United Nations University
CRIS
Comparative Regional Integration Studies

UNU-CRIS Occasional Papers

0-2006/25

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1. Introduction

The assessment of human security (HS) challenges and prospects in Central America (CA) presents a complex and contradictory picture. The region has been quite tumultuous during the past three decades, and the legacy of war, social violence, and democratization processes in various stages of progress and disrepair have all left important imprints.

Once considered as unlikely contenders for democratic institutionalization and consolidation (Barnes 1999), Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama can now be considered as democracies. Civil wars which wrecked Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua through the 1980's and early 1990's have all been officially terminated through the signing of national peace accords, under the umbrella of the Esquipulas regional movement, spearheaded in the late 1980's by Costa Rica's then president Oscar Arias. Peace-building efforts with internal and external support – notably in Guatemala, but elsewhere as well (Pearce 1998) – have initiated the process of democratic consolidation, and though these efforts have been problematic in many ways, the spectre of a return of the organized and widespread political violence of the 1980's has somewhat receded. Since 1998, crises of political institutions have occurred in South America (Argentina: 2001, Bolivia: 2003, Ecuador: 2000, Paraguay: 1999-2000, Peru: 2000, Venezuela: 2002) and in the Caribbean (Haiti: 2001) (Rojas 2004: 10) but Central America has largely avoided direct involvement in these regional tensions (Malamud 2005).

But no observer or resident of the region would consider this the moment for a declaration of victory in terms of the human security agenda. Major and intractable human security challenges remain. The wars and violence of the 1980's – in which an estimated 300,000 people died (Pearce 1999) – as well as the political structures in place previously, all exact a heavy toll as the region struggles towards more secure social formations for its residents. The past with its violence is gone but not forgotten. Central American societies are still characterised by high levels of social violence, and important economic security deficits exist. Although relative poverty indicators have shown improvements, absolute figures still rise (UNDP 2003b). The social and geographic income distribution does not show a tendency towards convergence and more equity (SICA-CEPAL 2004). Growth rates are insufficient; in

the poorest countries recent GDP growth rates are only marginally higher than population growth rates. Access to basic services is deficient. This complex situation poses serious challenges for the region.

The objectives of this chapter are, first, to assess (real and perceived) HS threats and challenges in CA through the lens of a modern HS conceptual framework, and, second, to assess the relevance of adopting a regional perspective to HS in the Central American case.

We start with the presentation of the conceptual and theoretical framework (section 2). Then, after a general assessment of perceived human security (HS) threats in CA (section 3), we will assess clusters of HS challenges in three major HS pillars and connect them to the emerging regional human security discourse. The first cluster includes social and political issues, and particularly the challenges posed by high levels of social violence, and faltering democratic consolidation processes (section 4); the second is related to issues of economic development and the integration of CA in the regional and global economy (section 5); and the third deals with regional impacts of natural hazards and disasters (section 6). In section 7 these three human security threats and challenges are placed in the light of regional strategies to enhance and achieve the human security agenda. Section 8 concludes.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Due to the complex national and regional challenges facing the Central American countries the HS concept is a suitable tool for analysis. One common feature of all HS concepts is a focus on the linkage of threats to the security of individuals or humankind (Ogata and Cels 2003; CHS 2003). This integrative approach enables politicians, activists, policymakers, scholars, peace-builders and others to think about challenges in a way that does not attempt to isolate them. By conceptualizing the linkages between these complex threats and challenges, complex and integrated responses become possible. The HS approach also offers a normative focus on "the security of the people" (CHS 2003: 2).

The conceptual and theoretical framework on which this chapter is based departs from the traditional national security framework in two respects. On the one hand we will employ a multi-dimensional human security concept, thereby (at least to some extent) 'moving down' from the state level to the level of citizens. On the other hand, we will at the same time 'move up' from the national level to the regional level of analysis and link the HS perspective with a regional integration perspective.

It goes beyond the scope of this chapter to present in depth the conceptual development that the HS concept has undergone (Rojas and Fuentes 2002; Brauch 2003, 2005). Suffice it here to say that we

will follow the broader human security concept as it has been developed in the international policy community, particularly the UN context (UNDP, 1994), as well as in academia roughly since the beginning of the 1990s (Buzan et al. 1998; Brauch 2005).

Concentrating only on the micro-level does not allow one to capture the reality of today's security threats, risks and challenges and, in addition, as Brauch (2005:22) also pointed out, it would not lead to many policy-relevant conclusions. 'Moving down' to the level of citizens, as we mentioned above, should therefore be taken as a key analytical thematisation through all levels of analysis, rather than the only level of analysis considered. Maintaining a focus on the citizen-level provides a valuable analytical orientation for the consideration of national- and regional-level economic, political and social structures.

We thus propose to employ a human-centred and encompassing concept, combining the second and third approaches in Brauch's overview of the conceptual developments of HS, associated with proposals originating in the UN system (UNDP 1994; Annan 2001).

Bogardi and Brauch (2005) synthesised the current conceptual discussion and proposed to consider a HS concept based on three pillars:

- *freedom from fear*: political, military and societal security which is reached by reducing the probability that people confront violence and conflict;
- *freedom from want*: economic and societal security which is reached by reducing social vulnerability through poverty eradication;
- *freedom from hazard impacts*: environmental security which is reached by reducing vulnerabilities of societies confronted with natural and human-induced hazards.

We will use this conceptual framework in the rest of this chapter to structure our argumentation. One should be aware, however, that the borderlines between these three pillars are not always very clear and that there is quite some overlap.

As we mentioned before, we opt for adding an explicit regional dimension to our conceptual framework, because of the characteristics of the human security issues in CA, as they will be discussed below.

