



Ensuring Human Security toward Sustainable Development: Current Situation and Solutions

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ABSTRACT

Ensuring human security is both a fundamental objective and a driving force for maintaining socio-political stability and fostering a strong and prosperous nation. In the process of international integration, Viet Nam has achieved notable results in promoting human security in line with the requirements of sustainable development. However, certain limitations remain, directly affecting people's aspirations to live in prosperity, freedom, and happiness within a social environment characterized by order, discipline, security, safety, and well-being. These challenges also pose significant obstacles to the goal of comprehensive human development. Against this backdrop, this article analyzes and clarifies key theoretical issues related to human security, examines the current state of human security in Viet Nam, and proposes solutions aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of human security governance in the coming period.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, the concept of human security has emerged as a pivotal paradigm in development studies, shifting the focus from traditional state-centered security to a people-centered approach that emphasizes freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom to live in dignity (UNDP, 1994; Sen, 1999; Alkire, 2003). Within this framework, human security is increasingly recognized as a foundational pillar of sustainable development, as it addresses multidimensional vulnerabilities related to economic insecurity, health risks, environmental degradation, social exclusion, and political instability.

In the context of globalization and rapid socio-economic transformation, many developing countries face complex and interrelated challenges that directly threaten human security. Structural inequalities, demographic changes, climate change, pandemics, and increasing socio-economic polarization have intensified human vulnerabilities, thereby undermining long-term development outcomes. Consequently, ensuring human security has become not only a normative objective but also a practical necessity for achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs), particularly those related to poverty reduction, health, social equity, and environmental sustainability.

Vietnam's development trajectory over recent decades reflects many of these global dynamics. While the country has achieved significant economic growth and social progress, the process of development has simultaneously generated new risks to human security. Issues such as population aging, income inequality, uneven regional development, climate-induced disasters, public health threats, and environmental stress have increasingly affected the well-being and resilience of individuals and communities. These emerging challenges highlight the limitations of growth-centered development models and underscore the need for a more comprehensive approach that integrates human security into national development strategies.

Despite the growing relevance of human security in both academic discourse and policy practice, empirical studies examining the current state of human security and policy responses in Vietnam from a sustainable development perspective remain limited. Existing research often addresses isolated dimensions such as social security, environmental protection, or health policy without sufficiently capturing their interconnections within a human security framework. This gap calls for a systematic analysis that links human security with sustainable development in a holistic and context-sensitive manner.

Against this backdrop, this article aims to examine the current situation of human security in Vietnam and to propose policy solutions oriented toward sustainable development. By situating the Vietnamese experience within the broader theoretical framework of human security, the study seeks to contribute to the international literature on people-centered development while providing policy-relevant insights for countries facing similar development challenges.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts an interdisciplinary approach grounded in the human security framework, which conceptualizes human beings as both the central subject and the ultimate objective of sustainable development. The methods of document analysis and synthesis are employed to systematize theoretical perspectives and empirical findings from both domestic and international studies on human security and sustainable development, thereby constructing an analytical framework appropriate to the Vietnamese context.

In addition, the study applies policy analysis and secondary data analysis based on development reports, statistical data, and previous research to assess the current state of human security in Viet Nam across key dimensions, including economic, social, health, and environmental security. A comparative method is selectively employed to juxtapose Viet Nam's experience with broader regional and global trends in human security governance.

Based on the analytical results, the study utilizes logical and analytical reasoning to propose policy-oriented solutions aimed at strengthening human security and advancing sustainable development in the contemporary context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Theoretical Foundations of Human Security

The findings indicate that human security has emerged as a significant theoretical framework attracting growing attention from scholars, policymakers, and international organizations. This approach places human beings at the center of development and emphasizes protection against multidimensional and non-traditional threats. According to the *Human Development Report* of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 1994), human security refers to freedom from threats such as poverty, disease, crime, and oppression, as well as protection from sudden and harmful disruptions in daily life at home, in the workplace, within communities, and in the surrounding environment (Ha, 2020, p.171). This conceptualization underscores that human security extends beyond mere survival to encompass the conditions necessary for comprehensive and sustainable human development.

