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Local Actor Strategies for Achieving Human Security Functionings

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Abstract: This article explores the experiences of community-level actors in the pursuit of greater human security in their communities. Utilizing a conceptual framework based on the capability approach, human security, and securitization theory it considers local actor perceptions of security and the strategies used to achieve their goals. It presents and discusses strategies employed by two distinct actors—a local non-governmental organization and an independent group of community dwellers—in their attempts to achieve security functionings. The results of this qualitative study suggest that while community-level actors view themselves as being empowered as agents in achieving certain human security functionings, the ability of local actors to achieve higher-level functionings is dependent on their recognition as legitimate securitizing agents by more powerful actors and potential partner groups.

Keywords: capabilities approach; Copenhagen school; development; human security; securitization

1. Introduction

One of the inherent realities in the human security paradigm—the idea that security's chief focus is the vulnerabilities of individuals—is that those most acutely aware of insecurities are often the furthest removed from the resources needed to address them. In the face of scarcity, local actors may seek external resources. However, finding support or capital from an external source has its own set of challenges. Resources earmarked for local-scale projects are limited, and funding may come laden with obligations tied to other interests. Furthermore, international or state actors can influence how security and development agendas are implemented in favour of their own interests. As a result, much of the discourse, policy, and practices can become disconnected from the people in need. As Liotta and Owen describe it, "idealism thus becomes enmeshed

in realism; actions taken on behalf of the powerless are determined only by the powerful" [1]. Security policies and projects can be developed in a manner that relegates locally derived human security values to secondary considerations in favour of the interests of other actors. As a consequence, the pursuit of security can be perceived as operating in a top-down manner and communities become passive receivers and objects of policy, not as agents capable of consolidating local security discourse and influencing policy. Given this context, it is not always possible for local actors to achieve the security goals which they value most; however, it is incorrect to characterize local actors as passive, and an injustice to deny the agency they have as security actors. Local people are often the most important agents for security, deeply involved with improving the conditions of their communities. For empowered local actors, the lack of resources can be just another

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barrier to overcome, not something that builds dependence and erodes agency. But, in these situations, what differentiates those actors who successfully pursue security goals in their communities? What strategies can they apply to achieve their security needs?

This article presents and reflects on the perspectives of community-level actors regarding their role in improving security conditions in their communities. Using a conceptual framework based on the capability approach, human security, and securitization, it explores the question of how local actors engage in security-making, apply strategies, and leverage agency to achieve their human security goals. More specifically, it presents and discusses strategies employed by two distinct actors—a local non-governmental organization and an independent group of community dwellers—to construct and achieve valued security functionings. This qualitative study demonstrates that community-level actors view themselves as agents in achieving human security functionings, despite recognizing their own limitations in achieving higher-level functionings independently. Additionally, it shows that expanding human security capabilities can depend on recognition as legitimate securitizing agents by other actors and partner groups. The first two sections of this paper present the methodological and theoretical components of the study. Later sections provide empirical evidence of these strategies and processes from local community-level actors in the research area, and discuss the implications for securitization theory in regards to human security—specifically, whether a bottom-up form of securitization can be applied to analyze local actor security dynamics. In doing so, this paper argues that more attention is needed to analyzing security dynamics at the grassroots level, in particular, the role of local actors in sculpting security values.

2. Methods

The study was developed and carried out between September 2012 and December of 2013. It employed a qualitative case study approach, organized into *desk, field*, and *synthesis* phases. Qualitative case study design was selected to provide a fuller exploration of the complexity inherent in human security as well as a high level of detail on informant perspectives regarding security strategies [2]. The *desk* phase began with the selection of a research area and the examination of articles and published reports on development and potential human security issues in that area. Both broad and narrow definitions of human security were considered. The aim was to familiarize the researcher with contemporary security and development issues in post-conflict Liberia, including a knowledge base regarding influential actors and organizations in the research area. Additionally, it aided in developing interview guides and establishing a baseline for comparing interview data. Liberia was selected as a research area based on three factors: firstly, the strong likelihood of diverse individual perspectives on sources of insecurity given the post-conflict and less-developed country

status of the setting [3]; secondly, the presence of significant international organizations focusing on development and security issues; and thirdly, the widespread use of English that enables the researcher and informants to communicate clearly and effectively, minimizing the chances for misinterpretation. Additionally, the historic role of the state as a source of insecurity coupled with the contemporary weakness of the state suggested that Liberia would likely have situations in which local and community actors assumed the role as primary security actors [4–6]. Moreover, state misgovernance has been identified elsewhere as being a source of insecurity itself [7]. Social media tools were employed by the researcher to build contacts and garner further information on potential research communities. A specific case study area was identified, near the city of Paynesville, selected for the observed presence of thematically relevant organizations and groups.

