Local and Transnational Civil Society as Agents of Norm Diffusion

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Although the concept of a global civil society has already attracted much debate, one of the unresolved questions about its relevance concerns the divide between transnational actors who operate across continents and time zones and local actors those who are situated within single time zones and marginalized locations. This divide, one of the more serious challenges to the concept of transnational (which I prefer to global) civil society, must receive greater recognition in the academic literature and by the policy community. In the campaigns of transnational civil society actors, including those concerning human rights and human security (both highly relevant to the challenge of armed violence), the role of local actors are often ignored and marginalized. But these actors often resist, redefine, and contextualize the agenda of outside ones and even proposed alternatives when asked to follow concepts and agendas which are inconsistent with their prior beliefs and practices. This paper supports the view that the idea of a global or even transnational civil society is not very meaningful in the absence of an understanding of the ways in which local NGOs relate to transnational actors. But it goes a step further by suggesting ways in which the gap between the two can be narrowed, if not completely overcome. Aspects of the evolving literature on norm diffusion, especially the notions of “localization” and “subsidiarity”, not only offer insights into how one might conceptualise the role of local NGOs in responding to the challenge of violence and insecurity, but also how the transnational and local elements of the “global civil society” may work together better. To make the above points, the paper offers two case studies. First, I analyze the literature on human rights norm diffusion and the role of Southeast Asian NGOs in the creation of a regional human rights mechanism. This illustrates the gap between the marginalized conceptualization of the agency of local actors in the diffusion of transnational norms and the important role they actually play in creation of human rights mechanisms. A second case study, human security in India, illustrates the role played by local NGOs in redefining a supposedly global norm, or affirming an alternative understanding of a popular global norm in a local context, so as to make it workable and practical in the local context in ways that has broader global relevance.

A good deal of earlier work on the role of the NGO community as agents of norm diffusion done within a narrow analytic framework that had evolved during the heydays of the Cold War and the immediate post-Cold war “end of history moment” in international relations. This framework did not sufficiently acknowledge the role of the local civil society and NGO community (in this paper, I use the two terms interchangeably) as norm-makers and norm brokers, i.e. in contextualizing, redefining, and localizing transnational ideas and even developing new norms that have appeal in one or multiple local

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contexts. Moreover, the literature has focused much on the role of a transnational civil society, operating from major Western countries, at the expense of the normative role of local actors, including NGOs and their networks, in the developing world, which are often closely and more directly involved with the targeted impact area of global norms. Yet, this paper argues that the role of local actors in redefining and localizing global norms is crucial to the successful propagation of norms, and their expected outcomes for development and security. Local NGOs should not be regarded as passive recipients of transnational norms, but as active agents of norm localization and construction. This is especially true of those norms which are especially contentious, such as those related to human rights and human security (including human development). In this paper, I elaborate on this argument and sketch out an conceptual framework with the help of the new and emerging literature on norm diffusion, especially the “norm localization” and “norm subsidiarity” (L-S) perspectives that might help us to better capture and analyse the role of civil society actor in norm diffusion.

Civil Society and Norm Diffusion: A Conceptual Framework

The literature on norm diffusion has moved through several phases. At the outset, the emphasis of the norm diffusion scholarship in constructivism was on moral cosmopolitanism. I have identified its main features elsewhere, but briefly, these are an emphasis on cosmopolitan norms - such as the campaign against land mines, ban on chemical weapons, protection of whales, struggle against racism, intervention against genocide, promoted by transnational agents, be they individual “moral entrepreneurs” or social movements. This literature focused on “proselytism” and conversion rather than contestation, and generally viewed resistance to cosmopolitan norms as illegitimate or immoral. It gave causal primacy to transnational actors and their “international prescriptions”, while ignoring the expansive appeal of “norms that are deeply rooted in other types of social entities – regional, national, and subnational groups.” Moreover, it tended to view global or universal norms as good, and regional and local norms as “bad”. In other words, norms making a universalistic claim about what is good are considered more desirable and more likely to prevail than norms that are localized or particularistic. A related limitation was its failure to account for the role of local agents, and its tendency even to denigrate norms that are rooted in local beliefs and practices. From the moral cosmopolitanist standpoint, norm diffusion is viewed as teaching by transnational agents, thereby downplaying the agency role of local actors.