In De Lombaerde (2005) we have argued that the rationales for a regional approach to security policy include the following:

- the regional scale of the threat or problem;
- the nature of border conflicts;
- the occurrence of negative spill-overs;
- destabilising migration flows;
- prisoner dilemmas leading to e.g. uncoordinated military build-up;
- common external threats;
- external (extra-regional) policy objectives and creation of extra-regional bargaining power.

As we will see below, many of these rationales apply in the case of CA, although we should be aware of the existence of a grey zone between national and regional (human) security issues.

From a theoretical perspective, the linkages between regional integration and human security are complex and causality runs in both directions, if a systemic approach is not preferable. According to the liberal view on international relations, growing (regional) interaction and economic interdependence should lead to more shared prosperity and peace.[2] Also in the early developments of integration theory (functionalism) (Mitrany, 1966, 1975), pragmatic cooperation in functional areas was expected to contribute to peace and stability in post-war Europe.

Other arguments are offered in the approaches inspired by the fiscal federalism literature (see e.g. De Lombaerde and Costea, 2006), according to which the regional level is the adequate level for the provision of certain public goods (several of which directly contributing to the provision of HS), especially when the national jurisdictions are 'small' and the cross-border spill-over effects are important as in CA (see below).

The conceptual difference between regional cooperation (ad hoc, inter-governmental, sectoral) and integration (structural, supra-national, multi-sectoral) is relevant to the extent that deeper regional inte-

[2] Empirically, the causal linkages between trade and security are limited. Democracy appears to have an independent positive effect on both variables (Polachek, 1992, 1996).

gration, whereby more policy areas are gradually involved (economic, political, military, infrastructure, …), permits bargaining between countries, linking different issues on the policy agenda. This way, agreements can be reached more easily and conflicts avoided. Deeper integration is also capable of generating more effective regional policies since they are somewhat shielded from national political events and cycles, on the condition of having secured sufficient resources.

The Balassa type stages model of regional integration only indirectly informs us about the interlinkages between economic integration and (human) security issues. From the perspective of HS policies, of relevance here is, on the one hand, the possibility offered by customs unions (CUs) to autonomously generate financial resources at the regional level, and, on the other, the fact that deeper economic integration requires the building of regional institutions and administrative capacity, which can then more easily be mobilised in other policy areas.

3. Human Security Threats and Challenges in Central America

The perception of and the debate about HS threats in a region is a function of concrete historical circumstances and of the social context. The debate on HS is not (only) an academic debate. In CA, the HS debate is only slowly developing. CA was also absent from the Human Security Network, led by Canada and Norway (Rojas and Fuentes 2002). The debate first centred on the concept of 'democratic security' with a regional dimension, as inspired by the political events of the late 1980's and early 1990's, and the Tegucigalpa Protocol of 1991. This concept refers to the repositioning of security within a framework of democratic rules, done in the context of the regional pacification process.

The most important aspects of the concept of 'democratic security' as understood in CA are:

- the recognition of the democratic State (*Estado democrático de Derecho*),
- the respect for human rights,
- the submission of the armed forced to civil authority,
- its integral and indivisible character,
- the peaceful solution of conflicts,
- the harmonisation, coordination and cooperation in security and defence policies,
- mutual confidence building measures,

- the control of military forces and armaments, and
- collective defence (White Gómez 2004: 24-25).

Only gradually the concept acquired a broader significance when sectors of Central American societies became more conscious that security is not only about the absence of conflict (White Gómez 2004: 15). This conceptual development –and shift in the direction of a true HS conception- is still ongoing.

What are the dominant threats then to HS in CA in the early 21st century? Ranking the HS threats for a country or region and comparing them with other countries or regions is difficult. Rojas (2004) compiled perceived threat rankings for four sub-regions in Latin America and the Caribbean based on official documents and speeches (table 1). In all sub-regions, drugs trafficking and terrorism are ranked 1 and 2. Risks related to the environment and natural disasters, and threats linked to organized crime, are perceived as relatively more important in CA, whereas activities of guerrilla movements or subversive groups appear with the lowest rank. These rankings should be treated with care. Perceived threats may differ from objective threats, challenges, vulnerabilities and risks (Brauch 2005).

They are also very sensitive to 'events' occurring at the moment of assessment and to how they are used in political discourses. The terrorism threat, for example, appeared in many political discourses after the 9/11 event. However, the academic literature in the region seems to focus more on other threats. According to White Gómez (2004: 21), criminal violence is the perceived dominant threat in CA, whereas in the Caribbean the security threats are more related to global warming, hurricanes, and large scale commercial crises. Thus perceived security threats in CA have shifted from the state level to the level of persons and citizens.

Table 1: Perceptions of threats to human security ranked by sub-region. **Source:** Rojas (2004: 10).

Rank	Central America	Caribbean	Andean Community	Mercosur
1	Drugs trafficking	Drugs trafficking	Drugs trafficking	Drugs trafficking
2	Terrorism	Terrorism	Terrorism	Terrorism
3	Environment and natural disasters	Poverty and social deprivation	Poverty and social deprivation	Arms trafficking
4	Organized crime	Environment and natural disasters	Guerrilla activity and subversive groups	Organized crime
5	Poverty and social deprivation	Arms trafficking	Arms trafficking	Environment and natural disasters
6	Arms trafficking	Organized crime	Organized crime	Poverty and social deprivation
7	Guerrilla activity and subversive groups	-	Environment and natural disasters	Guerrilla activity and subversive groups

Note: 1 = most important, 7 = least important.

4. 'Freedom from Fear': Social and Political Dimensions of Human Security in Central America

4.1. Interlocked Threats to Human Security

From a human security perspective, the people of CA experience a startling series of interlocked threats: from crime and social violence, to lingering psychosocial impacts of war, high levels of violence against women, migratory pressures and drug smuggling. But the progress that has been achieved in this former Cold War front cannot be ignored. Nicaragua signed its peace accord in 1990, El Salvador in 1992, and Guatemala in 1996. Since then, massive strides have been made in terms of nation-building, the institutionalisation of democratic governance, the rule of law, and other social and institutional factors contributing to a future for the region characterized by greater security for all.

