

# Human Security Beyond Military Security: Rethinking Security in the Twenty-First Century

By: Civic Roots Research Team

## Introduction

*For decades, security has been largely understood through a military lens. Nations measured their security by the size of their armed forces, the sophistication of their weapons systems, and their ability to defend territorial boundaries against external threats.*

*This understanding of security emerged from a world defined by interstate conflicts, geopolitical rivalries, and military competition. In such an environment, national security was synonymous with military capability.*

*Today, however, the nature of threats has changed dramatically.*

*Many of the dangers that affect the daily lives of citizens do not arrive through invading armies or cross-border military attacks. They emerge through poverty, unemployment, hunger, disease, environmental degradation, organized crime, weak institutions, cyber threats, social exclusion, and economic instability.*

*A nation may possess a powerful military and still face widespread insecurity among its citizens. Likewise, a country may have secure borders while millions struggle to access food, healthcare, education, clean water, and economic opportunity.*

*These realities have given rise to a broader understanding of security known as human security.*

*Human security places people at the center of security policy. It shifts attention from protecting territories to protecting lives, livelihoods, dignity, and opportunities. It recognizes that national stability ultimately depends on the well-being of citizens.*

*For countries like Nigeria, this shift in thinking is particularly important.*

*The future of security will not be determined solely by military strength. It will increasingly be shaped by a nation's ability to create conditions in which people can live productive, healthy, and meaningful lives.*

## Understanding Human Security

Human security is built on a simple but powerful idea.

People are secure when they are protected not only from violence but also from the conditions that threaten their survival, well-being, and prospects.

This approach expands the traditional definition of security beyond military defense to include a wide range of interconnected factors.

These include:

- Economic security

- Food security
- Health security
- Environmental security
- Personal security
- Community security
- Political security

Human security recognizes that these dimensions are deeply interconnected.

A family that lacks income security may struggle to access healthcare.

Poor healthcare can reduce productivity and deepen poverty.

Poverty can contribute to social unrest.

Social unrest can create insecurity.

Insecurity can discourage investment and economic growth.

The cycle then continues.

From a human security perspective, security and development are not separate issues. They are mutually reinforcing.

A secure society creates conditions for development.

Development, in turn, strengthens security.

This broader framework has become increasingly relevant in a world where many of the greatest threats to human well-being are non-military in nature.

### **Why Traditional Security Thinking Is No Longer Enough**

Military security remains essential.

Every nation must protect its sovereignty, territorial integrity, and citizens from external aggression.

However, military security alone cannot address many of the threats that define contemporary society.

The Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated this reality clearly.

Countries with advanced military capabilities found themselves vulnerable to a public health crisis that disrupted economies, overwhelmed healthcare systems, and affected millions of lives.

Similarly, climate change, cybercrime, food shortages, unemployment, and economic shocks cannot be solved through military force.

These challenges require different forms of preparedness, resilience, and institutional capacity.

A nation can spend billions on defense while neglecting education, healthcare, infrastructure, and job creation. Such a country may appear secure from a military standpoint while remaining vulnerable from a human security perspective.

The lesson is clear.

National security and human security are not competing priorities.

They are complementary objectives.

Military strength protects the state.

Human security protects the people.

Long term stability requires both.

## The Nigerian Context

Nigeria's security challenges are often discussed in terms of armed conflict, terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, and communal violence.

These issues are serious and require effective security responses.

However, focusing exclusively on military solutions risks overlooking the underlying conditions that contribute to insecurity.

Many security challenges are rooted in broader socioeconomic realities.

High youth unemployment, educational deficits, economic inequality, weak institutions, limited economic opportunities, and inadequate public services create environments where insecurity can flourish.

When young people lack access to opportunities, frustration grows.

When communities feel excluded from economic progress, tensions increase.

When public institutions fail to meet expectations, trust declines.

When trust declines, social cohesion weakens.

These conditions do not automatically create insecurity, but they increase vulnerability.

Human security therefore encourages policymakers to examine not only the symptoms of insecurity but also its underlying drivers.

A comprehensive security strategy must address both.

## Economic Security as National Security

Economic security is one of the most important components of human security.

Individuals who have access to stable employment, income opportunities, and financial resilience are generally better positioned to contribute positively to society.

Economic insecurity produces multiple risks.

Households become vulnerable to shocks.

Consumer spending declines.

Poverty increases.

Social tensions rise.

Migration pressures intensify.

Informal and illicit economic activities may become more attractive.

In many developing economies, unemployment and underemployment represent significant security concerns because they affect social stability and national productivity.

For Nigeria, creating jobs is not merely an economic objective.

It is a security objective.

Every meaningful discussion about national security should therefore include conversations about economic inclusion, entrepreneurship, industrial development, skills acquisition, and private sector growth.

Economic opportunity remains one of the most effective long-term investments in security.

## **Food Security and Social Stability**

Food security is another critical but often overlooked aspect of national security.