In challenging the moral cosmopolitanism approach, I have proposed the ideas of norm localization (or “constitutive localization) and norm subsidiarity as agent centric approaches that highlight the role of local actors. I define “localization” as the active construction (through discourse, framing, grafting, and cultural selection) of emerging universal ideas by local actors, which results in the latter developing significant congruence with local beliefs and practices. The concept of localization puts a premium on local agency and legitimation.

The concept of localization describes three types of acts. The first is termed “local initiative”. Ideas are not imposed through force or purchased through commerce or aid; instead local actors pro-actively seek out foreign ideas that they find morally appealing or political empowering. In normative change, this perspective would stress the agency role not just of “outsider proponents”, - the standard

definition of a norm entrepreneur - pursuing a universal moral agenda, but also of “insider proponents” seeking to legitimize a local identity. Outside proponents are more likely to advance their cause if they act through local agents, rather than coming independently at it. Successful diffusion of emerging norms depends on the degree to which they can be said to build upon and supplement, rather than supplant, existing ideas and norms.

A second act of localization is the use of foreign ideas as a frame to express local beliefs and practices. The formal shape (name or structure) of the foreign idea may remain intact, but its contents are infused with local beliefs and practices. Norm-takers may resort to infusion to validate existing beliefs, demonstrate the broader relevance and appeal of local beliefs and practices, and sell “homegrown” ideas to a larger market. Moreover, in accepting the outsiders’ normative ideas, local actors may see an opportunity to ensure that the former too learn from local practices. Such acts of “amplifying”, “signifying” and “universalizing” local beliefs and practices, help us develop an understanding of idea transmission as a two-way dialogue. A third act of localization involves changing the formal shape and content of foreign ideas on the basis of the recipient’s own prior beliefs and practices. This might involve borrowing only those ideas which are, or can be made, congruent with local beliefs and which may enhance the prestige of the borrower. It could also involve pruning outside ideas to get rid of its undesirable elements, especially those which challenge established beliefs and practices, while finding a fit between its desirable elements and existing local beliefs and practices.

Localization could be pragmatic response to the demand for new norms, where there is no other way to introduce a new norm into a locale without adjusting it to local circumstances and need. It could also be triggered by the local actors’ belief that new outside norms – which may be initially feared and resisted simply because of their alien quality – could be used to enhance the legitimacy and authority of their extant institutions and practices. Another factor favoring localization is the strength of prior local norms. Some local norms are foundational to a society o group. They may derive from deeply-ingrained cultural beliefs and practices or from international legal norms which had, at an earlier stage, been borrowed and enshrined in the constitutional documents of a group. In this case, norm takers whether states or NGOs, are more likely to localize a transnational norms that adopt it wholesale.

Norm subsidiarity has been defined “as a process whereby local actors create rules with a view to preserve their autonomy from dominance, neglect, violation, or abuse by more powerful central actors.” This process usually comes about when local actors resent the excessive dominance of central actors or authorities, especially when the latter are deemed to be inadequately representative of, indifferent to, or even subversive of local ideas, interests and identities. This process is related to localization, but has some distinct features compared to the latter. For example, in localization, local actors are always norm-takers. In contrast, in subsidiary, local actors can be norm rejecters and/or norm makers. In localization, local agents redefine foreign norms which they take as generally good and desirable, but not fully consistent with their existing cognitive prior (hence the need for their redefinition). In subsidiarity, local agents reject outside ideas (of powerful central actors, but not universal principles) which they do not view as worthy of selection, borrowing and adoption in any form. Hence, localization is generic to all actors, big or small, powerful or weak. Subsidiarity is specific to peripheral (smaller and/or weaker) actors, because by definition it’s their autonomy which is more likely to be challenged. Another difference is that in localization, foreign norms are imported for local usage only. In subsidiarity, local actors may export or “universalize” locally constructed norms. This may involve using locally-constructed norms to support or amplify existing global norms against the parochial ideas of powerful actors. In other words, subsidiarity stresses local norm creation and its exportation and universalization, including from regional to global and on a region-to-region basis.

