah, 2017, p. 130).

The concept of human security is inherently comprehensive, defined by its central focus: humanity. Consequently, security threats have become all-encompassing, originating from international actors, within states, from groups, or from individuals. These threats may be economic, social, political, or ethnic in nature. Many traditional and non-traditional threats to human security have emerged, categorized as follows:

• **Human-caused threats**: Globalization has been a significant factor in the spread of new human-caused security threats. By facilitating open borders, the free flow of information, and ease of communication, it has led to the proliferation of numerous asymmetric security threats. In these threats, a single individual or a group can create a new threat to the state. Among the most prominent examples are the spread of terrorist groups, irregular migration, and organized crime.

• **Threats from and between states:** Threats from within states include civil wars, ethnic cleansing and discrimination, widespread corruption, denial of freedom of expression, and the

state's failure to provide economic, financial, social, and health security, among other threats that negatively impact national and human security. Sometimes, states prioritize their own security at the expense of individual security, as seen in Syria and some countries that experienced the Arab Spring uprisings, where the regime itself became a threat to individual safety. Threats between states include wars and the use of destructive weapons such as chemical and biological weapons.

• **Threats from nature:** These include desertification, global warming, drought, and other natural threats. The failure to develop policies and strategies to address climate change can lead to reduced agricultural and livestock production, threatening food security and consequently negatively impacting human security. However, the spread of diseases, epidemics, and pandemic threats such as COVID-19, AIDS, and Zika are classified as natural threats that are man-made. In discussing natural threats, it's worth noting that the administration of former US President Barack Obama was the first to address these challenges as threats to international security and stability, requiring international cooperation.

In 2010, the United States identified two types: The first challenge is human-made, encompassing terrorism, global security, the spread of organized crime, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, poverty and hunger, human rights violations, restrictions on public freedoms, and pandemic threats, in addition to the challenges posed by other international actors competing with Washington on the global stage.

The second challenge consists of natural disasters such as earthquakes, volcanoes, hurricanes, floods, and global warming.

While these present economic and environmental challenges for nations, they are considered less threatening than the first type. Therefore, countries have become victims of the spread of epidemics that destroy human security, thereby threatening the human element. They do not only affect health but also development, and confronting them requires not only national plans but also programs to reduce the damages that they reflect in the future on the dimensions of human security, such as harming food security, the economy and political stability (Salem, 2020, pages 126-127).

2.2 The concept of non-governmental organizations

It is necessary to understand the concept of non-governmental organizations, the conditions for their establishment, and their characteristics, in order to study the extent of their relationship to human security, as follows:

2.2.1 Definition of non-governmental organizations and the conditions for their establishment

There are several legal definitions of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). It is important to rely on the definitions provided by specialized international institutions and organizations, such as the United Nations, which was a pioneer in establishing relations with NGOs through its Department of Public Information and the Economic and Social Council (Rubio, 2004, p. 126).

The United Nations defines international NGOs as: "The organized coordination of bodies, institutions, and programs that

aim to support or improve the economic, health, or personal capabilities of the entire population" (Al-Hamawi, 2013, p. 18).

In another context, the United Nations adopted a broad developmental definition, which embodies solidarity, mutual support, and social justice. It defined them as: "Organizations that aim to serve communities, possess a specific developmental vision, and are concerned with improving the conditions of groups overlooked or harmed by development initiatives. Their work is defined in the fields of development projects, emergencies, rehabilitation, development culture, and the defense of economic and social rights" (Abadi, 2008, p. 215). It is noteworthy that, despite the United Nations' emphasis on the developmental dimension in its broad definition of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), it has not yet moved beyond the functional evolution of these organizations' role. The developmental vision remains confined to improving the conditions of marginalized groups, without extending to their role as social intermediaries in processes of social change that would eliminate the mechanisms of marginalization.

The United Nations document 1994/A defines them as "a non-profit entity whose members are citizens or groups of citizens belonging to one or more countries, and whose activities are determined by the collective will of its members, in response to the needs of members of one or more of the groups with which it cooperates." It also defines them as "a non-governmental, non-profit network, which may be large or small, secular or religious, and may work solely for its members or for anyone in need of assistance. Some focus on local issues, while others operate at the national, regional, or international levels" (Ben Ali, 2015, p.

25). The World Bank defines international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as: "Institutions and groups with diverse interests that are wholly or partially independent of governments, characterized by humanitarian and cooperative work, and have no commercial objectives." This definition reflects the World Bank's emphasis on the role of NGOs as a means of mitigating the severity of problems, rather than as intermediaries between society and the state, or as suitable frameworks for contributing to the democratic transformation of society, or as capable of playing a comprehensive developmental role.

The UNESCO General Conference, in its eleventh session (as amended in its fourteenth session), defined the nature of an international NGO. It determined that an international NGO is "any international organization not established by agreement between governments, whose aims and functions are of a non-governmental nature, and which includes a significant proportion of groups or individuals as members from multiple countries" (Fouad, 2004, pp. 82-83).