Even as the threat of organised political violence and outright civil war have decreased, throughout CA, social violence and crime are on the increase (Rojas and Fuentes 2002; Adorno 2003; Chinchilla 2003). Even in those countries that have not suffered the impacts of brutal wars – Costa Rica, Honduras, and Panama – new and pernicious forms of social violence have emerged. While each country faces nationally particular challenges, regional threats are also emerging, particularly from emerging transnational crime syndicates. The fact that all Central American regimes are now democratic should not obscure the immense work that needs to be done in all countries to consolidate democratic institutions and civil society. The serious challenges for continuing democratization thus form a backdrop to all other challenges. Governments characterised by varying levels and sorts of fragility are thus stretched to their limits in trying to cope with these present and emerging threats.

The insecurity that characterizes much of CA supports the shift away from state-centric security concepts. If security is limited to threats to the state, then the view from CA looks quite promising. But when the security of individuals is considered as a focal point, an entirely different picture emerges. Rising levels of social violence mean that the threats posed to individuals throughout the region are an increasingly prominent part of the daily experience of Central Americans. Interpersonal violence, for example, has become the leading cause of death among 15-25 year olds (Harris 2002). This sense of insecurity is exacerbated by a generally perceived inability or unwillingness of law enforcement agencies to control this violence. In Honduras, despite numerous high-level efforts to bring the extraordinarily high level of child-murders under control, many remain uninvestigated, and *Casa Alianza*, a regional NGO, estimates that one third of these murders may have been committed by the police (Harris

2002). This combination of widespread violence and perceived impotence of governments to cope with it, or even their involvement in it, creates an environment where the fear of violence becomes a generalised, routine, and pervasive dimension of social life throughout CA. Using the HS framework, this and other ways that individuals experience 'fear' and 'want' in their lives have become key security questions. We will review some of the most prominent social and political challenges to HS in the region by focusing on an interlocking set of issues with great impacts on individuals, and that help to conceptualize the nature and range of these challenges. They are in no way an exhaustive listing of HS challenges.

4.2 Gang Violence and Illegal Trafficking

Crime and criminal networks are some of the most glaring sources of fear experienced by ordinary Central Americans. Exacerbated by poverty, the region's geographical position between the cocaine-producing countries of South America and the USA, the relative weakness of the rule of law, and the ready availability of weapons, high-levels of crime, and the pervasiveness of various forms of criminal networks are among of CA's most significant contemporary human security challenges. Gang violence is one of the most virulent forms of such criminality, posing serious threats to human security and the consolidation of the rule of la throughout the region, but especially in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. Though exact estimates of membership in gangs (*maras*) are difficult and are based on contentious definitions, it is assumed that there are roughly 70,000 to 100,000 members in the region (Arana 2005). Gang violence is not limited to attacks on or homicides of other gang members. Turf wars between gangs, and ongoing battles with police make the streets of many cities and towns in CA potential sites for this new sort of violence.

The *mara* phenomenon is of relatively recent vintage, beginning with the deportation of gang members from the U.S. and especially from Los Angeles. In 1996, the U.S. Congress extended and toughened immigration laws, making it possible to deport non-citizens who had been jailed for a year or more. This applied to thousands of imprisoned gang members from Los Angeles who were the children of refugees from the conflicts in CA. The deportees brought the knowledge, traditions, institutions, and styles of violence characteristic of U.S. street gangs to CA. Not only does the continuing flow of deported gang members transplant Angeleno gang culture – in 2003 nearly 80,000 immigrants were deported from the U.S. after many of them returned to CA – but it also provides a ready and willing pool of recruits and enables the emergence of robust international criminal networks, as members often maintain allegiance and links to their home gang.

Two outfits in particular have become 'super-gangs', extending from CA up to Los Angeles and other parts of the USA. These two organizations, *Mara Salvatrucha* and *Mara 18*, are only loosely organised, but they share loyalties and connections, and are so widespread that they have become a significant challenge to the state and source of violence. In El Salvador, at least 15 towns or cities are *de facto* run by gangs. This challenge is not limited to El Salvador. Honduras estimates that 40,000 youths are active gang members (Arana 2005). The potential for deadly violence is exacerbated in a regional context where firearms are widely available and only poorly regulated. In El Salvador, there are an estimated 450,000 guns in the hands of civilians, 1 for every 4 El Salvadorans, and 60 per cent are illegal or not properly registered (UNDP 2003a).

Controlling murder and crime that come with these violent groups is a key human security challenge in the region. The problem cannot be easily isolated. CA is a key zone in the drug trade in the western hemisphere. While drug mafias have existed, it is in their connection with the *maras* that the threat of drugs, drug money, and the intense violence associated with drug trafficking is at its most potent as a human security threat. With the easy access to weapons, the cash of the drug mafias and the loosely organized but numerous and territorially vast *maras*, a new potentially frightening threat begins to emerge. Given the desperation of many *mara* members and their loyalty to the gang, the widespread gang violence may become more severe if the drug mafia-*mara* links that seem to exist in an embryonic form should become full-fledged.[3] There is even a report, perhaps apocryphal but at least suggestive of regional fears that in the year 2000 members of *Mara Salvatrucha* may have met with an Al-Qaeda leader, Adnan el-Shukrijumah, in Honduras (Papachristos 2005). If such connections with trans-national drug or terror outfits have evolved, these emerging hybrid entities could pose both 'national' and a 'human' security threats.