In September and October of 2013, the *field* phase of this study used participant observation, group discussions, and one-on-one interviews as the primary sources of data collection. The interview process consisted of unstructured and semi-structured components. Twenty-three informants were recruited through both purposeful and snowball sampling (See: Table 1). Initial informant contact was through social media, then additional informants were recruited via local networks. This method of convenience sampling helped to effectively understand the relationships between actors on the ground, highlighting the types of networks and social capital available to informants [8]. Nineteen informants were recruited in this manner, including government workers, volunteers, and other relevant security actors. Three targeted interviews were conducted with non-Liberian staff working in fields relevant to human security. A final interview with the leader of Youth Crime Watch of Liberia (YCWL) confirmed details of the organizations history, objectives, and strategies. All interviews except one were recorded, transcribed, and anonymized. The remaining informant, employed in the police services, declined to be recorded, so the researcher took handwritten notes. One-on-one interviews utilized an interview guide developed during the *desk* phase, but iteratively modified during the observation period. Group interviews, inter-organizational meetings, and relevant written sources such as internal documents and annual reports provided the researcher with additional details regarding the strategies applied by the actors in the two cases discussed in this study (See: Table 2).

The *synthesis* phase consisted of data coding using a thematic framework to analyze and process the informants' responses. Unstructured portions of interviews were coded into emergent thematic categories generated through multiple readings by the researcher. Semi-structured portions of the interviews were coded using a framework developed on the basis of specific question responses as well as the general research questions. The themes used for analyzing the research were centered on informant definitions of security/insecurities, perceptions of security responsibility, perceptions of inter-actor relations, and others.

Table 1. Informant's self-identified background and relation to case studies.

Interview number & Pseudonym	Occupation / Role	Liberian Citizen	Informant Network
1 - Mike	Lecturer (political science)	x	YCWL
2 - Tim	Student (geology)	x	YCWL
3 - Jack	Volunteer. Labourer	x	YCWL
4 - Victor	NGO (healthcare)		
5 - Eric	Student. Tutorer	x	Eric's Group
6 - James	Volunteer	x	YCWL
7 - Omar	Unemployed	x	YCWL
8 - Gerry	NGO (refugees)		
9 - Nancy	NGO (armed violence). Music promoter		
10 - Ivan	Student (geology)	x	YCWL
11 - Max	Volunteer. Basketball Coach	x	YCWL
12 - Jake	NGO (peacebuilding)	x	
13 - Fred	Graduate (business). Merchant	x	
14 - Steve	Graduate (business). Merchant	x	
15 - Arnold	NGO (development). Police	x	YCWL
16 - Luke	NGO (crime & violence). Training	x	YCWL
17 - Mark	Media Practitioner. Previous NGO work	x	YCWL
18 - Joe	Security professional. Former police	x	
20 - Zack	NGO (Crime)	x	YCWL
21 – Zuo Taylor	YCWL Leader	x	
22 – Otto [1]	Unknown	x	Eric's Group
23 – John [1]	Government (refugee related)	x	Eric's Group

[a] Denotes informants who participated in group interviews only

Table 2. Data collection table.

Data Collection Type	N	Other information
One-on-one interviews	n = 21	Some individuals also took part in group interviews
Group interviews	n = 4	Occurred opportunistically
Youth Crime Watch Liberia meetings	n = 10	
Inter-organizational meeting observations	n = 4	UNICEF (1), UNDP (1), Early Warning Early Response Working Group (1), Ushahidi Liberia (1)

3. Conceptual Framework

In approaching this research a conceptual framework was developed to encapsulate issues of security values, agency, and actor relations. It incorporates three key ideas into its analytical perspective: human security gives us a flexible and inclusive notion of threats and insecurities; the capability approach provides an understanding of values, agency, and a normative reference point; and, securitization gives us an analytical starting point for understanding how local actors construct and pursue valued security issues.

