

Final Recommendations

of the UNESCO-ISS Expert Meeting on Peace, Human Security and Conflict Prevention in Africa

Background

On 23 and 24 July 2001, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) of South Africa hosted a high-level expert meeting on peace, human security, conflict prevention and social development, with the participation of regional and continental organizations and selected representatives from civil society in Africa. The meeting took place under the terms of a cooperation agreement signed between UNESCO and the ISS in Paris on 22 February 1999 and followed the First International Meeting of Directors of Peace Research and Training Institutions, hosted by UNESCO in Paris on 27 and 28 November 2000.

The November 2000 meeting made a number of specific recommendations concerning Africa, including the need to give support to African initiatives; the need to strongly link conflict prevention to the promotion of human security, on the basis of dialogue within societies; and the need to strengthen education, training and scientific capacities to deal with the major challenges of conflict prevention and the building of human security. The Agenda for Action from the Paris meeting called, *inter alia*, for the convening of expert meetings in the different regions in order to draw up more specific agendas for the promotion of human security at the regional and subregional levels.

The Pretoria meeting is the first of a series of four on the same

theme. Thus, three other meetings will be held in 2001, one in Karachi (Pakistan) for the South Asia region, in collaboration with the Pakistan Institute of International Affairs (PIIA); one in Almaty (Kazakhstan) for the Central Asia region, in cooperation with the National Commission for UNESCO; and the last in Santiago (Chile) for the Latin America and Caribbean region, in cooperation with the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO).

Meanwhile, UNESCO is also preparing regional international conferences for 2002 on peace, human security and conflict prevention in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Obstacles, challenges and prospective issues

Africa is plagued by the twin phenomena of weak states and weak civil society. Notwithstanding, states continue to be important actors both politically and economically. Within that context, the institutional and administrative shortcomings of governments, parliaments, judiciaries and security sectors, as well as low social and economic indicators, need to be addressed if any progress on human security is to be achieved.

In this respect, capacity-building on a number of levels is necessary, as is improved access to information at the national, subregional and regional levels. Greater openness in the process of governing is also critical, both in terms of preventing crises and of improving governance and accountability.

However, in furthering the cause of human security, the political will of the parties involved is crucial. Apart from a lack of capacity, lack of will has been a major constraint on progress in regional integration and the development of regional codes of conduct, for example.

The Pretoria meeting focused on the following questions:

1. How can we ensure that regional, subregional and national bodies take the dimension of human security into account in their policy formulation and implementation?
2. Have the priorities that require long-term action been identified by these bodies or are they only dealing with urgent matters (crisis management)?
3. What capacities need to be built to promote human security, especially through education and training?
4. Which strategies can mobilize the most vulnerable populations so

that they too have a stake in the democratic process?

The concept of human security

Although in recent years there has been an expansion of both the concept of development and that of security, the two terms are not synonymous. While delegates enthusiastically subscribed to a wide definition of security as encapsulated by the term 'human security', the concept requires some delineation. In fact, there is a close overlap between our understanding of security and the term 'peace-building'. Therefore, for example, while delegates did not focus on the issue of development as such, the effects of (failed) development approaches and policies that impact very significantly on individual and communal security were considered to be of central concern.

Our focus on security does not imply a top-down approach to the strengthening of administrative structures or a state-centred approach to security thinking. Indeed, we reject an approach that relies upon structure to the exclusion of content and process.

Our concern with human security, therefore, provides space for community-based approaches to building stability and a host of initiatives between this and international responses and initiatives. Finally, in contrast to the short-term, problem-orientated focus of traditional strategic or security studies, our focus on human security attempts to lengthen the timescale within which security concerns are addressed, and broaden the scope beyond purely military issues.

Recommendations: A general overview

The meeting aimed to develop recommendations that would build on existing institutions and programmes carried out both by UNESCO and/or regional and national organizations, as well as organizations such as the ISS and other partners, in order to avoid duplication of effort. In addition, an attempt was made to base recommendations on their potential feasibility.

Delegates recognized that a number of recommendations impact upon other actors, such as the broader United Nations system, funding agencies and civil society.

The recommendations can be implemented at a number of levels and

by a number of actors:

- National: government and its agencies, with UNESCO playing a role in some of the initiatives.
- Subregional and regional: intergovernmental organizations such as the African Union, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), with UNESCO playing a role in some of the initiatives.

In all of the above, domestic and regional civil society organizations were identified as important actors, although their general weakness meant that expectations of delivery needed to be modest. Initiatives to strengthen the role of civil society organizations, think-tanks and regional institutes such as the ISS were therefore a recurrent theme.

UNESCO's core competency, that of capacity-building through education and training, can be focused in the following areas:

- skilled technical and administrative personnel at national governmental, subregional and regional intergovernmental level, who can manage projects effectively and engage in complex negotiations, such as the various rounds of the World Trade Organization;
- easily accessible and 'processable' information/resources.

These could be achieved on the basis of the draft UNESCO Medium-Term Strategy for 2002-2007, and in particular of its Strategic Objective 5 relating to human security and its Strategy on the Eradication of Poverty.

Key proposals

1. The participants recognized the significance of UNESCO's culture of peace and related programmes. It was agreed that certain core values of promotion of human rights and good governance are universal. The development of region-specific programmes promoting a culture of peace would build on existing UNESCO programmes, but would be aimed at identifying specific problems facing regions. For example, in the Horn of Africa the specific problem could be the militarization of politics, while in

other parts of the continent it could be religious or racial intolerance. Such programmes (e.g. Education for Peace) could be operational at a national level, but would be given added weight and create additional awareness if they were officially approved as joint programmes of UNESCO with the various subregional groupings, such as SADC or ECCAS, among others. UNESCO could develop pilot projects focused on human security for states that have very little capacity or resources. In addition, literacy programmes could be used to promote peace, human rights, democracy and tolerance.

