2022 SPECIAL REPORT

New threats to human security in the Anthropocene
Demanding greater solidarity

OVERVIEW

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Foreword

We are faced with a development paradox. Even though people are on average living longer, healthier and wealthier lives, these advances have not succeeded in increasing people's sense of security. This holds true for countries all around the world and was taking hold even before the uncertainty wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic has increased this uncertainty. It has imperiled every dimension of our wellbeing and amplified a sense of fear across the globe. This, in tandem with rising geopolitical tensions, growing inequalities, democratic backsliding and devastating climate change-related weather events, threatens to reverse decades of development gains, throw progress on the Sustainable Development Goals even further off track, and delay the urgent need for a greener, more inclusive and just transition.

Against this backdrop, I welcome the Special Report on *New threats to human security in the Anthropocene: Demanding greater solidarity,* produced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The report explains this paradox, highlighting the strong association between declining levels of trust and increased feelings of insecurity.

It suggests that during the Anthropocene—a term proposed to describe the era in which humans have become central drivers of planetary change, radically altering the earth's biosphere—people have good reason to feel insecure. Multiple threats from COVID-19, digital technology, climate change, and biodiversity loss, have become more prominent or taken new forms in recent years.

In short, humankind is making the world an increasingly insecure and precarious place. The report links these new threats with the disconnect between people and planet, arguing that they—like the Anthropocene itself—are deeply entwined with increasing planetary pressure.

The contribution of this report is to update the concept of human security to reflect this new reality. This implies moving beyond considering the security of individuals and communities, to also consider the interdependence among people, and between people and planet, as reflected in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In doing so, the report offers a way forward to tackle today's interconnected threats. First, by pursuing human security strategies that affirm the importance of solidarity, since we are all vulnerable to the unprecedented process of planetary change we are experiencing during the Anthropocene. And second, by treating people not as helpless patients, but agents of change and action capable of shaping their own futures and course correcting.

The findings in the report echo some of the key themes in my report on *Our Common Agenda*, including the importance of investing in prevention and resilience, the protection of our planet, and rebuilding equity and trust at a global scale through solidarity and a renewed social contract.

The United Nations offers a natural platform to advance these core objectives with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders. This report offers valuable insights and analyses, and I commend it to a wide global audience as we strive to advance *Our Common Agenda* and to use the concept of human security as a tool to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

António Guterres
Secretary-General
United Nations

Acknowledgements

This Report builds on cumulative contributions over close to three decades that started with the seminal 1994 Human Development Report (led by Mahbub ul Haq), which popularized the concept of human security, continuing with the groundbreaking work of the Human Security Commission, led by Sadako Ogata and Amartya Sen, published in 2003.

The preparation of this Report would not have been possible without the support, ideas and advice from numerous individuals and organizations.

The Report benefited deeply from the intellectual advice, guidance and continuous encouragement provided by the High-Level Advisory Panel of Eminent Experts. We are particularly grateful to Co-Chairs Laura Chinchilla and Keizo Takemi for their intellectual leadership, commitment and hard work through countless sessions (virtual, hybrid and in person) throughout 2021. The other members of the Advisory Board were Amat Al Alim Alsoswa, Kaushik Basu, Abdoulaye Mar Dieye, Ilwad Elman, María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, Haishan Fu, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, Amy Jadesimi, Jennifer Leaning and Belinda Reyers.

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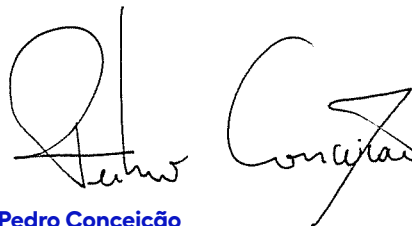†   Also a peer reviewer.

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New threats to human security in the Anthropocene: Demanding greater solidarity

New threats to human security in the Anthropocene: Demanding greater solidarity

As the Covid-19 pandemic got under way, the world had been reaching unprecedented heights on the Human Development Index (HDI). People were, on average, living healthier, wealthier and better lives for longer than ever. But under the surface a growing sense of insecurity had been taking root. An estimated six of every seven people across the world already felt insecure in the years leading up to the pandemic (figure 1). And this feeling of insecurity was not only high—it had been growing in most countries with data, including a surge in some countries with the highest HDI values.