6 Acharya, “Norm Subsidiarity and Regional Orders”.
The localization-subsidiarity (L-S) framework, as I would call a synthesis of the two processes, may thus be recognized by some key features. First, both recognize the agency of local actors, ‘insider proponents’. Second, norm-making and borrowing reflects the norm-taker’s quest for legitimation, i.e., the acquisition of greater status and authority by conforming to a universal standard but by infusing it with local characteristics and by making it congruent with the local context. Third, the cognitive priors of the norm-taker are not extinguished, but may remain dominant, at least initially, in deciding the shape and content of the modified external norm or in the creation of a new norm. Finally, both recognize that normative change in most cases is evolutionary, not a one-step transformation.

The L-S framework can be applied not just to explain the normative behavior of local state actors (governments or regional inter-governmental organizations like ASEAN, SADC, MERCOSUR, etc.) but also to locally-grounded civil society actors in analyzing their normative purposes and functions. How does the L-S framework help to understand the normative role of NGOs? It is widely believed that local NGO communities are usually likely to accept the definition and content of ideas and norms given to them by the transnational civil society and the donors (who often defer to the definitions of the transnational civil society). This is because they receive funding from the latter, and hence are dependent on them. They also often lack access to information, including information about new ideas and concepts relevant to their area of activity. Many local NGOs lack in-house research capacity, and do not have access to epistemic communities (or knowledge communities) which generate new ideas or pass newly emerging ideas (such as about development) around. The most influential epistemic communities and think tanks are usually located in the West and in major urban centers of developing countries. Hence, local civil society ends up passively accepting new norms, rather than actively constructing them.

But this view can be challenged. There are a number of reasons why local civil society actors may act as norm brokers, localizers and developers. Drawing upon the insights of my previous work on the localization and subsidiarity, the following motivations are important:

1. When local NGOs feel that the new ideas are primarily intended to serve the political and foreign policy objectives of the major donor countries;
2. When local NGOs, despite seeing merit in new ideas, find them to be too far removed from the local context and need;
3. When local NGOs face difficulties in explaining them to the local audience;
4. When local NGOs face additional difficulties in deal with local government authorities in permission to operate or obtain resources because the latter see them as agents of foreign influence;
5. When local NGOs feel they can strengthen and make a norm more relevant and effective by adding new local dimensions to them;
6. When local NGOs perceive selectivity, double standards and hypocrisy on the part of the donors in providing information, and resources.
7. When and where foreign NGOs are reluctant to get involved in a particular area of conflict and underdevelopment due to safety and technical concerns (see discussion in the latter in this chapter)

A small but significant illustration of some of these factors can be found in Orissa (now known as Odisha), India, which is one of the poorest states of India. According to one study of the relationship

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7 My initial work on localization and subsidiarity was state-centric, but both concepts can be easily applied to non-state actors, including NGOs. This paper is an attempt to correct that bias and extend the framework to civil society actors.
between local development organizations (NGOs) and foreign (mainly Western transnational) donors in Orissa:

“Most of the [local] organizations surveyed felt donors did not understand the needs of the local people...Additionally, organizations reported they differed with their donors over funding and implementation. [Local] Organizations do not simply do the bidding of donor organizations; some will reject funding if they feel donor goals do not accurately reflect local needs...If [local] organizations feel too pressured by donors they will reject the donation...NGOs who reported that donors understood the needs of the local population were more likely to create programming based on donors’ desires and less likely to reject a donation.⁸

It is in this context that local donors can act as agents of norm diffusion. According to the above study in Orissa:

[Local] NGOs are able to act as mediators between local and international norms. They balance the needs of locals with the desires of donors as well as international norms. They also understand and are able to articulate both local needs and international ideas. NGOs are able to successfully navigate both local and international norms making them ideal mediators."⁹

In Orissa, a Maoist movement, called the Naxalites, calling for social and economic justice, rather than secession from Indian state, has been active for nearly a decade now (along with other parts of eastern and central India). Yet, despite the intensity and longevity of the conflict, ¹⁰ very few foreign donors have supported development projects in this poorer and conflict-prone state of India because of concerns for safety and uncertainty about achieving project goals set earlier at the headquarters level. Foreign donors may not like to support projects in these areas as their visits for monitoring are just not possible. Hence local civil society groups have to bear the primary burden of conceiving and implementing human security projects. ¹¹