2.2.2 Characteristics and features of non-governmental organizations

When discussing the characteristics of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), we can outline the following:

• These organizations are established by private individuals and legal entities seeking change, sharing common interests, and operating wholly or partially independently of governments.

• They represent significant segments of public opinion, serving as a valuable voice in their local and technical fields, expressing the views of their members and playing a suitable role in harmonizing the shared interests of relevant sectors within a national, regional, or global framework.

• They have an international organizational structure for their activities and are voluntary in nature, being transnational, non-profit entities. Their activities are centered on change; they work to transform lifestyles and reduce legal gaps, such as in human rights, environmental, health, women's, and children's rights laws.

• They operate in numerous countries worldwide, thus representing a new force capable of influencing government policies in the international community. • It should have an institutional framework, including bodies each performing different social and humanitarian functions and roles to address the shortcomings and paralysis of states and their institutions at the regional and international levels.

• It should have privileges, particularly those with "observer status," which allows it to send an observer-without voting rights-to attend international meetings (Saadallah, 2009, pp. 19-20).

3. Second axis: The relationship of NGOs to human security

The efforts of international non-governmental organizations to provide a suitable environment for activating human security and sustaining its various aspects lead us to focus on understanding the roles, arrangements, and mechanisms these organizations adopt in their work. As one of the most important

actors in human security, these organizations rely on a set of mechanisms that work to provide a suitable environment for activating human security and sustaining its aspects, through an agenda based on three fundamental efforts: prevention and risk assessment, protection, and compensation (Edri, 2012, p. 83).

3.1 Mechanisms of non-governmental organizations in preventing threats to human security:

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as key actors in human security, rely on a range of mechanisms to create a conducive environment for the implementation and sustainability of human security. This is achieved through an agenda based on three fundamental efforts: prevention and risk assessment, protection, and redress. At the primary level, NGOs rely on what are known as "preventive mechanisms" to ensure the effective implementation of human security. These mechanisms aim to avert imminent violations by identifying when individuals are at risk of physical harm (such as when freedom of movement or the right to work is restricted), when a group faces the threat of losing its voice within society, or when a traditional way of life begins to disappear.

These mechanisms are particularly crucial for countries experiencing collapse or on the brink of poverty. Adopting preventive mechanisms enables international non-governmental organizations to not only deal with the results or consequences of insecurity, but also to delve into addressing the root causes of the main humanitarian factors or concerns that lead to individual insecurity and to prevent or reduce them (Edri, 2012, pp. 84-85).

3.2 The mechanisms of non-governmental organizations in protecting human security:

Initially, NGOs focused on denouncing past or present violations of individual security and dignity, relying on policies of publicizing and shaming violations, given the existence of documented abuses. However, the mechanisms they used have expanded considerably. NGOs no longer merely criticize, but also form partnerships with governmental and non-governmental institutions to help protect individual security (Edri, 2012, p. 94).

3.2.1 UN Consultative Status :

The United Nations Charter established close ties with international non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Article 71 of the UN Charter: ″The Economic and Social Council may make suitable arrangements for consultation with non-governmental organizations which are concerned with matters within its competence. Such arrangements may be made with international organizations and, where appropriate, with national organizations after consultation with the Member of the United Nations concerned‟.Under this article, non-governmental organizations have consultative and observer status with the United Nations, which grants them the right to be consulted and to express their views on various issues at the UN. The Economic and Social Council recognizes that these organizations should be given the opportunity to express their views, as they can offer the Council the greatest possible benefit due to their expertise and technical knowledge. (Belbey, 2018,

p. 110).

3.2.2 NGO'S as a lobby groups :

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have become capable of exerting pressure even on the largest governments to urge them to take, or refrain from taking, specific human rights actions. Their cross-border advocacy role influences not only national governments but also multilateral institutions and national and transnational corporations through various means, including agenda-setting, reporting, lodging complaints on behalf of victims, exposing violations committed by some states, and mobilizing public opinion in support of human rights issues.

3.2.3 Compensatory mechanisms of non-governmental organizations:

In their efforts to promote human security, NGOs rely on these mechanisms to strengthen fractured societies and combat abuses and impunity. These mechanisms include highlighting the importance of the legal framework in identifying victims, holding perpetrators accountable, and achieving justice through litigation and reparations; documenting violations; establishing fact-finding commissions to investigate and acknowledge serious human rights and security violations; and developing mechanisms for the rehabilitation and empowerment of communities and individuals, as well as building advocacy networks for the human security agenda and culture. Despite the significant importance of the individual in contemporary international law, which enshrines a range of legal guarantees

and mechanisms-such as the rules, principles, and foundations upon which human rights are based-that must be observed to ensure due respect for the universal rights and freedoms of individuals, this does not mean that there are no instances where individuals' security and rights are violated or left insecure. Many states continue to violate these rights and prevent other states from intervening to protect individuals under the pretext that such actions fall within their domestic jurisdiction.