3.1. Securitization and Security-Making

Exploring the role of local actors in the pursuit of security requires understanding how security *happens* at the local level. Security is not a fixed concept and is influenced by

a complex array of structures and variables. Moreover, security is fragmented in terms of subject, object, and practice [9]. Borrowing from the Copenhagen School's notion of securitization, this research adopts a social constructivist approach to security in order to understand how actors imbue security with their own values and meanings. Applying this concept to analyze security dynamics at a local level enables a better understanding of the potential roles of local actors.

Securitization describes the process in which security threats are socially constructed through speech acts. The units involved in this process are *securitizing agents*, *referent objects*, and *functional actors* [10]. The securitizing agent is an actor who makes a claim that a particular issue—the referent object—is a threat or is threatened. If the claim is deemed credible by the functional actors or audience, then that object falls into the realm of security threat to be

acted upon through some kind of special handling [10]. This process of actor claims and audience acceptance generates notions of security and threats. For the purposes of this article, "actor" will refer to the agent making a claim regarding security and "audience" will refer to those that must evaluate the legitimacy of said claim.

Framing this process as interplay between claim-making actors and claim-interpreting audiences fundamentally alters the arena in which security notions are determined. Williams describes how "not only is the realm of possible threats enlarged, but the actors or objects that are threatened. . . can be extended to include actors and objects well beyond the military security of the territorial state" [11]. However, despite this widening of potential actors, not every securitizing claimant will be successful in shaping security. Thierry Balzacq suggests three considerations that influence effective securitization: 1) how it is context-dependent; 2) how it is audience-centered; and 3) the dynamics of power [12]. This is reinforced by Williams, who notes that, not all actors are empowered to make effective claims:

While the securitization process is in principle completely open (any "securitizing actor" can attempt to securitize any issue and referent object), in practice it is structured by the differential capacity of actors to make socially effective claims about threats, by the forms in which these claims can be made in order to be recognized and accepted as convincing by the relevant audience [11].

Securitizing actors require social or political legitimacy to have their claims accepted. Furthermore, claims need to have a degree of resonance with the values of their audience [12]. Securitizing acts that lack social, cultural, or political relevance to the audience are unlikely to align with that audience's needs and expectations.

Audience receptivity and the legitimacy of the response is a key aspect of securitization. Not only are socially derived norms, experiences, and values relevant to what is viewed as a potential insecurity, they also influence the legitimacy of claims on what actions can be reasonably taken in response [9]. The securitizing agent may be recognized as a legitimate speaker of security, but agreement on responses towards the referent are still contingent on what is acceptable to the audience. For example, mass shootings in schools might be a very legitimate source of insecurity, but it is doubtful that issuing weapons to students would be regarded as a legitimate response. The audience must deem a security claim in terms of both the threat and the proposed response.

While securitization is largely about convincing an audience to break free of normal politics, the process is also intersubjective, having elements of social negotiation [10]. In the context of local actors, this means security claims should focus on issues and insecurities that are relevant at the local level but retain resonance amongst potential audiences. Since insecurities at this level are often highly localized, they may not be intuitively relevant to non-local audiences. A number of factors, including social and political capital, perceived legitimacy as speakers of security,

and their claims about referent objects, potentially limit the agency of securitizing actors.

3.2. Human Security

Understanding the role of local actors in the pursuit of security necessitates adopting a concept of security that is relevant for them. The reality for many people is that traditional notions of state-based security have limited bearing on their daily lives. Moreover, through issues like misgovernance, the state has been recognized as a source of insecurity itself [7]. State-oriented traditions of security offer little to address issues like undernourishment or the persecution of sexual minorities. Security at the local level often has more to do with underdevelopment and human rights than military or state power.

The association between security and underdevelopment was largely popularized by the 1994 United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Human Development Report [13]. The report mainstreamed human security, shifting the focus of security discourse from a state-centric notion to one that recognized the security needs of individuals and communities. As Emma Rothschild notes, one of the results of this shift was the connection drawn between the security of individuals, states, and the international systems as a whole [14]. The post-cold war reality meant that if the world was to be secured, then the security of individuals needed to be addressed alongside interstate conflicts. Without buttressing the security of people, the conditions for peace would be untenable. This bound the individual and the global, creating a space for audience susceptibility to security claims made by local actors.