The Covid-19 pandemic has now affected everyone, imperilling every dimension of our wellbeing and injecting an acute sense of fear across the globe. For the first time, indicators of human development have declined—drastically, unlike anything experienced in other recent global crises. The pandemic has infected and killed millions of people worldwide. It has upended the global economy, interrupted education dreams, delayed the administration of vaccines and medical treatment and disrupted lives and livelihoods. In 2021, even with the availability of very unequally distributed Covid-19 vaccines, the economic recovery that started in many countries and the partial return to schools, the crisis deepened in health, with a drop in life expectancy at birth. And the HDI, adjusted for Covid-19, had yet to recover about five years of progress, according to new simulations (figure 2).

It is not hard to understand how Covid-19 has made people feel more insecure. But what accounts for the startling bifurcation between improvements in wellbeing achievements and declines in people's perception of security? That is the motivating question for this Report. In addressing it, we hope to avoid returning to pathways of human development with human insecurity.

In the background of the human development–human security disconnect looms the Anthropocene, the age of humans disrupting planetary processes. Development approaches with a strong focus on economic growth and much less attention to equitable human development have produced stark and growing inequalities and destabilizing and dangerous planetary change. Climate change is an example, and Covid-19 may very well be. The 2020 Human Development Report showed that no country has achieved a very high HDI value without contributing heavily to pressures driving dangerous planetary change. In addition to climate change and more frequent disease outbreaks that are linked to planetary pressures, we confront biodiversity losses and threats to key ecosystems, from tropical forests to the oceans. Our pursuit of development has neglected our embeddedness in nature, leading to new threats as a by-product of development: new health threats, increased food insecurity and more frequent disasters, among many others. Recognizing that our development patterns drive human insecurity forces us to revisit the human security concept and understand what it implies for the Anthropocene.

When introduced in 1994, the human security approach refocused the security debate from territorial security to people's security. This idea, which the UN General Assembly endorsed in 2012, invited security scholars and policymakers to look beyond protecting the nation-state to protecting what we care most about in our lives: our basic needs, our physical integrity, our human dignity. It emphasized the importance of everyone's right to freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom from indignity. It highlighted the close connection among security, development and the protection and empowerment of individuals and communities. This Report explores how the new generation of interacting threats, playing out in the Anthropocene context, affect human security and what to do about it.

Part I of the Report shows how the human security concept helps identify blind spots when development is assessed simply by measuring achievements in wellbeing and suggests ways to enrich the human security frame to account for the unprecedented challenges of the Anthropocene context. Part II discusses four threats to human security that are superimposed on the Anthropocene context (figure 3): the downsides of digital technology, violent conflict, horizontal inequalities, and evolving challenges to healthcare systems. While the underlying challenge of each threat taken individually is not new, the threats are novel in the expression that they acquire in the Anthropocene context and their interlinked nature, which has been building over time. Current development journeys have often missed that point, focusing on addressing problems in silos when designing or evaluating policy.

Figure 1 Perceptions of human insecurity are widespread worldwide

More than **6 in 7** people worldwide perceived feeling moderately or very insecure just before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Out of 100 people	Low and medium HDI countries	High HDI countries	Very high HDI countries
People feeling secure			
People feeling moderately or very insecure			

Source: Human Development Report Office based on data from the World Values Survey, waves 6 and 7 (mostly pre-Covid-19 data; see annex 1.2).