From the above, one can also get a sense of some of the modalities of how local NGOs may act as agents of norm diffusion. They do so in four main ways (1) localizing foreign ideas and approaches to development, security and rights, (2) filling gaps by operating in areas where foreign NGOs fear to tread or banned from operating, and (3) devising and implementing projects that are locally relevant and useful. These motivating factors are inter-related and all or several of them can be present in a given situation to prompt local NGOs to act as norm localizers and developers. It should be noted that state and non-state actors can localise foreign norms or create new ones when they come to believe that each needs the other for their own success. Governments may localize norm that they like and see to be in their interest so as to make it congruent with its domestic audience, including a local civil society groups, rather than accept it wholesale and open itself to the charge of “selling out” to foreign powers. Governments also accept a norm that they don’t like to satisfy the demand of the civil society and people whom that civil society represents. Civil society actors may come to accept reformulation of a

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⁹ Ibid., p.11.
¹¹ The author is grateful to Subrat Kumar Singhdeo for his help with the research.
norm to persuade the governments to accept it and obtain resources to promote it and thereby make their own contribution to society. This mutual accommodation may result in a localization of a foreign norm or the creation of a new norm that can be presented to the transnational civil society or international actors as the basis of cooperation and policy action.

In the sections below, I present two brief cases studies which attest to the importance of the role of local NGOs in norm diffusion. First, I examine the role of Southeast Asian NGOs in the creation of a regional human rights mechanism (the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights) in the context of the dominant extant academic literature on human rights norm diffusion. This illustrates the gap between the marginalized conceptualization of the agency of local actors in the literature and the important role they actually played in the creation of the regional human rights mechanism. This role was not necessarily acting in accordance with the Boomerang model, in ASEAN in the creation of the ASEAN human rights mechanism. It is better explained by the Banyan metaphor which I will outline later.

A second case study, human security in India, illustrates the role played by local NGOs in redefining a supposedly global norm peddled by influential donor countries such as Canada and Norway, and affirming an alternative understanding of the norm, so as to make it better understood and more workable in the local context in ways that has broader global relevance, including in the efforts to define human security at the United Nations. The human security norm is especially relevant to the study of armed conflict. It was pushed by some countries as the key framework for reducing the human costs of armed conflict, through measures to ban land mines and child soldiers, curb the trade in small arms, and promote the idea of the international criminal court, and the R2P idea. In the case study, I show how local NGOs perceived human security in conflict affected areas in Northeast India and Orissa. They did not privilege freedom from fear over freedom from want, contrary to what some western norm advocates had insisted. Rather they stressed the latter and a more synthetic or holistic view of human security, which really bridges the gap between freedom from fear and freedom from want.

**Case Study I: Human Rights Mechanism in Association of Southeast Asian Nations**

One of the main examples of the crucial role of local actors that had been neglected in the earlier literature on norm diffusion can be found in the area of human rights. On the spread of human rights norms, the previous literature was dominated by two related models: the boomerang model and the spiral model, although the latter is seen as a refinement of the former. These theoretical contributions have been widely studied, and inspired a generation of scholars, and I need not go into detail revisiting their contribution and the debates surrounding them. Briefly put, in the former, activists link up with transnational human rights groups and use their influence with their own national governments and international organizations to bring pressure to bear on their domestic oppressors. In the spiral model, which subsumes the boomerang, governments initially accept human rights norms for instrumental reasons, but gradually end up internalizing them due to moral pressure and accountability politics. 12

Underlying both processes are a number of common assumptions. Both are consistent with the moral cosmopolitanism approach. Both present norm creation as a top down process and give local agents little recognition. As James Ron puts it, the literature on human rights has privileged the role of

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transnational actors and “paid far less attention to the local embodiments of human rights norms in the developing world.”\textsuperscript{13} Although in the Boomerang model local groups initiate “the process, their location, obscure language, and marginality have limited scholarly inquiry.”\textsuperscript{14} Yet, scholars increasingly acknowledge the critical role of local civil society groups: “Transnational NGOs and networks can monitor, inform, and advocate all they want, but without serious investments of time and effort by local human rights champions, nothing much will change on the ground”.\textsuperscript{15}

Moreover, these models seem to have been overtaken by recent developments in world politics. They painted a generally adversarial picture between local governments and transnational civil society and donors, rather than an inclusive one. This captured the situation well during the Cold War and early post-Cold War period in the context of Latin American and Eastern Europe, and thus research based on these frameworks on “Africa, Asia, or the Middle East may be barking up the wrong theoretical tree.”\textsuperscript{16} Moreover, 9/11 diminished the moral prestige and leverage of “Western Powers”, especially the US, for the Boomerangs to travel effectively. The rise of the rest has accelerated since the 1990s. Western leverage on human rights issues may be diminishing in view of the growing voice of emerging powers. Democratization in non-western societies (Indonesia) means local actors there have less rationale and need for foreign support. The role of social media empowers local actors and permits a more horizontal mobilization among domestic activists than ever before. Hence there is less need for information boomerangs that travel internationally.