Unfortunately, it is a conceptual and logistical challenge to address the diverse security needs of individuals and groups. Human security acknowledges insecurities as being highly contextualized. Not only is it difficult to identify specific threats to individual wellbeing, but it is difficult to codify them in a way that is conducive to policy development and analysis. The UNDP suggested seven categories of security threats as potentially destabilizing: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security [13]. However, this range of concepts was somewhat unwieldly, which is perhaps why the Commission on Human Security (CHS) reformulates human security as follows:

Human security in its broadest sense embraces far more than the absence of violent conflict. It encompasses human rights, good governance, access to education and health care, and ensuring that each individual has opportunities and choices to fulfil his or her own potential. . . Freedom from want, freedom from fear and the freedom of the future generations to inherit a healthy natural environment – these are the interrelated building blocks of human, and therefore national security [15].

Security expands beyond survival and recognizes the need to live a life that individuals have cause to value. This reformulation creates a more manageable concep-

tual paradigm, but it offers little to help delineate units of analysis or understand how individuals determine priorities and appraise security needs. Freedom from fear and want may capture the fundamental imagery, but does little to provide a blueprint for policy, practice, and analysis. The non-specificity of the core requirements of human security is at the heart of much of the critique of the concept [16–18]. However, in a study of numerous National Human Development Reports (NHDR), Richard Jolly and Deepayan Basu Ray [19] demonstrate that when human security analyzes *have* been executed, these criticisms fail to manifest as impediments to operationalizing a conceptually open, people-centered, and context-dependent framework. Jolly and Basu Ray's analysis suggests that developing a concrete list of human security components or factors is not necessary from an operational point of view—human security needs can effectively be identified "in theater", so to speak. However, while their analysis demonstrates the value of flexible definitions, it does little to explain how security values and needs are constructed at the individual level. To bridge this gap this study employed the capability approach.

3.3. Capability Approach

The capability approach is a normative evaluative framework focused on the ability of individuals to achieve the things they value through expanding real freedoms and opportunities. The fundamental units of this approach are *functionings* and *capabilities* [20]. Functionings are those things that an individual has cause to value doing or being. Capabilities are freedoms and capacities that enable one to achieve various functionings. The classic example is that of a starving child as compared to a fasting monk. Eating, fasting, and starving are all potential functionings, however, fasting is fundamentally different from starving because for the monk it is a choice. The monk exists in a situation of greater security, retaining the ability to eat if exposed to a deterioration in livelihood.

Generally, the capability approach is not conventionally folded into discussions of human security except for when one is clarifying the distinction between human development and human security [19,21]. However, this paper argues that the ability of individuals and communities to achieve human security goals—herein referred to as *security functionings*—is a capability worth measuring in itself. Individuals are fundamental agents in the pursuit of security functionings. Not considering agency and choices in relation to security alienates individuals from the values that matter most to them.

The connection between values, agency, and security-making is at the heart of this research and is articulated by the CHS, in that "human security must also aim at developing the capabilities of individuals and communities to make informed choices and to act on behalf of causes and interests in many spheres of life" [15]. This means creating the conditions for the expansion of capabilities of people to pursue security functionings. Efforts to support human security must be evaluated by whether or not they expand opportunities and remove barriers to the pursuit of human security functionings.

The question is how to identify the functionings that are valued by local level actors? Several authors have attempted to codify universal capabilities lists or sets to apply as a supplement to Sen's framework [22–27]. However, Sen has himself remained skeptical of these attempts:

The problem is not with listing important capabilities, but with insisting on one predetermined canonical list of capabilities, chosen by theorists without any general social discussion or public reasoning. To have such a fixed list... is to deny the possibility of fruitful public participation on what should be included and why... public discussion and reasoning can lead to a better understanding of the role, reach and significance of particular capabilities... [28].

Externally creating lists of capabilities precludes participation and thereby undermines local values. To understand how local values manifest, it is essential to look for security needs expressed and pursued by local actors themselves. Making a security claim can be interpreted as an expression of value— a declaration that a particular functioning is needed to assure a security goal. The referent object represents a valued security functioning, or some combination of doings or beings that if not achieved will result in insecurity.