Figure 2 The Covid-19 pandemic has caused an unprecedented decline in Human Development Index values
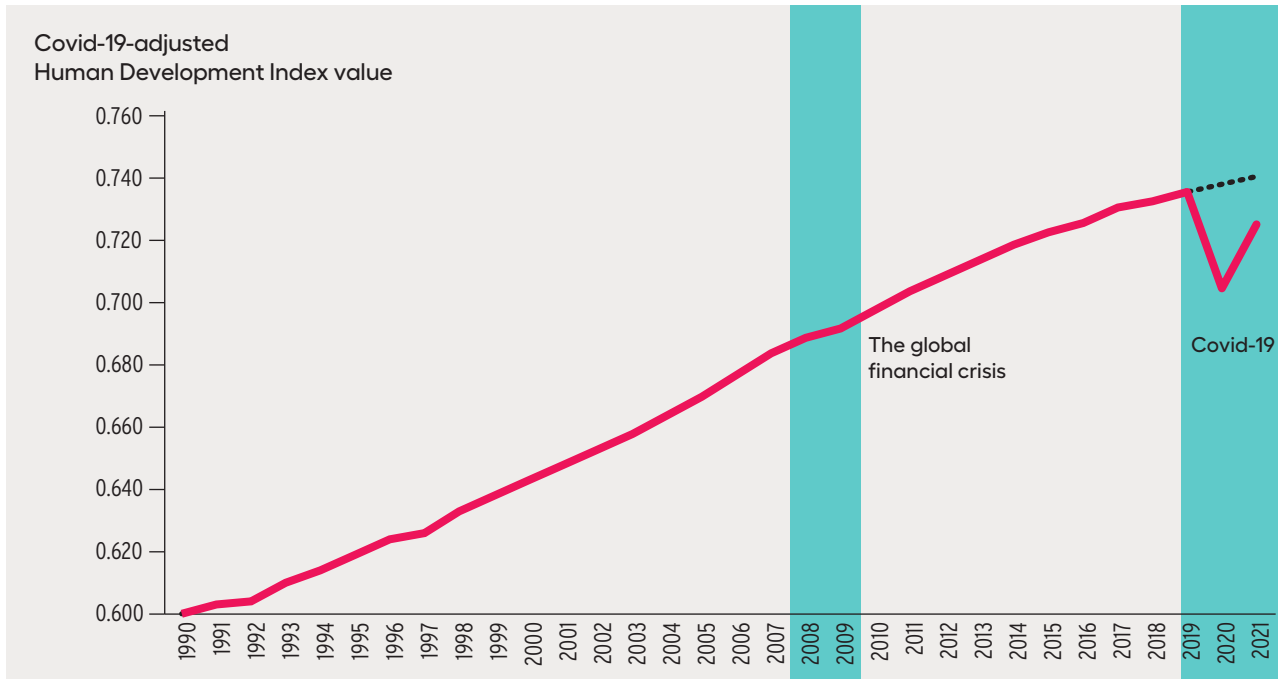
Source: Human Development Report Office (see box 1.1 in the full report).

The Covid-19 pandemic makes these interconnections more apparent and unmasks new accumulating threats to human security. The uneven pain and devastation have been widely documented. Women face the brunt of adaptations to remote work and the dramatic increase in violence against them. Informal workers are left outside social protection systems. People living in urban poverty are hit partic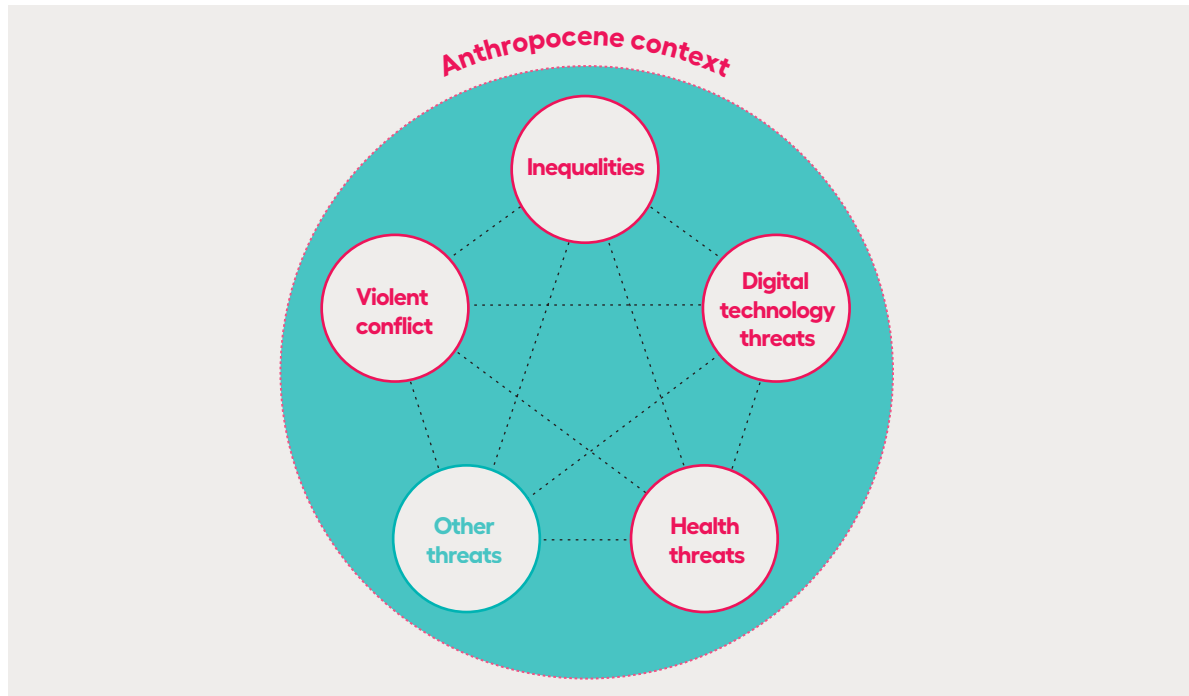ularly hard by the health and economic consequences of the pandemic. Yet Covid-19 is only one manifestation of the new Anthropocene context. The Report includes novel work and estimates of the scale of the threats in the Anthropocene context.