4.3 Policing the Gangs and the Problems of Policing

Presidents, parliaments, and the public have not let this threat posed by the *maras* go unchallenged. In 2001, Ricardo Maduro was elected as president of Honduras with a zero tolerance pledge. His popular 'get tough' attitude has become known as '*mano dura*' (hard hand). *Mano dura* policies have since been adopted by Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador to grapple with crime in the region and high penalties are adopted against all sorts of gang activities, and even for gang membership. The criminallization of gang membership has made arrests extremely easy, given the distinctive tattoos that adorn

[3] "After the Massacre", in: *Economist*, 374, 8409, (15 January 2005).

the bodies of most gang members. Due to these policies, jails have swelled with numerous arrests. Public officials and police claim that crime and gang violence have decreased, but so far there is little evidence to support this claim. The regionalization of this *mano dura* approach was solidified with an agreement signed in early 2004 that allows for the sharing of warrants between El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Guatemala, the countries hit hardest by the *maras* (Garland 2004).

These policies have been criticized by human rights and other advocacy groups for two reasons. First, through the criminalization of gang membership, as well as through the policing tactics that have been authorized, these *mano dura* laws themselves pose a fundamental threat to human rights and human security. Second, because they are focused solely on punishment, it is argued that they will be ultimately ineffective in combating the spread of the *maras* and the violence they cause because both phenomena are closely linked to problems of poverty and social exclusion, and thus not amenable to approaches that focus only on punishment and law enforcement. Thus, the *maras* raise a dual HS issue for CA. The high level of social violence caused by the *maras* has created an intolerable atmosphere of threat and fear. But the preservation of human rights is itself a critical HS objective. The question is whether *mano dura* or similar approaches to the problem of the *maras* will be able to reduce violence and citizens' experience of threat without undermining fundamental human rights and constitutional guaranteed.

Another dimension of HS that is highly relevant for examining the *mara* problem: the insistence that approaches to HS challenges must address the root causes of violence (Ogata/Cels 2003; Paris 2002). This would require governments to deal with youth unemployment and to implement unpopular rehabilitation schemes (Thale 2005). It seems that the *mano dura* approach will not be sufficient to combat these problems (Arana 2005). Rather, these laws may be quite counterproductive in the long-term, with thousands of jailed youths solidifying their gang links and commitments while in prison.

The issue becomes ever more tangled, as some groups have begun to take the law into their own hands combating these gangs, while gang members have stepped up their violence by targeting civilians as a response to the new aggressiveness of the police. The death toll of gang and non-gang members continues to grow. In San Pedro Sula in Honduras, two shocking incidents capture the dynamic and violent nature of this situation: In May 2004 over 100 gang members were killed in a fire in a local prison[4]; in December 2004 *mara* members armed with automatic weapons slaughtered all passengers on a bus

[4] "Bringing it All Back Home", in: *Economist*, 371, 8376, (22 May 2004).

travelling on a main highway[5], as a reprisal for the prison fire and a violent reaction against the *mano dura* laws.

4.4. Democratic Transitions

The emergence of authoritarian responses to violence in the Central American context is not surprising. All countries in the region continue to undergo processes of democratic transition and consolidation. With traditions of both authoritarian rule (Sojo 2003) and patrimonialism (Holden 2004), the normative democratic resources of well-established democracies are lacking in most CA states. Thus, complex and urgent issues such as the *maras* and drugs are further complicated by the relative weakness and rigidity of existing governance structures. Especially in those states emerging from civil wars, these governance structures tend to be fragile and radicalized. Corruption (Brown/Cloke 2005) further complicates these matters. At the same time, processes of democratic consolidation which would allow more coherent and effective responses to HS threats are themselves often casualties of deteriorating HS conditions. Thus, the new democracies are often worse off than authoritarian states in dealing with fundamental and serious threats to individuals, and even to the state. Democratic consolidation is thus an important issue if the "incomplete democracies" (Barnes 1999: 63) in CA are to be sufficiently empowered to provide security for all individuals.

The institutional level of democratic consolidation is particularly important in a region where the history of the military has remained problematic. Except in Costa Rica, where the military was abolished in 1949, the other countries have long had very powerful military apparatuses, or as Robert Holden (2004) has called them, "armies without nations". During the 1980's, the region emerged from this imbalance in the military and civilian relationship. Since the 1980's the power of the military has been drastically diminished (Robinson 2003), but demilitarization remains a key priority and dimension of democratic consolidation and social change (Kincaid 2001).

Continued demilitarization coupled with a strengthening of the institutions of civil society are another key piece in the solidification of democratic norms and controls in CA states. Even in those countries that did not experience civil war, lingering patrimonialism and authoritarianism, alongside corruption pose tremendous challenges for the continuation of building strong and flexible systems of government capable of responding to the various threats to HS existing and persisting in the region for the foreseeable future.

[5] "After the Massacre", in: *Economist*, 374, 8409, (15 January 2005).

4.5 Violence Against Women

The problem of gender-based violence, and specifically violence against women is endemic through all the countries of CA. This violence exists in a wide variety of different forms and settings which include the specific targeting of women in acts of criminal violence, high rates of domestic violence, and weak or non-existent legal options realistically available. The problem, in Central America as elsewhere in Latin America and the world, can be conceptualised as on the one hand women's high exposure to violent and potentially violent situations, and on the other hand weak official recourse or response. Women in CA are particularly vulnerable to violence for many reasons not particular to the region: low levels of social, economic, and political power; patriarchal social structures that do little to constrain violent men, and much to constrain women from empowering themselves; and cultural and historical patterns of representation in which women come to be seen as more 'acceptable' targets for violence. Sexual violence of various kinds and intimate partner or domestic violence are two of the most epidemic forms of gender-based violence that Central American women experience. These are compounded by extremely weak regulatory environments (particularly for domestic violence), and police and legal indifference or even obstruction. It is critical that this issue be considered as an integral part of the human rights agenda because of its discriminatory nature, and because of its pervasiveness. While estimates are difficult because of the nature of this sort of violence, UNIFEM estimates that a minimum of 1/3 of women will experience gender-based violence at some point in their lives. It is likely that in CA, that percentage is even higher, reflecting trends in Latin America more generally, where *Human Rights Watch* estimates that 40% of women will experience this sort of violence. While the proportion of the population directly affected alone makes this a stark human security issue facing the region, the nature of this kind of violence links it directly to a much more widely experienced environment of fear. Because intimate violence so often occurs over prolonged periods and in the home, it has impacts far beyond its physical repercussions. Children, communities, and society in general are ultimately implicated in this pattern of violence. Governmental policy throughout CA is particularly lacking, with treatment of victims of rape and domestic violence often amounting to a second victimisation as women are forced to go from office to office, dealing with officials who are often neither trained to deal with these sorts of crimes, nor necessarily sympathetic (Velzeboer et. al 2003). Responses to the problem of violence against women, it should be noted, have varied widely. Costa Rica in many ways leads the region, with tools like its "Law Against Domestic Violence" providing a positive legal framework to deal this sort of crime, as well as promoting training for police and social workers in recognising and dealing with the particular demands that violence against women entails.