Not all security functionings will be the subject of a security claim. Social and political contexts influence which values are likely to be presented, and claims might not represent the most critical security needs. Social structures and power disparity will inevitably influence the values that are expressed within social groups [29]. Denuelin and McGregor [30] have argued that the capability approach needs to be strengthened through a recognition of how social factors influence the development values. Our social nature influences which referent objects become subject to security claim. When considering human security concerns we must be cognizant of how social factors impact value-forming and security-making processes in three ways: firstly, social dynamics influence which functionings are valued; secondly, power dynamics influence which values are expressed as a security claim; and thirdly, these influences are potentially omnidirectional, including those coming from non-local actors. The research investigates the existence of local capabilities by exploring the dynamics of how valued security functionings manifest and the strategies employed by local actors to achieve them. It utilizes the idea of securitization to analyze the ways in which local actors construct and position their security needs. Furthermore, it considers the differential capacity of actors to make effective claims about security.

4. Results—Evidence from Liberia

The results of this study will be presented in two parts. First, we present data relating to understandings of insecurities in communities and perspectives on actor agency in the pursuit of improved human security. This provides us with

insight into how local individuals identify valued security functionings and reflect upon their own agency in achieving them. Second, we present two sample cases in which local actors adopted strategies to achieve their security goals. This section digs deeper into the specific strategies through which local actors attempt to achieve their valued security functionings. These parallel but differently successful strategies show that not all local actors have the same range of capabilities in terms of achieving their security goals.

4.1. Community Understandings of Security

As this research sought to understand local actors as security agents, a key consideration is how informants views their notion of a secure life, their capacity to identify insecurities in their communities, and their ideas about the responsibility and power to pursue security goals. The aim of this line of investigation is to uncover the existence of locally valued security functionings and the informants' perceived level of agency in achieving those goals.

In regards to the informants' ideas on important security functionings, views were broad but largely consistent with the idea of human security. Some respondents had a fairly simple conception of security. For Jack, "...security means protection. Security means to have a bed peace, that when you are sleeping, when you have security in your environment. When you have security, you can sleep well" [3]. The connection between safety and security was echoed by Max, who additionally described employment as key to both his own security, and also in reducing crime in his community [13]. Others linked security to more complex, emotional or social needs. A geology student, Tim, linked security to his ability "...to feel proud and I feel that with security I can contribute immensely to the good and development of my country" [2]. Interestingly, two informants responded by addressing the complexity of security as a concept. Mark asked, "When you say secure, what do you mean? Food security? Safety?" [21] Luke had similar concerns, reflecting that "...security is a broad terminology and could refer to your daily life, it could refer to an entire country" [20]. Informants' notions of security were generally reflective of the complexity found in human security discourses.

When asked about specific insecurities they felt needed to be addressed, responses were varied. The most common concern was criminal activity, however, Fred, Eric, and Max saw it as being connected to issues of poor infrastructure, unemployment, and a failure to meet basic needs. [7,13,15] Fred was concerned about the lack of electricity, saying, "...where there is no electricity, you see them burglarizing (...) and go and hijacking people." Eric was concerned about infrastructure as a threat to the ability of students to go to school to study, saying, "...everywhere in Liberia, the road is damaged. No electricity. We are in darkness". The lack of basic infrastructure was also tied to health security by Mark, who expressed concerns regarding waste management:

I live in a fence, and right outside the fence there is a garbage dump. There's my fence, right here, people dump dirt all in the front of the fence here. It is rising, to the point where it is rising to the level of my fence. Children defacate there, okay? And one time there was a dead baby found there [21].

The fence surrounding Mark's home was used as a dumping area in the community for refuse—or "dirt" in the colloquial Liberian. Sanitation and refuse management as a health threat was well recognized by informants.

Additionally, food security was mentioned by Max, Jack, and Steven as being an ongoing concern [3,13,21]. Max observed that they "...have kids that are hungry in the community and we find that are not good looking, like malnutrition" and it becomes a concern for the entire community. Steve went further, suggesting that food insecurity often led to criminal activity. Again, the sources of insecurity identified by the informants were broad, and often interconnected. Moreover, the ready ability to identify insecurities in their communities suggests a sense of value or priority in relation to needed security functionings.