- Hunger is on the rise, reaching around 800 million people in 2020, and about 2.4 billion people now suffer food insecurity, the result of cumulative socioeconomic and environmental effects that had been building before 2019 but were boosted by the pandemic in 2020 and 2021.
- Climate change will continue to affect people's vital core. Even in a scenario with moderate mitigation, around 40 million people worldwide could die, mostly in developing countries, as a result of higher temperatures from now to the end of the century.
- The number of forcibly displaced people has doubled in the past decade, reaching a record high of

82.4 million in 2020.[1] And forced displacement may be further accelerated as long as climate change remains unmitigated.[2]

- Digital technologies can help meet many of the Anthropocene challenges, but the rapid pace of digital expansion comes with new threats that may exacerbate ongoing problems related to, for example, inequalities and violent conflict. Not only did the ongoing pandemic accelerate a digital shift in the productive economy, but cybercrime also skyrocketed, with annual costs projected to reach $6 trillion by the end of 2021.
- The number of people affected by conflict is reaching record highs: today approximately 1.2 billion people live in conflict-affected areas, 560 million of them outside fragile settings, reflecting the spread of different forms violent conflict.
- Inequalities are an assault to human dignity. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people and members of other sexual minorities face particular risks of harm to their person in societies where diversity is not tolerated.[3] In 87 percent of 193 countries,[4] they lack the right of recognition of their identity and full citizenship.
- Violence against women and girls is one of the cruellest forms of women's disempowerment.[5] Subtle

Figure 3 The new generation of human security threats

Anthropocene context

- Inequalities
- Violent conflict
- Digital technology threats
- Other threats
- Health threats

Source: Human Development Report Office.

forms of violence and so called microaggressions build up to such severe forms of violence as rape and femicide.[6] In 2020, 47,000 women and girls were intentionally killed by their intimate partner or their family. On average, a woman or girl is killed every 11 minutes by an intimate partner or family member.[7]

- The gap is large and growing between very high and low HDI countries in the universalism of healthcare systems. Countries with weaker, less universal healthcare systems also face the greatest challenges in health: the increasing burden of noncommunicable diseases and the effects of pandemics.

The Report argues for expanding the human security frame in the face of the new generation of interconnected threats playing out in the context of the Anthropocene. It proposes adding solidarity to the human security strategies of protection and empowerment proposed by the 2003 Ogata-Sen report.[8]

Solidarity recognizes that human security in the Anthropocene must go beyond securing individuals and their communities for institutions and policies to systematically consider the interdependence across all people and between people and the planet.