In the context of deepening international integration, Vietnam has increasingly approached human security as an integral component of its national development strategy for the period 2021–2030, with a vision toward 2045. The analysis shows that the socio-economic development orientations defined by the Communist Party of Vietnam have progressively incorporated human security into social development governance, closely linked to the assurance of social security, political stability, and social order (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, p.116–117). This reflects an important shift in development thinking from a predominantly traditional security paradigm toward a people-centered approach.

Further discussion reveals that ensuring human security in Vietnam is closely associated with recognizing human beings as the most important endogenous resource for development. The Party emphasizes the need to awaken patriotism, national self-reliance, and the full mobilization of human potential as the key driving force for sustainable development (Communist Party

of Vietnam, 2021, p. 34). From this perspective, human security is not only a policy objective but also a fundamental prerequisite for promoting social progress, equity, improving quality of life, and enhancing the happiness index of the population (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, p. 202).

From a theoretical standpoint, human security can be understood as a condition in which individuals live in stability and safety, free from threats and violations, while fully enjoying human rights and fundamental civil rights as stipulated in the 2013 Constitution of Vietnam (Lam, 2021, p.2). The findings suggest that ensuring human security in Vietnam carries strategic significance in realizing the development goals of “a prosperous people, a strong nation, democracy, equity, and civilization,” while simultaneously laying a solid foundation for sustainable development in a context characterized by increasingly complex and interwoven risks and challenges.

Results and Limitations of Ensuring Human Security in Vietnam.

The empirical analysis indicates that human security has been consistently positioned at the core of Vietnam’s development strategy, with notable achievements across multiple dimensions. From an early emphasis on fundamental human rights and people-centered development, Vietnam has progressively institutionalized human security within its socio-economic policies, linking it closely with national security and sustainable development objectives.

Recent policy frameworks demonstrate a more comprehensive understanding of human security, encompassing economic, social, health, environmental, and community dimensions. This integrated approach has contributed to significant improvements in social stability and human well-being, particularly through expanded social protection systems, the adoption of a multidimensional poverty standard, and sustained poverty reduction. These outcomes have been widely recognized as examples of inclusive development in a lower-middle-income context.

The COVID-19 pandemic provided a critical stress test for human security governance in Vietnam. The state’s swift policy response, including large-scale social support measures and universal, free vaccination, played a decisive role in protecting lives and maintaining social cohesion. These measures strengthened public trust and underscored the importance of prioritizing human security during systemic shocks.

Overall, the findings suggest that strengthening human security has contributed to national stability and development resilience, reinforcing the interdependence between human security and national security. This experience highlights the effectiveness of a people-centered approach in managing complex risks, while also providing important lessons for other developing countries facing similar challenges in the pursuit of sustainable development.

Despite the achievements attained, the process of ensuring human security in Vietnam continues to face several notable limitations.

First, the implementation of socialist democracy still faces significant obstacles in the context of a socialist-oriented market economy and increasingly deep international integration. While the socialist-oriented market economy remains the overarching model for the transition period (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, p.128), ensuring genuine democracy – linked to the rule of law and humanistic values – becomes a prerequisite for each individual to truly play a central and active role in development. As emphasized, development is only meaningful when it is “truly for the people, not for profit through exploitation and degradation of human dignity” (Trong, 2021).

Second, corruption continues to pose a major challenge to human security. The Communist Party of Vietnam has clearly identified corruption as one of the threats to the survival of the Party and the political system (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, p. 93). Data on the Corruption Perceptions Index indicate that Vietnam remains under considerable pressure in controlling corruption, particularly in the context of international economic integration and market-oriented development (Dung, 2023). Corruption not only undermines public trust but also directly increases the vulnerability of disadvantaged groups, thereby exerting a negative impact on human security and the goal of sustainable development.

Third, employment and unemployment have emerged as significant challenges amid economic restructuring, technological transformation, and global shocks. The COVID-19 pandemic, combined with global economic instability and the repercussions of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, has rendered labor market recovery increasingly fragile, especially in low- and middle-income countries (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2023). These factors directly affect livelihoods, income security, and workers’ safety, posing substantial challenges to ensuring human security in the medium and long term.