4.6 Border Disputes

As the focus of the security debate has been shifting to HS, one should not completely forget the 'old' security issues like the existence of continuing border disputes. Of the over 40 territorial claims and/or demarcation problems (on land or sea) in Latin America and in the Caribbean, several involve Central American countries: Belize-Guatemala, Honduras-Nicaragua, Costa Rica-Nicaragua, and Colombia-Nicaragua. Looking at the recent history of militarized inter-state conflicts, one should not underestimate this heritage. CA showed a relatively high number of inter-state conflicts with a relatively high hostility level in the previous decade (table 2). It remains to be seen whether the positive evolution during recent years is solid and sustainable.

A definitive settlement of the pending border disputes is a pre-condition for further progress towards peaceful interaction, trust and cooperation (Rojas and Fuentes, 2002:23).

Table 2: Inter-state militarized conflicts in the Americas, 1990-2001. **Source:** Own calculations based on Mares (2003).

	US	Central America	Caribbean	Andean region	Southern Cone
US	-	# = 1 μ = 3,0	# = 6 μ = 3,2	# = 10 μ = 3,0	-
Central America		# = 19 μ = 3,5	-	# = 1 μ = 2,0	-
Caribbean			-	# = 5 μ = 3,8	-
Andean region				# = 13 μ = 3,5	-
Southern Cone					-

Note: #: number of conflicts; μ : average hostility level (2 = threat, 3 = mobilization, 4 = use with < 1000 casualties in conflict zone, 5 = war)

Diagonal elements show intra-subregional conflicts.

5. Human Security as 'Freedom from Want'

Within the context of globalization and a possibly emerging regional world order, regional groupings of small countries are vulnerable, not only due to structural weaknesses related to their limited scale, often linked to a peripheral location, but also because their environment is highly exogenous. Due to their limited negotiation power in the political and economic arena, they have only few capacities to shape their own conditions for development and security. But flexible niche specialization strategies

can show important results, as small countries like Singapore, Chile, various European countries and, to some extent, Costa Rica have shown.

Although the situation in Central America is probably not as extreme as in the Caribbean or South Pacific Islands, the successful integration of this sub-region in the world polity and economy is not without risks. Initial conditions show problematic features: a limited scale of economic and governmental activity, a vulnerable socio-economic situation, combined with a vulnerable ecological situation (volcanic activity, resource intensive exports). Any realistic strategy should take these factors into account.

Looking at the human development indicators for the region, one observes that, except Costa Rica and Panamá, all countries are almost systematically underperforming, compared to the averages for Latin America and the Caribbean. This is the case for life expectancy, literacy rates, school enrolment, per capita income levels, electronic connectivity, etc. (table 3). Two countries, Honduras and Nicaragua, show per capita incomes of less than one third of the average figure for the wider region. Poverty, the quantity and quality of education, the quantity and quality of health services, and (intra and extra-regional) migration have been described as the most important social equity deficits in the region, and it has been argued that these should be the intervention points for a new HS strategy (Urquyo 2004: 112-122). The importance of the promotion of basic economic security as a pre-condition for further social development and development in general has also been emphasized by UNDP (2003b).

Table 3: Selected development indicators for Central America**: Source**: <http://hdr.undp.org/statistics> and own calculations.

	Belize	Costa Rica	El Salvador	Guatemala	Honduras	Nicaragua	Panamá	Latin America and Caribbean
Life expectancy at birth (years), 2003	71,3	78,6	70,4	66,1	66,1	68,8	75,0	70,9
Population growth (average annual %), 2000-2004	3,0	1,7	1,7	2,6	2,5	2,5	1,5	1,4
Population total, 2004 (million)	0,3	4,0	6,7	12,6	7,1	5,6	3,0	541,3
Literacy rate, adult female (% of females ages ≥ 15), 2002	77,1 (00)	95,9	77,1	63,3	80,2 (2001)	76,6	91,3 (2000)	88,1 (2004)
Literacy rate, adult male (% of males ages ≥ 15), 2002	76,7 (00)	95,7	82,4	75,4	79,8 (2001)	76,8	92,6 (2000)	89,9 (2004)
School enrolment, primary (% net), 2002	99,2	90,4	90,4	87,3	87,5 (2001)	85,5	99,6	95,3
Poverty headcount ratio at national poverty line (% of population), 2000	Na	na	na	56,2	na	na	na	
GDP growth (average annual %), 2000-2004	7,0	3,3	1,9	2,6	3,8	2,9	3,2	2,3
GNI per capita, Atlas method (current USD), 2004	3.940	4.670	2.350	2.130	1.030	790	4.450	3.600
Improved sanitation facilities, urban (% of urban population with access), 2002	71	89	78	72	89	78	89	84
Internal freshwater resources per capita (cubic meters), 2003	58.458	27.967	2.755	8.857	13.776	34.672	49.262	25.193
Internet users (per 1000 people), 2002	109	193	84 (2003)	33	25	17	62 (2003)	106 (2003)
Roads paved (% of total roads), 2002	Na	22	na	Na	na	11	na	Na
Trade in goods (% of GDP), 2003	77	79	60	38	66	61	30	42
Exports of goods and services (% of GDP)	54	47	27	16	36	24	59	24
Short-term debt outstanding (DOD, current billion USD)	0,1	16.265	1.759	1.257	464	595	440	-
Aid per capita (current USD), 2003	44	7	29	20	56	152	10	12

In addition to these low levels of socio-economic development, social and economic inequality should be addressed. This is one of the structural obstacles that represent risk for the further democratic development of the region and the generation of crisis situations (Rojas and Fuentes 2002:23).