Thus, the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has become pivotal in addressing human security issues following threats and violations. These organizations strive, through a range of legal mechanisms, to achieve a form of justice after human rights violations and breaches of individual security, and to dismantle the cultural and institutional structures that allow perpetrators to escape punishment. This is achieved either by seeking to punish offenders or by compensating and rehabilitating victims.

Through these mechanisms, NGOs focus on societies emerging from oppressive rule or armed conflict, as well as on other countries where historical injustices and severe violations of individual safety remain unresolved. They do this by providing comparative information, legal and political analyses, documentation, and strategic research to institutions concerned with justice and fact-finding. Ultimately, human security cannot be achieved without establishing the rule of law (Edri, 2012, p. 107).

3.2.3 Diplomatic intervention mission

In its efforts to ensure respect for and uphold human rights at the

domestic level, NGOs send diplomatic missions to various countries. The organization may draw the attention of official authorities to the violation, demand an impartial investigation into the violation and the punishment of those responsible, and request that the results of the official investigation be published so that the public is aware of the executive government's fulfillment of its legal duties towards them. The organization may also raise questions about the standards and procedures used in such cases in order to prevent the violation from occurring in the future. The organization may also warn officials of the spread of a phenomenon that infringes upon citizens' rights and fundamental freedoms if specific actions are not stopped. The organization may make any or all of these demands. (Azzam, 1996, pp. 121-122).

3.2.4 The efforts of non-governmental organizations in the process of building a culture of human security

The efforts of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in building a culture of human security revolve around educating future generations and integrating the principles of human security into educational curricula. This integration is generally part of the value system that each curriculum aims to achieve through its courses and programs. NGOs also collaborate with governments to raise awareness of international humanitarian law (IHL), disseminate materials that facilitate its teaching, and work to disseminate information on the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols. Furthermore, they organize seminars and lectures on the content of this law (Fouad M.,

2005, p. 31).

In addition to the significant role played by the Human Security Network, established in 1999, in promoting a culture of human security and developing practical measures to address issues threatening human security—such as focusing on the protection of civilians during armed conflicts and increasing the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations—the efforts of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have also contributed to addressing situations where resorting to war and weapons results from incidents that the warring parties have failed to prevent. This led to the adoption and development of the provisions of international humanitarian law, in other words, the law of war, or the law of international and internal armed conflicts.

It serves as a set of general rules of conduct to guide belligerents in their relations with each other and with civilian populations, aiming to resolve humanitarian problems arising directly from armed conflicts, whether international or non-international. For humanitarian reasons, it limits the right of parties to a conflict to use certain means and methods of warfare. It protects cultural, civilian, and environmental objects, vital installations, and persons who are harmed, especially those horrified to fight due to illness, detention, or any other reason. It mandates that they be treated humanely in all circumstances, without any adverse discrimination based on race, color, or religion. It prohibits attacks on life and physical integrity, particularly murder in all its forms, mutilation, cruel treatment, torture, and attacks on personal dignity, especially degrading and humiliating treatment. It also prohibits the passing of sentences and the

execution of punishments without a prior trial before a legally constituted court that guarantees all necessary judicial safeguards (Idri, 2012, p. 116).

4. CONCLUSION

From the above, we conclude that there is a close relationship between human security and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as the latter exist to ensure the protection of individual rights, security, and safety. Accordingly, we will present a set of results followed by the necessary recommendations.

Results:

Similar to the many roles these NGOs have played, they have also attempted to contribute to the protection of human security, especially since the latter has emerged as a result of several factors. These include the changing nature of wars and conflicts, which have become mostly internal, as well as the growing influence of soft power, which is based on the functions of development, resource security, environmental protection, and the guarantee of human rights.

The shift in the nature of international risks and new security threats has necessarily led to a restructuring of the cognitive and operational content of security.

Consequently, the way NGOs deal with all these threats-such as organized crime, environmental threats, terrorism, drug trafficking, and small arms trafficking, or those resulting from potential state failure-requires the adoption of preventive mechanisms to proactively address them or to manage their

repercussions on human security, and resorting to protection and compensation mechanisms in case of failure.

The work of NGO mechanisms extends beyond simply mitigating threats to human security. It encompasses addressing institutional changes and social transformation processes with long-term impacts on human security, including governance, public participation, transparency, and capacity building.

Recommendations:

Effective mechanisms must be employed, along with a broad awareness campaign aimed at raising awareness among individuals and the international community about the importance of human security.

NGOs must establish relationships and cooperative networks with other civil society groups and states that can contribute to the activation of human security.

They should focus on long-term perspectives to optimize their role and fully leverage their contribution in developing and implementing international standards in the field of human security.

The work of NGOs must be facilitated to ensure the effective protection of human security.

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