Fourth, income disparities and the risk of widening inequality continue to intensify under the combined effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and global economic uncertainty. UNDP reports highlight that the pandemic represents not only a health crisis but also a profound socio-economic shock, adversely affecting efforts to improve income levels and living standards (UNDP, 2021). Disparities across regions, social groups, and residential areas exacerbate inequalities in access to basic services, thereby directly undermining human security and the orientation toward comprehensive human development.

Fifth, the social security system faces significant difficulties in achieving coordinated and sustainable implementation, particularly amid global economic downturns and mounting fiscal pressures (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, p. 106). Challenges related to income protection, expansion of social insurance coverage, establishment of a social protection floor, and provision of basic social services for vulnerable groups call for deep and long-term reforms. Estimates by the International Labour Organization (ILO) indicate that investment needs for social protection in developing countries are substantial (Duc, 2025); however, reductions in social security spending would result in serious consequences for human security.

Sixth, healthcare provision especially for older persons has become an increasingly pressing challenge in the context of rapid population ageing. Although the Party has articulated comprehensive goals regarding the care and promotion of the role of older people (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, p. 271), the accelerated pace of ageing, coupled with high healthcare costs, places significant pressure on the healthcare system and the social security framework (Tuyet & Quyen, 2021; Vinh & Huong, 2018).

Taken together, these analyses demonstrate that ensuring human security in order to realize the socio-economic development goals for the period 2021–2030 is a complex and multifaceted process. It requires coherent, adaptive, and well-sequenced policies. This underscores the need for the Party and the State to further refine institutional frameworks, enhance governance capacity, and proactively respond to emerging risks arising from both domestic and international contexts.

Solutions to ensure human security that meet the requirements of sustainable development in Vietnam in the coming period.

In the context of international integration, Vietnam is facing multiple and interrelated threats to human security, including political, economic, cultural, environmental, and social security challenges. These threats are increasingly complex, intertwined, and mutually transforming, indicating that human security cannot be addressed through a single-dimensional approach. Instead, it requires a systemic, multidimensional, and people-centered framework. On this basis, several key groups of solutions can be outlined as follows.

First, Vietnam should continue to align with and effectively implement the core human security goals proposed by the United Nations, particularly those related to ensuring basic human needs such as minimum living standards, food security, healthcare, education, employment, housing, a safe living environment, and fundamental human rights. These elements constitute the essential foundation for strengthening individuals' self-protection capacity and adaptive resilience against both traditional and non-traditional risks.

Second, sustainable economic development, closely linked with economic security, represents the direct material foundation of human security. Economic growth should be pursued alongside improvements in quality, efficiency, and inclusiveness, with a strong focus on employment creation, income stability, and the enhancement of living standards, while simultaneously ensuring social progress and equity.

Third, improving the income distribution system in a fair, rational, and sustainable manner is a crucial solution to mitigating inequality and social polarization. Upholding labor-based distribution, combined with effective income regulation and the expansion of the middle-income group, will help establish a stable social foundation for human development.

Fourth, the social security system should continue to be strengthened to better adapt to population ageing, urbanization, and the diversification of employment forms. Expanding social insurance, health insurance coverage, and welfare provisions for vulnerable groups is a key condition for realizing the principle of "leaving no one behind."

Fifth, enhancing integrated social security governance and strengthening citizens' sense of safety play a vital role in ensuring human security. The combination of risk prevention and control, the promotion of community participation, and the development of a healthy socio-cultural environment will create favorable conditions for comprehensive human development.

Finally, health security should be regarded as a strategic priority. Ensuring equity in access to healthcare services, improving the quality of the healthcare system, and effectively implementing universal health insurance are critical factors in strengthening human development capacity and resilience in the face of emerging and increasingly complex risks.

CONCLUSION

Vietnam is entering a new phase of international integration in which emerging threats to human security are becoming increasingly complex and multidimensional, exerting significant pressures on socio-economic development trajectories. These challenges arise both directly and indirectly from globalization, structural economic transformation, and evolving regional and global risks. In this context, ensuring human security requires a comprehensive understanding of institutional, socio-economic, and governance-related constraints that affect individuals' capacity to live free from fear and want. From a human-centered development perspective, strengthening human security is closely linked to investments in human capabilities, social protection systems, and inclusive growth. Accordingly, safeguarding human security constitutes a foundational condition for sustainable development, social stability, and the enhancement of human well-being in contemporary Vietnam.

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