History demonstrates that food shortages can trigger social unrest, political instability, migration, and conflict.

When citizens cannot reliably access affordable and nutritious food, broader societal challenges often emerge.

Nigeria possesses significant agricultural potential.

Yet challenges related to productivity, infrastructure, logistics, storage, climate variability, and market access continue to affect food systems.

Human security recognizes that food security is not simply an agricultural issue.

It is a strategic national priority.

A country that cannot feed its population sustainably faces long-term vulnerabilities that extend beyond economics.

Food security contributes directly to social stability, public health, and national resilience.

## **Health Security in an Interconnected World**

The events of recent years have underscored the importance of health security.

Health crises can disrupt economies, overwhelm public institutions, and expose structural vulnerabilities within societies.

Strong healthcare systems contribute to productivity, resilience, and economic growth.

Weak healthcare systems increase societal vulnerability.

Human security therefore views investments in healthcare not merely as social expenditures but as strategic investments in national stability.

Healthcare workers, hospitals, disease surveillance systems, pharmaceutical capacity, and public health infrastructure all contribute to security outcomes.

In an interconnected world, health security has become a central pillar of national security.

## **Environmental Security and the Future**

Environmental challenges increasingly shape security outcomes across the globe.

Climate change, desertification, flooding, water scarcity, and environmental degradation affect livelihoods, agricultural productivity, migration patterns, and resource availability.

In Nigeria, environmental pressures are already influencing economic and social conditions in many regions.

Communities dependent on agriculture and natural resources are particularly vulnerable.

Human security encourages governments and businesses to view environmental sustainability as a security imperative rather than a purely ecological concern.

The ability to manage environmental risks will increasingly influence economic performance, social stability, and long-term development.

### **Education as a Security Asset**

Few investments contribute more to human security than education.

Education expands opportunities.

It improves productivity.

It strengthens civic participation.

It promotes innovation.

It increases social mobility.

It reduces vulnerability.

A well-educated population is better equipped to adapt to economic changes, participate in democratic processes, and contribute to national development.

Conversely, educational deficits can deepen inequality and limit opportunities.

Human security therefore recognizes education as both a development tool and a security asset.

Nations that invest in human capital strengthen their long-term resilience.

### **The Role of Institutions**

Human security cannot exist without effective institutions.

Strong institutions deliver public services, enforce laws, manage resources, protect rights, and create opportunities.

Weak institutions often amplify insecurity.

When citizens lose confidence in public institutions, trust declines and social cohesion weakens.

Institutional effectiveness therefore represents one of the most important foundations of human security.

Governments must not only provide security through law enforcement and military capacity.

They must also build institutions capable of addressing the broader needs of society.

This requires investment in governance, accountability, transparency, service delivery, and policy implementation.

The strength of institutions often determines the strength of human security outcomes.

### **What Human Security Means for Business**

Human security is not solely a government responsibility.

Businesses have an important role to play.

Organizations operate within communities and economies. Their long-term success depends on stable and prosperous societies.

Businesses contribute to human security through:

- Job creation
- Skills development
- Innovation
- Responsible investment
- Community engagement
- Environmental stewardship

- Ethical governance

Forward-looking companies increasingly recognize that social stability and business sustainability are interconnected.

Economic growth is strongest when communities are secure, healthy, educated, and productive.

Human security therefore aligns closely with modern approaches to corporate responsibility and sustainable development.

### **A New Framework for National Development**

Perhaps the greatest value of human security is that it encourages integrated thinking.

Traditional policy approaches often treat security, health, education, employment, governance, and economic development as separate issues.

Human security recognizes that they are interconnected.

A society cannot achieve lasting prosperity without security.

A society cannot achieve lasting security without development.

The two objectives must be advanced together.

For policymakers, this means moving beyond narrow sectoral thinking.

For businesses, it means understanding the broader ecosystem in which economic activity occurs.

They will be those that create the most secure conditions for human flourishing.

For citizens, it means recognizing that security is about more than protection from violence.

It is also about access to opportunity, dignity, and hope.

### **Conclusion**

The security challenges of the twenty-first century demands a broader perspective.

Military capability remains important, but it is no longer sufficient on its own.

A nation may secure its borders and still leave its people vulnerable.

True security exists when citizens are protected from violence, poverty, hunger, disease, exclusion, and uncertainty.

Human security offers a framework for understanding this reality.

It recognizes that people are the ultimate beneficiaries of security policy and that national stability depends on their well-being.

For Nigeria, embracing human security does not mean abandoning traditional security priorities.

It means complementing them with investments in economic opportunity, healthcare, education, food systems, environmental sustainability, and institutional effectiveness.

The strongest nations of the future will not simply be those with the most powerful militaries.



Security is no longer only about defending borders. It is about expanding possibilities, protecting dignity, and enabling citizens to live productive and meaningful lives. That is the true promise of human security.