Pressures from intra-regional and extra-regional migration will continue. These migration flows have usually socio-economic determinants (e.g.: migration from Nicaragua to Costa Rica, migration flows to the US, transit migration to Mexico) but can be temporarily influenced by natural hazards like in the case of hurricane Mitch. In Costa Rica the decent treatment of legal and illegal immigrants from Nicaragua must remain a major priority in a country with a stable governmental system, founded on the rule of law and protection of human rights. Human trafficking (Clark 2003), high levels of violence against women, child abuse and prostitution are important challenges for CA as its states seek to meet the demands to ensure HS for all residents.

6. Human Security as 'Freedom from Hazard Impacts'

The Central American states face other serious HS challenges and threats than the ones described thus far. Deforestation and ecological devastation are not only environmental issues (Khagram, Clark and Raad 2003), but they are linked to human insecurity through the increased prevalence of natural disasters such as hurricanes, mud slides, through the destruction of valuable farm land, and the increasing pressure placed on fresh water.

Central America has been extremely vulnerable to natural hazards: hurricanes, flash floods, land slides, volcano eruptions, earthquakes etc. Data sources like the EM-DAT database make it now possible to analyse data on natural disasters in a systematic way over long periods of time. In table x.4, we made a selection of data showing up-to-date cumulative figures since the beginning of the XXth century. These figures illustrate the tremendous environmental and social vulnerability reflected in the high figure of people who died in these events. One way of visualising the degree of vulnerability of the region to natural disasters consists of relating these figures to population figures. If, for example, the total stock of affected people is related to current population stocks (see table 4), we find that the former represents the equivalent of between 35 and 79 per cent of current populations for Central American countries (except Panama); these are obviously very high figures. These and other indicators (e.g. number of events) also show that the vulnerability towards natural disasters of the region is relatively homogeneously distributed across countries. This has important implications for the need, design and feasibility of regional responses and policies in order to face these challenges, as will be further developed in the next section. One of the issues that emerges in this context is the fact that, apparently, the poorest countries bear the highest burden if we look at the damage figures.

Of the 11 categories of disasters that are considered, drought, earthquakes, epidemics, floods, and wind storms are the ones that affect practically the whole region. Earthquakes, floods and wind storms (in this order) are the most mortal disasters. Windstorms, earthquakes and floods (in this order) also have the highest economic cost.

Table 4: Stock of Natural Disasters Affecting Central American Countries. **Source**: OFDA/CRED International Disaster Database (EM-DAT), available at: www.em-dat.net, last accessed on 8 Aug 2006; and own calculations.

	Drought	Earth-quake	Epidemic	Extreme temperature	Famine	Flood	Slides	Volcano	Wave/surge	Wild fires	Wind storm	**Totals**
Belize (Sep 1931- Oct 2005)												
# events				1		3					10	14
# killed				0		0					1840	1840
total affected				0		19600					218570	238170
Damage (1000 USD)				2250		2700					410040	414990
Costa Rica (Apr 1910 – Oct 2005)												
# events	2	12	1			18	1	6		2	6	48
# killed	0	1844	0			84	7	104		0	90	2129
total affected	0	35113	4786			394745	200	91321		1200	869336	1396701
Damage (1000 USD)	0	20700	0			317000	0	5000		0	151090	493790
El Salvador (Jan 1902 – Oct 2005)												
# events	2	8	8			11	2	1	1		9	42
# killed	0	3405	506			610	44	2	185		2563	7315
total affected	412640	2533521	69570			125842	0	2000	0		163381	3306954
Damage (1000 USD)	30800	2936500	0			281500	0	0	0		745400	3994200
Guatemala (Apr 1902 – Oct 2005)												
# events	5	12	7	1		13	6	11		2	5	62
# killed	42	27697	608	0		40808	234	12000		0	2176	83565
total affected	206596	5028912	33597	1850		149555	3242	11678		0	599160	6034590
Damage (1000 USD)	21500	1005000	0	0		117500	0	0		0	1751300	2895300
Honduras (Dec 1915 – Nov 2005)												
# events	7	3	6			21	2		1	1	15	56
# killed	0	2	37			693	2810		0	0	24597	28139
total affected	1412019	500	23150			860947	0		1720	0	2937726	5236062
Damage (1000 USD)	55000	0	0			278800	0		0	0	4454600	4788400
Nicaragua (Feb 1906 – Oct 2005)												
# events	4	9	9		1	10	1	5		3	13	55
# killed	0	12686	80		0	394	29	0		0	3672	16861
total affected	557645	735894	17584		0	327207	5769	30577		16000	1453926	3144602
Damage (1000 USD)	202300	887000	7		50	11550	0	2722		80000	1754080	2937709
Panama												
# events	1	4	5		1	20					4	35
# killed	0	32	101		0	135					43	311
total affected	81000	21511	5554		3000	140224					16800	268089
Damage (1000 USD)	0	0	0		0	17700					70300	88000
Totals for Central America												
# events	21	48	36	2	2	96	12	23	2	8	62	
# killed	42	45666	1332	0	0	42724	3124	12106	185	0	34981	
total affected	2669900	8355451	154241	1850	3000	2018120	9211	135576	1720	17200	6258899	
Damage (1000 USD)	309600	4849200	7	2250	50	1026750	0	7722	0	80000	9336810	