2. As human security was still an emerging paradigm, with differing perceptions and emphasis, UNESCO would consider supporting a pilot study, possibly through the ISS, to investigate the development of human security indicators, which could raise the profile of critical human security issues. This would be complementary to the emphasis of the New Africa Initiative, adopted by the Organization of African Unity at its July 2001 Summit in Lusaka (Zambia), on good governance, democracy, human rights and sustainable development. Such a project could eventually involve a number of actors, including civil society, subregional and regional organizations. If adopted, these human security indicators could be used as benchmarks and early-warning mechanisms for the identification of focused programmes of action. For it to be African-owned, the process of developing such indicators would have to include the input of organizations and policy-making or academic institutions in Africa.

Participants also recommended that African institutions be encouraged to research and publish on the concept of human security and associated issues. UNESCO would possibly fund and encourage such projects.

3. Early-warning systems: Participants emphasized the importance of early warning and the challenge to translate this into early action. These mechanisms do not necessarily need to be intergovernmental, subregional or regional only, but delegates supported the development of early-warning mechanisms located in appropriate African research institutions with a focus that included non-military aspects of human security, particularly human rights and governance. The participants noted with appreciation the role played by established regional early-

warning systems within civil society, such as that at the ISS.

4. Delegates also discussed the furthering of the human security agenda through capacity-building of African parliamentarians, through institutions that form part of the broader security sector, including the armed forces and criminal justice sectors, as well as in respect of civil society. It is apparent that many African legislative institutions have limited information on international agreements and protocols entered into by their governments (examples are the Palermo Convention and decisions on controlling the proliferation of small arms). Educational and capacity-building projects to address these problems could be channelled intergovernmentally and through civil society. Delegates noted that all regional organizations have established or are considering various types of regional parliamentary institutions as well as referring to the mooted Pan-African Parliament.
5. Encouragement was given to African Member States to promote common legislative agendas in their national assemblies on issues that have been identified as crucial to the promotion of human security, such as HIV/AIDS, poverty, environment, human rights and good governance. It was also seen as important to consider vulnerable groups more broadly, in particular refugees, internally displaced persons, women, children, those affected by HIV/AIDS and persecuted communities and groups.
6. The participants also highlighted the fact that the overarching principles of the African Union, the New Africa Initiative (NAI) and the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA) are complementary to the concept of human security, and that it would be important to cooperate at an intergovernmental level to work towards attaining the principles contained therein. Delegates encouraged regional civil society organizations, such as the ISS, to assist in mobilizing and popularizing these initiatives in the run-up to the first Assembly of the African Union, to be held in South Africa in 2002. Such popularization should seek to provide space for civil society organizations within these continental initiatives and seek to embed the principles of good

governance and democracy, tolerance and empowerment of the populations, politically, socially and economically, at all levels. They also require the development of benchmark levels of democracy to ensure some measure of assessment of progress. This would also facilitate accountability of national and intergovernmental agencies to their citizens.

7. One of the issues identified by the participants as a key constraint was access to and dissemination of information. In this framework, the UNESCO SecuriPax Network should be strengthened, in particular through regional and subregional networking in Africa.

The participants recommended the establishment of a publicly accessible electronic resource centre, focusing on intergovernmental organizations in Africa, which would be responsible for the collection and dissemination of official documentation, such as decisions, resolutions, and basic documentation such as protocols and other official agreements. This would provide two benefits: easy access to information by regional and national bodies; and a means by which governments and intergovernmental organizations could be held accountable for decisions and policies adopted.

However, the participants also pointed to the fact that the so-called 'information society' was a reality for only a small proportion of people in Africa. Other forms of dissemination of information needed attention, such as radio and publications, especially in countries where the media are controlled by the state. In addition, citizens may have access to international broadcasters, but little access to information and developments directly pertinent to their own countries or regions. Participants stressed that the utilization of technology was a strong vehicle against the abuse of power. It provided for greater accountability and in this respect would need to be harnessed by organizations of civil society and UNESCO.

8. Capacity-building of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations in matters such as knowledge of codes of governance, and the more effective operation of such organizations, were also identified as areas in which UNESCO could help to address serious deficiencies.

In this respect, the identification for training of women's

organizations and community-based organizations in rural areas would go a long way towards assisting vulnerable groups.

Participants also touched on the necessity of developing a database or inventory of African NGOs, which could facilitate improved networking among them as well as with intergovernmental organizations. Delegates noted that the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) already has an African Network for Civil Society. Participants also noted with appreciation the results from the OAU - Civil Society Conference hosted in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) in June 2001 and the resolutions that flowed from it.

The meeting also identified a role for civil society, working together with UNESCO and other agencies, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in developing the capacity of civil society organizations in Africa. The recommendations included acceleration in the accreditation of African NGOs based at UNESCO. This would allow a more balanced perspective by UNESCO on the needs of NGOs, especially those of Africa. It would also help to create the necessary links between UNESCO and elements of African civil society.

Furthermore, the UNESCO National Commissions could focus on scenario-building with youth and women, particularly in less-developed countries, similar to the UNDP African Futures - National Long-Term Perspectives Studies.

Participants again called on the ISS to assist in mobilizing civil society participation in the forthcoming Assembly of the African Union, and UNESCO urged African leaders, and South Africa as the host, to assist in such a process and provide for civil society participation during the Assembly.

9. In all the above, UNESCO and regional intergovernmental organizations should strive to identify the role that traditional African institutions, such as the Council of Elders, can play. This would create a real sense of the ability of indigenous mechanisms to promote peace and human security.

Pretoria, 24 July 2001