For each of us to live free from want, from fear and anxiety and from indignity, all three strategies must be deployed—for it is protection, empowerment and solidarity working together that advances human security in the Anthropocene. Agency (the ability to hold values and make commitments, regardless of whether they advance one's wellbeing, and to act accordingly in making one's own choices or in participating in collective decisionmaking) lies at the core of this framework (figure 4). Emphasizing agency is a reminder that wellbeing achievements alone are not all we should consider when evaluating policies or assessing progress. Agency will also help avoid the pitfalls of partial solutions, such as delivering protection with no attention to disempowerment or committing to solidarity while leaving some lacking protection.

This proposal for enriching the human security frame is made in a very particular context, where perceptions of human insecurity are associated with low impersonal trust, independent of one's financial situation.[9] People facing higher perceived human insecurity are three times less likely to find others trustworthy,[10] a trend particularly strong in very high HDI countries. Trust is multifaceted and essential for everyday life, but given this association, trust—across

Figure 4 Enriching human security for the Anthropocene
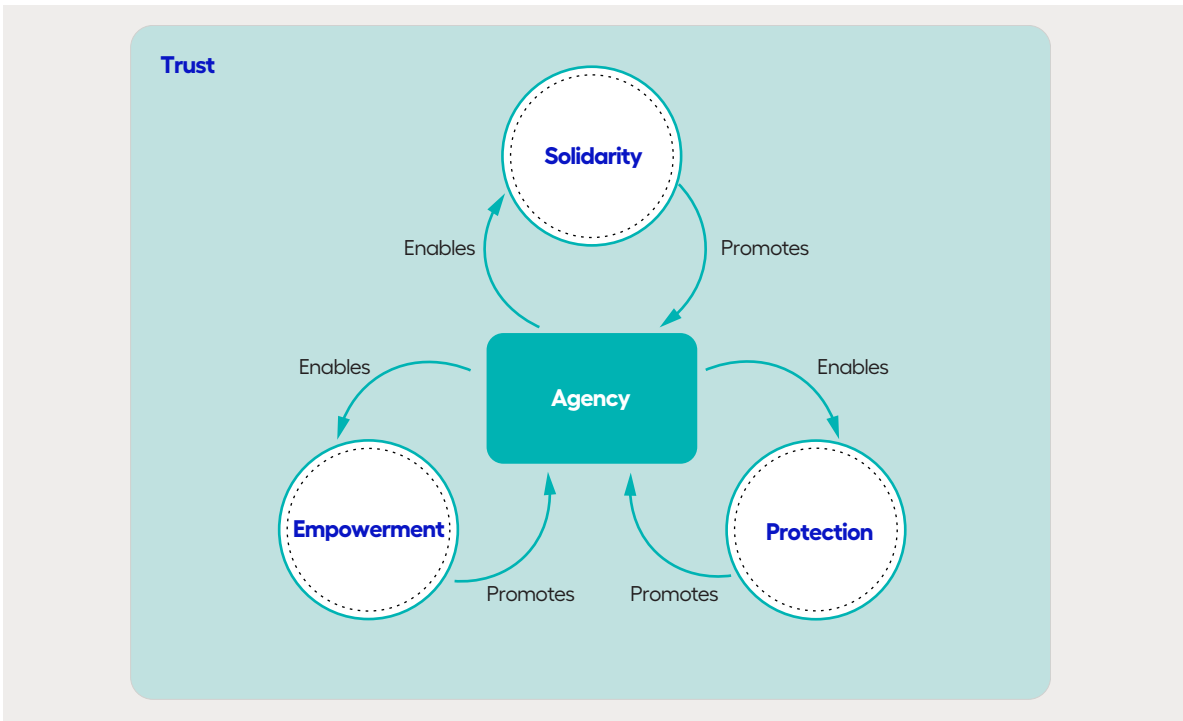
Source: Human Development Report Office.

people, between people and institutions, across countries—may enable or hamper the implementation of protection, empowerment and solidarity strategies to enhance human security.[11]