These developments warrant a rethink of the role of civil society in areas where their role had been little studied. Southeast Asia is one such region. The creation of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) in 2009 illustrates the pro-active role of civil society in norm diffusion. ASEAN, established in 1967, initially had no mandate for promoting human rights and no intention of creating a human rights body for the region. In the 1990s ASEAN members rejected pressure from western governments and transnational human rights advocacy groups to improve their human rights record and stop their support for the military regime in Myanmar. Before the Vienna world human rights conference in 1993, ASEAN governments expressed themselves firmly in favour of a relativist position on human rights, insisting that human rights should be defined and promoted with due consideration for the history, culture and economic context of the ASEAN region and the ASEAN members. And they continued to support the regime in Burma despite the atrocities it committed on its own people.

Since the early 1990s at least, a group of Southeast Asian NGOs have tried to persuade ASEAN to create a regional human rights mechanism, pointing to the fact that Asia is the only continent to lack a regional human rights body. Although weakly organized due to lack of resources, it managed to articulate a clear alternative voice on human rights relative to the ASEAN governments. Groups like Forum Asia, Alternative ASEAN, and Asia Pacific Conference on East Timor and Focus on the Global South rejected cultural relativism and called for human rights universalism, But instead of the outright confrontational approach, and resorting to the boomerang approach calling for sanctions on ASEAN as a group, they took for a more conciliatory stance. The exception was Myanmar, where groups like the Alternative ASEAN called for sanctions against the regime there, but in general, ASEAN NGOs did not call for economic sanctions against ASEAN as a whole.

\textsuperscript{14} Ron, “Legitimate or Alien?”
\textsuperscript{15} Ron, “Legitimate or Alien?”
In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the ASEAN governments began to seriously explore the idea of creating a regional human rights mechanism. This shift was due to several factors, including the democratic transition in Indonesia in 1998. Indonesia’s leadership role in ASEAN helped to reorient ASEAN’s stance on human rights. Another reason was the realization that the doctrine of non-interference in the internal affairs of states, which was a major reason for ASEAN’s previous reluctance to support human rights promotion, had come under stress in the wake of the Asian financial crisis in 1997. That crisis, and other transnational challenges such as the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) and the emerging (though somewhat exaggerated threat of transnational terrorism), led to a growing realization that non-interference must be at least diluted, if not abandoned. In this context and a more general effort in ASEAN to revitalize its institutions, ASEAN started a process of consultations to create a human rights mechanism. What are important about this process was that it involved not only ASEAN government officials, but also NGO groups. In a series of workshops on the idea of a regional human rights mechanism held since 2001, ASEAN invited NGOs to participate and offer their suggestions.17

Although it has been criticized for having a limited mandate, able to “promote” but not “protect” human rights, the AICHR is nonetheless a major shift in ASEAN’s position on human rights. Moreover, as one study has argued its creation shows that “Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) have been primarily responsible for lobbying for an ASEAN human rights mechanism, as part of the push for political liberalization and respect for human rights.”18 The voluntary and active (even enthusiastic) participation of the regional NGO networks in its creation also attests to “the importance of a constructive and non-confrontational approach to enhance promotion and protection of human rights. It is then clear that the universality of human rights for ASEAN entails respect for diverse ASEAN backgrounds and the ASEAN values of non-interference.”19 The ASEAN experience in AICHR shows that the regional level (which I consider as a subset of the category “local”), including regional organizations and regional civil society groups, matters in norm diffusion; they can work together to develop new institutions that can advance the human rights awareness and agenda. It also shows that human rights promotion can be more inclusive than adversarial, as was assumed under the boomerang model.