Notes: 'Total affected' is the sum of killed, injured, homeless and other effected persons. 'Epidemics' include: arbovirus (dengue fever) in Costa Rica; arbovirus (equine encephalitis), diarrhoeal/enteric (cholera), arbovirus (dengue fever), arbovirus (dengue) and respiratory (pneumonia) in El Salvador; arbovirus (equine encephalitis), measles, diarrhoeal/enteric (cholera), arbovirus (dengue fever) and arbovirus (dengue) in Guatemala; meningitis (polio), arbovirus (equine encephalitis), arbovirus (dengue fever), diarrhoeal/enteric (cholera) and arbovirus (dengue) in Honduras; arbovirus (equine encephalitis), diarrhoeal:enteric (cholera), arbovirus (dengue fever), leptosporosis and arbovirus (dengue) in Nicaragua; measles, diarrhoeal/enteric (cholera), arbovirus (dengue fever), meningitis (viral meningitis).

7. Regional cooperation and integration as responses to human security challenges

7.1. The regional dimension of the HS issues in CA

Many, if not most, of the challenges and threats in the social and political realm are regional in nature, requiring careful coordination and gradual harmonization of laws and practices. Others are far more pressing in some countries. Their officials and populations – with international support - must find a balance between ineffective responses to threats with failures to respond. Both responses will diminish future prospects for meeting the very serious social and political HS challenges that persist in the region.

Also in the economic realm, problematic policy issues and areas are increasingly international (regional and/or global) in scope. Migration issues and health policies, linked to the discussion on services and intellectual property rights on medicines at the WTO and in the CAFTA framework, illustrate very well that effective policy responses aimed at increasing HS levels increasingly require a coordinated regional approach, complementary to national policies. To cope with these challenges and to facilitate the integration of CA in the global economy, regional cooperation and integration will be crucial. Regional cooperation increases scales of operations, makes the handling of common and cross-border problems easier, enhances opportunities to provide regional public goods and strengthens the region's external negotiation position. One of the most important lessons of the signing of the Esquipulas agreements has precisely been to clarify the links between the HS and regional integration agendas in CA (Solís Rivera 2003).

In the area of environmental security (freedom from natural hazard), the situation in CA is a clear case in support of the call for a regional orientation in the 'fourth phase' of environmental security research and policy discussion (Brauch, 2005:38-39). According to this author, this requires regional natural science models (climate, soil, water), and also new case studies from a comparative social science perspective on the policy processes at the regional level. In table x.4 we showed the important overlap that exists between countries in terms of the type of natural disasters to which they are vulnerable. This offers many opportunities for joint learning, for joint designs of prevention policies and for the mobilisation and pooling of resources for disaster management and reconstruction efforts. Especially in situa-

tions of major non-synchronous events, the region-wide (rapid) concentration of regional resources has a potential to save many lives.

7.2 Building Blocks for Regional Cooperation and Integration

Although the solidity of the historical process of regional integration in CA is an issue under debate, there are building blocks and relevant antecedents to further regional integration and cooperation.

Early stages of the institutionalization of the integration process were the creation of the *Organization of Central American States* in 1951 and, more importantly and after long negotiations (1952-1960), the creation of the *Central American Common Market* (CACM) in 1960 by the treaty of Managua. Original member states of CACM were Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador, with Costa Rica joining in 1962. Its objective was to encourage the industrialization and development through trade and regional integration. Although the CACM shared several weaknesses with other initiatives of the so-called first wave of regionalism in Latin America, like low levels of production factor mobility and unsuccessful industrial cooperation, it also showed quite remarkable results in terms of intra-regional trade expansion and coverage of the common external tariff (De Lombaerde 2005).[6]

As part of a 'second wave' of regionalization, taking place worldwide, the integration process was reactivated in 1991 with the signature of the *Tegucigalpa Protocol* (in force in 1993), establishing the *Central American Integration System* (CAIS).[7] The formal objectives of the CAIS are to initiate a process of political, economic, social, cultural and ecological integration in order to build a region of peace, liberty, democracy and development. The CAIS reformulated the security concept, with a new model of 'regional security' based on power balances, strengthening of civil power, fight against extreme poverty, promotion of sustainable development, environmental protection, eradication of violence, corruption, drugs and arms trafficking. In 1993, regional economic integration was re-launched with the Guatemala protocol and in 1994, a pragmatic content was given to the integration scheme with the adoption of the *Alliance for a Sustainable Development* (ALIDES) at the Summit of Masaya (White Gómez 2004: 40). In 1995 a *Social Integration Treaty* and a *Framework Agreement on Democratic Security* were signed, stressing the cooperative and collective dimension to security issues and reaffirming the emphasis on 'democratic security'. According to a recent comprehensive study of Cen-

[6] More than 98% of extra-regional trade covered.
[7] Members are: Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panamá.

tral American regional integration, there are still significant potential gains to be expected from a further deepening of the process (SICA-CEPAL 2004).

Whether cooperation and integration deliver the quality of regional governance and the amount of regional goods that are needed, depends on the way in which political leadership further moulds the integration architecture and addresses a number of challenges and threats.

