



EDITORIAL

FOOD SECURITY AND HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCIES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

The end of the Cold War in 1989 opened the way for a resumption of a more open debate on security issues, freed from the shackles of ideologically expressed bloc formation. In some respects the years that followed saw the re-emergence of the human rights debate that had characterised the years immediately following the end of World War II, and the foundation of the UN. Not least among those urging a broadening and deepening of the concept of security has been the current UN secretary-general, Kofi Annan, who has time and again drawn attention to the importance of making people rather than states the essential reference point in any discussion of security. 'Human security' has become a buzz-phrase in the public arena, with all the threats that this implies for becoming virtually meaningless. Only by locating threats to human security in particular contexts and events can we really bring our critical faculties to bear upon the dilemmas to which it draws attention.

The dichotomy between extreme conceptions of human security and their traditional state-centred counterparts was highlighted by global reactions to the tragic events of 11 September 2001. While this response was almost unanimous in its condemnation of the attacks, the identification of the most efficacious long-term counter-measures differed quite starkly.

For some, the war against global terror would involve strengthening the apparatus

of the state even to the extent of severely circumscribing human rights usually regarded as sacrosanct in a democracy. In effect the official security agenda had moved back to a position not unlike that prevailing during the Cold War.

Other analysts, from a non-government perspective, drew different conclusions, and sought to use the events to draw attention to the glaring inequities of a global order moving apparently inexorably towards the marginalisation of the majority of people, especially in the South. For these analysts the events of 11 September served as a reminder of the need to focus increasingly on human rather than national security, which so easily transforms itself into state, and eventually elite, security.

For Africa, there is every danger that, in their official policy positions, the rich countries of the North will continue to concentrate on state security to the virtual exclusion of human security—a concept with which they are less comfortable since it would demand that they address certain systemic sources of global inequity. Yet an emphasis on people-centred security as an adjunct to that of state security is essential if peace and development are to be secured by Africa's masses. In what we are assured is a globalising world, security is indivisible, and cannot be reduced to the operations of police and other security agencies. Stability and security are by no means synonymous, for security cannot be equated with the maintenance of an inequitable status quo

except by the cynical beneficiaries of this arrangement.

Many more people are currently exposed to non-traditional threats to their security than to death either directly or indirectly as a consequence of armed conflict. Famine, HIV/AIDS, disease, and other manifestations of maldevelopment all constitute endemic threats to the livelihoods and lives of Africans. Of course, some of these non-military threats do contribute or lead to armed conflict. They also complicate the construction of some kind of post-conflict reconstitution of society.

It is in recognition of the significance of non-traditional threats to the well-being of millions of Africans that we have dedicated a section of the *African Security Review* to the issue of food security and humanitarian assistance. The coverage possible here is by no means exhaustive, and merely seeks to highlight certain key issues, but should provoke thought on an essential aspect of human security.

In the first feature article Jenny Clover addresses the paradox of growing global food insecurity despite massive increases in overall production. Nowhere is this situation more apparent than in Africa, where famine currently threatens the lives or livelihoods of many millions of people. Though recurring climatic extremes account partly for the situation, the relationship between food availability and food security is by no means as straightforward as it seems at first glance, and these threats to human security will continue to recur until a broader view prevails that integrates the issues of food availability, access and affordability. The article also covers the linkages between

'natural hazards', conflict, structural poverty, political crises, and the relatively new scourge of HIV/AIDS, all in the context of the global market for food.

The second article, by Julia Stewart, a consultant to the UN World Food Programme based in South Africa, was commissioned to provide a rare insight into the practical difficulties and operational complexities of providing emergency food assistance to millions of people in the Southern African region. Of particular interest are the observations about the differences in Southern Africa's own ability to respond to this crisis in comparison with that of 1992–93. Once again the variable of HIV/AIDS and the pandemic's capacity to undermine social mechanisms of economic support are thrown sharply into focus.

The third article, by Ailsa Holloway of the University of Cape Town, serves as a salutary warning against complacency and the triumphalism of those who expect the alleviation of human misery to be easily attainable. Though there is a great deal of rhetoric about the possibility of achieving sustainable development in the foreseeable future, the reality is far bleaker. In addition, there has grown a tendency to rely almost exclusively on external assistance to mitigate disasters once they have occurred, instead of building into domestic policy processes the anticipation of periodic and systemic threats to food security.

It is to be hoped that the publication of these articles will promote the discussion of food and human security, particularly in those circles more accustomed to participating in the traditional security debate.