It may be plausible to view the AICHR as a partial vindication of the Spiral Model, in the sense that it was created at least partly for instrumental reasons, to deflect international pressure. But in 2010, a year after the creation of the AICHR, ASEAN launched another human rights body, the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC). The ACWC is different from the AICHR in important respects. It takes a broad view of human rights, including the rights of women and children that are political, but also social and economic. In that sense, it creates a wider constituency of local stakeholders and ‘insider proponents’ for the human rights norm. Second, its mandate includes promotion and protection, at least going by its very title. Third, the twenty members

17 An example of this process was that the High Level Panel (HLP) of officials drafting the terms of reference of the AICHR invited “Civil society and human rights organizations in ASEAN Member States that wish to put forth their views about the TOR for the AHRB” to “get in touch with the HLP or meet with individual HLP Members.” The HLP also held “dialogue with representatives of ASEAN civil society and other relevant stakeholders (the informal Working Group for an ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism (WG AHRM), the Network of Four National Human Rights Institutions (4 NHRIs), the Solidarity for Asian People’s Advocacy (SAPA), and the Women’s Caucus for the ASEAN Human Rights Body) in 2008. Termsak Chalermpalanupap, “10 Facts about ASEAN Human Rights Cooperation,” http://www.aseansec.org/HLP-OtherDoc-1.pdf
19 Mewengkang, “ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR).”
of the ACWC are drawn both government agencies and rights groups, thereby attesting to its inclusive nature and its potential to act as a bridge between governments and civil society. The ACWC thus represents what I have called the Banyan Tree metaphor for norm diffusion,\textsuperscript{20} as opposed to Boomerang and Spiral models.

The main characteristics of the Banyan tree are: (1) they are found in many parts of the world (ubiquitous without being universal); (2) they have a large canopy spread out in all directions (representing the breadth of the meaning and scope of human rights); (3) they are shady, resting point for travelers (local-outside interaction); (4) they serve as a cultural symbol (as a place for festivals, ceremonies, worships, hence demonstrating a local cultural foundation for human rights); and (5) they function as a social institution (gathering place of diverse communities, dispute settlement, consensus-making, which makes human rights as an inclusive two-way process of dialogue than a matter of imposition through legalistic means and sanctions). Furthermore, the aerial roots hanging down from the branches and taking root illustrates localization (top-down), while the roots taking hold and supporting the branches and canopy illustrate subsidiarity (bottom up). Overall, the metaphor calls for a two-way process of human rights norm diffusion, with the following features:

- An inclusive, rather than adversarial approach.
- A broad view of human rights including social and economic rights (a large canopy for the evolving international human rights regime).
- Multiple constituencies rather than specialized advocacy groups (A Banyan has multiple roots which collectively support the tree. Governments consult and work with domestic and regional groups).
- Local (domestic, regional) ownership and entrepreneurship with a focus on “insider proponents”, rather relying mainly than transnational advocacy groups. (A Banyan Tree shelters outside travelers, but they are guests not actors, they bring in new ideas, and new incentives, but it is the locals who buy and use them). In this connection regional mechanisms are important, as regions could be early adopters and sites of diffusion.

**Case Study II: Human Security in India**

The L-S framework of norm diffusion involving local NGOs can also be found in the case of the framing of Human security as human development. Soon after concept of human security was first proposed in a UNDP report in 1994, based on the work of development economists like Mahbub ul Haq of Pakistan and Amartya Sen of India, there emerged a powerful contestation between those, like Canada and Norway, who viewed it as “freedom from fear” and those who viewed it as “freedom from want”. The former stressed addressing issues such as reducing the human suffering in conflict zones, with policies to ban land mines and child soldiers and preventing and punishing genocide and atrocities by creating the International Criminal Court. The latter stressed the developmental aspects of human security, including reducing poverty, inequality, illiteracy, disease, and environmental degradation. After a great deal of debate, a compromise view emerged, which includes both aspects into a holistic definition of human security.

One a common feature of all these debates and synthesis was that they were almost exclusively conducted by the academic community and policymakers of individual countries. Ironically, common people hardly got their voice through, even though human security is really about people’s security. What people – especially those who are real victims of human insecurity in their real lives- think of the

human security concept was hardly factored-in. This bias was partly because these debates took place in academia and in intergovernmental institutions and forums, but not in the field. It was also because we did not do micro-research, or case studies in actual conflict areas. Instead, we focused on the broad picture.