One of these challenges is related to the sustainability of the regional integration process and, by implication, the effectiveness of regional responses to HS challenges in CA. This is linked to the level of social participation of the citizens in these processes. In both CACM and OCAS, as in other initiatives in Latin America and the Caribbean, the state was the principal actor, influenced by national and regional bureaucracies (including ECLAC). According to some authors (Delgado Rojas 2001: 230,240) the business communities were not closely involved in these negotiations and described as 'passive' players, whereas others saw them as key players influencing the process (Best 2006: 200). The attitude of the trade unions was one of distrust and ideological opposition. This has changed to some extent with the new regionalism wave of the 1990's (De Lombaerde and Garay 2006). Civil society became more involved in these revived or new schemes. With regard to institutionalized participation, CA has been innovative though (Rojas Delgado 2001:238). Whereas the Andean Pact and, more recently, MERCOSUR established socio-economic advisory committees modelled on the European Social and Economic Committee, the Tegucigalpa protocol foresaw the creation of a Consultative Committee of CAIS in which regional workers' organizations, employers' federations, but also intellectuals and other groups in society took part. The particularity of this Committee is that eligibility is based on regional representation. Although this experiment was positive and promising in its conception, the results are deceiving (Best 2006: 200-201). Much activity of civil society at the regional level is reactive, rather than constructive, and reproduces national political dynamics, at the cost of more coordination of regional objectives (Rojas Delgado 2001: 243). For the integration process to be able to fulfil its promises in the political, economic and HS spheres, more effective civil society participation is still needed (Herrera 1999).

A second challenge is related to the linkages and tensions between the regional and other levels of governance. In our opinion, the emphasis on a stronger Central American region does not imply that the processes taking place at other levels are ignored. The governance architecture of the near future is probably one of multi-level governance with a high degree of flexibility and jurisdictional overlap. Bilateral and cross-border cooperation will remain important as well as developments at wider regional scales (continental and in the Caribbean Basin) and at a global multilateral level (WTO).

The *Association of Caribbean States* (ACS), is one such a forum that might offer opportunities for Central American states. The ACS was created in 1994 by the *Convention of Cartagena de Indias* signed as full members by 25 independent states and by 12 associated member states, in order to foster regional integration and cooperation in various policy areas. Despite its internal heterogeneity, the ACS presents important possibilities for cooperation including the joint management of natural disasters, the development of solidarity mechanisms (spreading and reducing risks), and the joint promotion of tourism. The prudence with which CA has approached the ACS, is due to the fact that Cuba is a member, and that the CA states are highly dependent (both economically and politically) on the U.S.[8] The work agenda of the ACS has been rather weak (González Arana 2001) but there is room for a more active and beneficial involvement of the Central American countries.

A third challenge to the regional integration process is precisely related to the multiple linkages with the U.S. An important recent development was the signing of the *Central American Free Trade Agreement* (CAFTA) in May 2004 by five Central American countries (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua).[9] Ratification is still pending in Costa Rica, and in the U.S., the President has been hesitant for domestic reasons to present this agreement to Congress.

CAFTA covers: (i) principles of national treatment and non-discrimination of goods, services and FDI, (ii) market access and gradual reduction of trade barriers, (iii) trade facilitation, (iv) public procurement, (v) agriculture, (vi) services, and (vii) conflict resolution mechanisms. Analysts (and the public) have been divided on the expected effects of this agreement for economic activity and HS. This does not differ from the situation in other Latin American sub-regions and the discussion on the FTAA and the Andean-U.S. bilateral agreements. A balanced view necessarily may conclude that such agreements present both opportunities and threats to the countries involved. In addition, the contents of such agreements reflect necessarily the structural characteristics of the negotiation setting: the U.S., on the one hand, and the small Central American countries, on the other.

On the opportunities side, usually market access is highlighted. In the short and medium term, however, these effects may well be very limited. The reason is that access is only marginally increased if it is compared with access under the *Caribbean Basin Initiative* (CBI), a unilateral concession by the U.S. in place since 1984. What is more relevant from an economic security point of view, is that unilateral preferences are now integrated in a bilateral agreement which should give more regulatory secu-

[8] Another obstacle is the border dispute between Colombia and Nicaragua.
[9] The Dominican Republic joined the Agreement in November 2005 (DR-CAFTA).

rity to economic agents.[10] Having negotiated the framework is particularly relevant if recent developments on the FTAA are taken into account. After the debacle at the Mar del Plata Summit on 4-5 November 2005, DR-CAFTA offers probably a more secure trade environment, which the Andean region, also quite dependent on the U.S. market, is still lacking.

As far as the threats are concerned, there are several issues at stake: (i) agriculture (especially the effects of trade liberalization on small farmers), (ii) intellectual property rights (traditional knowledge, pharmaceuticals), services (privatizations), (iv) worker rights protection. According to observers like *Human Rights Watch*, the latter are too weak in the agreement, because it does not include binding clauses which are able to bring labour legislation closer to critical standards.[11]

This leads to a perhaps contradictory situation where, although the regional level is able to provide policy answers to HS threats of different kinds, they present at the same time also new threats.

8. Conclusions

A complex and, to some extent contradictory, picture follows from our assessment of the human security challenges and prospects in CA. This complexity makes the HS concept a particularly apt mode of analysis, although its use in Central American academia and politics is only slowly gaining importance.

Parting from a state-centered focus on national security, the last decade undoubtedly showed substantial progress after the difficult episodes in the 1980's and early 1990's.

However, if we part from a broader and person-centred definition of HS, the image is not as positive. Serious threats to HS, both from internal and external origins, exist and require policy responses. They are related to organized crime, poverty, low educational levels, distorting migratory flows, environmental risks, and the adjustment costs of economic liberalization. Although reactive policies are often needed and urgent, a further shift towards proactive policies that address root causes of insecurity in the three HS pillars (like e.g. issues of social equity and mobility, corruption, housing, reforestation, etc.) is necessary along with the adoption of longer time horizons.

We have shown that traditional and non-traditional HS threats are highly interlocked in CA and that due to the structural characteristics of the region (small scales, high degrees of openness, dependence

[10] A similar development can be expected regarding the EU-GSP.

[11] For a discussion of the process and results of CAFTA, see Weisleder (2004); see also at: <http://www.hrw.org>.

vis-à-vis US, etc.), effective policy responses require (deeper) regional cooperation and integration driven by institutional and political processes with (higher) degrees of democratic participation.

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