The Anthropocene context, with interlinked human security threats, calls for a bold agenda to match the magnitude of the challenges, put forward with humility in the face of the unknown. The alternative is accepting fragmented security approaches, with responses likely de-equalizing, likely reactive, likely late and likely ineffective in the long term. Permanent and universal attention to an enriched frame of human security can end the pathways of human development with human insecurity that created the conditions for the Covid-19 pandemic, the changing climate and the broader predicaments of the Anthropocene.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals provide an ambitious set of multidimensional objectives that

inform action at all levels (from the local to the national) and mobilize the international community. But efforts remain largely compartmentalized, dealing separately with climate change, biodiversity loss, conflicts, migration, refugees, pandemics and data protection. Those efforts should be strengthened, but tackling them in silos appears insufficient in the Anthropocene context. It is imperative to go beyond fragmented efforts, to reaffirm the principles of the founding documents of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Charter, which are also the central ideas underpinning the concept of human security. Echoing the UN Secretary-General's *Our Common Agenda*, doing so in the Anthropocene implies a systematic, permanent and universal attention to solidarity—not as optional charity or something that subsumes the individual to the interests of a collective, but as a call to pursue human security through "the eyes of humankind."

Notes

1   United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2020. *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2020*. Copenhagen.

2   Rigaud, K. K., De Sherbinin, A., Jones, B., Bergmann, J., Clement, V., Ober, K., Schewe, J., and others. 2018. *Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

3   Albuquerque, G. A., de Lima Garcia, C., da Silva Quirino, G., Alves, M. J. H., Belém, J. M., dos Santos Figueiredo, F. W., da Silva Paiva, L., and others. 2016. "Access to Health Services by Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Persons: Systematic Literature Review." *BMC International Health and Human Rights* 16(1): 1–10. Badgett, M. L., Hasenbush, A., and Luhur, W. E. 2017. "LGBT Exclusion in Indonesia and Its Economic Effects." University of California Los Angeles School of Law, Williams Institute. Romero, A. P., Goldberg, S. K., and Vasquez, L. A. 2020. "LGBT People and Housing Affordability, Discrimination, and Homelessness." University of California Los Angeles, Williams Institute, Los Angeles, CA. Suriyasarn, B. 2016. "Discrimination and Marginalization of LGBT Workers in Thailand." In Köllen, T. (ed.), *Sexual Orientation and Transgender Issues in Organizations*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer.

4   Only 25 countries have gender identity or gender expression legislation: Argentina, Belgium, Bolivia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Denmark, Ecuador, France, Greece, Iceland, India, Ireland, Japan, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Pakistan, Portugal, Spain, Sri Lanka, Thailand, the United Kingdom, Uruguay and Viet Nam (Zhan, Z., Duffy, S., González Gil, M., Goodwin, L., and Patel, N. T. M. 2020. *Trans Legal Mapping Report 2019: Recognition before the Law*. Geneva: ILGA World. https://ilga.org/downloads/ILGA_World_Trans_Legal_Mapping_Report_2019_EN.pdf).

5   United Nations Development Programme. 2019a. *Human Development Report 2019: Beyond Income, Beyond Averages, Beyond Today: Inequalities in Human Development in the 21st Century*. New York.

6   As second-wave feminism established, "the personal is political" (Firestone, S., and Koedt, A., [eds.]. 1970. *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation: Major Writings of the Radical Feminists*. New York: Radical Feminism, p. 76), and feminist researchers have analysed violence in the individual and domestic realm as a form of political violence and a precondition for increased violence against women and girls in the public sphere (Firestone and Koedt 1970. Hanisch, C. 1969. "The Personal Is Political." In Firestone, S., and Koedt, A., [eds.], *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation*. New York: Radical Feminism).

7   United Nations Office on Drugs Crime. 2021. "Killings of Women and Girls by Their Intimate Partner or Other Family Members: Global Estimates 2020." Vienna. https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/crime/UN_BriefFem_251121.pdf.

8   Ogata, S., and Sen, A. 2003. *Human Security Now: Commission on Human Security, Final Report*. New York: Commission on Human Security.

9   See chapter 1 in the full report.

10 This finding is based on the generalized trust question in the World Value Survey: "Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?"

11 See chapter 1 in the full report.