But new research proves the limitations of the academic and policy debate. This can be seen from the findings of a study carried out by the Asian Dialogue Society (an NGO base din Singapore), in partnership with Transnational Challenges and Emerging National Dialogue (TRANSCEND) at the School of International Studies, American University Washington, D.C., and the Madhyam Foundation, a local NGO is Orissa, India, in two regions of India – Northeast India and Orissa. Both these areas have lots of human insecurity – poverty, insurgency and conflict. Four of its findings are especially important:

1. **Poor people fear most.** In Northeast India, the study found that 76.1 per cent of the people who have an annual income of 1000 rupees or less felt they were “compelled to live in anxiety?”, compared to 60.4 per cent of the people who had an income level of 10,000 rupees or more. The clear implication is that poverty and human insecurity are inextricably linked.

2. **States and state policies are also a source on human insecurity.** One cause of fear is operations by the military or security forces. For example, when asked whether they feared the militants or the military (security forces) more, 38.5 per cent of respondents in the North East India cases said they were equally afraid of both, a higher percentage than those who said they were more afraid of the militants and those who said they feared the security forces more. Another factor that came out clearly is bad governance, including government corruption. These findings go to the heart of a very important question about human security, which is security for the people, rather than security for states.

3. **Political and socio-economic factors behind conflict are closely linked.** Conflict is caused by a variety of sources. The three most important sources of popular dissatisfaction contributing to conflict (hence sources of threats to human security) that came out in both North East India and Orissa are: corruption in government, unemployment, and poverty and lack of basic amenities.

4. **People want dialogue.** More than two-thirds of the people – including people who sympathize with the insurgents- interviewed said they prefer dialogue to extreme solutions such as outright suppression or outright secession. They prefer governments to talk to insurgents, rather than strengthen military operations, or grant independence to them. Moreover, we people want the dialogue to be inclusive, involving the representatives of the larger civil society. This finding is significant for the efforts to find effective solutions to the problem of internal conflicts leading to state break-ups. The key demand of groups fighting governments may not be to break away,

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but to have their human security respected and fulfilled. Responding to internal conflicts with this understanding mind will go a long way in addressing the challenge of state failure today.

What is important about these findings and the study overall is that they were conducted with the help of local NGOs and based on interviews with people in the conflict areas. These NGOs enjoyed a proximity to the people which foreign donors and even local governments officials often do not have. Hence, they are more representative of “what people want” than academic or official positions, a problem with the earlier views of human security that I had highlighted. The above findings show that to an overwhelming extent, people see human security in a holistic way, not in a piecemeal manner. So the lines drawn between “freedom from fear”, “freedom from want”, and “freedom to live a life with dignity”, are easily blurred in people’s perceptions of human security, what it means to them and how it is challenged and how it is to be promoted. This is the finding that we need to bring into our ongoing efforts to reach a common understanding of human security and correct the bias created in favour of the “freedom from fear” perspective mentioned earlier. And while we derive these insights from case studies in India, it is my strong belief that they hold true everywhere. Although presented with both views in carrying out their fieldwork, there is little question that while borrowing and localizing transnational ideas such as human security, local NGO community generally accepts a broader view of human security, one that is closer to the people’s understanding of human security and that includes the “freedom from want” as much, if not more, than anything else.

In my research into the Naxalite movement in Orissa, it was found that without foreign funding, local NGOs tend to work mainly on “freedom from want” issues such as food security, income enhancement, access to education, health care services and avoid working on building peoples organisation, land issues and rights issues etc as these are openly discouraged by the Naxalites.

Conclusion

Much more research is needed to explore and prove the analytical value of the L-S framework which stresses local agency (translation, localization and subsidiarity) in the diffusion of translation norms, including the role of national governments in different regions, their regional intergovernmental bodies and local networks of NGOs and civil society actors. But the above discussion presents the outline of a framework that would be useful in advancing this line of thinking about norm diffusion. We need to rethink the top-down approach to norm diffusion and stress local construction norms of development, governance and security. Such a framework may not resolve all issues related to global governance and may not eradicate the challenges these norms are meant to address, but they fit the realities of the 21st century better and provide useful and testable alternatives to conventional approaches.