Informants had mixed responses when asked about how to address insecurities and who was responsible for improving security conditions. Informants recognized the need for multi-level approaches to addressing insecurities, but responses varied based on the type of insecurity. On the issue of economic security, informants pointed vaguely towards the government. Eric felt that the government needed "...to put some measure into place" for encouraging job creation.[7] Similarly, Tim believed that the government was responsible for getting young people off the streets [2]. Generally, the economy and jobs were largely seen as the realm of government actors, however, Zack and Steven felt that community groups had a role in creating education opportunities locally [16–18,29]. Group discussions pointed towards a divided role with the community supporting individuals to develop entrepreneurial skills, but the need for government actors to do more to support secure employment through economic development.

Safety and crime elicited a starkly divided response. Eric, John, and Omar felt that neighbourhood watch or vigilante groups were a major source of security [7,9,31]. Other informants believed that the Liberian National Police (LNP) should be responsible, but that their limited capacity and reputation for corruption made it difficult. Mike argued that repairing that reputation would reduce reliance on vigilante groups [1]. Arnold believed the best solution was for community watch groups to "ensure that every activity they carry on, they liaise with the Liberian National Police" [19]. For him, responsibility was shared between levels and actors. Otto had a similar view, saying, "...the community do have the responsibility to address the issue of security for the fact that the community knows best" [32]. In general, informants felt that the role of the community was undervalued by non-local actors.

When discussing how cooperative efforts worked in reality, Arnold, Luke, and Max took issue with some NGOs' approaches [13,19,20]. Citing an example of a well drilled

too close to a mass grave for local people's comfort, Max said "organizations that work in communities would just come in and carry on projects. They make a lot of mistakes and a lot of things goes wrong." Luke argued that the lack of democratic input from local people was also a problem, recalling an NGO project from a community he had visited:

. . . some NGO built a market center there. And the market center they built. . . somewhere on the football field of that town. But I'm sure there weren't a lot of consultation with them. Probably maybe the town chiefs just agreed to give that land and just build it there, they didn't even consult with them [20].

Lack of local participation was viewed as an impediment to ownership. Luke felt that NGO consultation with chiefs did not guarantee the respecting of local values or local involvement. Jack and James felt that local chiefs had an important role in conveying the needs of the community to higher-level actors.[3,8] Relating to social and symbolic capital, Jack felt that the chief or elected representative was in a better position to speak for the community, saying, ". . . as a local person, we cannot go and say 'we need this, we need that' " Many informants felt that international and even some national structures and agencies were out of reach for locals. Max went so far as to describe international groups as being "afraid of the air" [13]. These types of comments were reflective of a perceived barrier between local and non-local actors. This lack of access to audiences who could help was a compounding issue for many, especially in context of poor infrastructure.

If taken at face value, these responses suggest informants felt they lacked agency in dealing with insecurities, however, when probed on the topic informants emphasized the importance of local actors. Otto, a particularly strong supporter of controversial vigilante groups, attested to this saying that "security is actually everybody's problem. It is not an individual problem. When it is at the door of one individual it is good that every other person go to help solve that problem" [32]. He held that individuals and communities had to involve themselves more in situations where state sources of security were absent. Zack argued for a shared responsibility, stressing cooperation between communities and government:

We have to work together, see? So it's not like I have to blame the government, because it is not the government that making this place unsafe. It is the people that live in the community that make this place unsafe. So it require, you know what I'm saying, a mutual understanding and a good working relationship between the community and the police to better the situation [29].

This type of mixed approach was also advocated by Jack, who described the roots of security within communities as follows:

. . . I would think that the main source of security would be the local structure. I don't want to be specific to say like peace committees or so on, but the chiefs, the elders, those traditional leaders. Umm, the youth, all of them coming together. It is that social cohesion within the community.

That's what keeps them secure. It is not about the police. Those infrastructures, it means nothing. Security is about the people [3].

Mark had a democratic perspective, emphasizing the importance in local people speaking out for their values:

You have your district representatives, you have your county senators (. . .) to address the challenges. You also have civil society, you have community groups (. . .) who have to speak out. I'm not saying these people are implementers, these people are not implementers but these are people who have to speak out, hold government accountable, make these things known to their representatives, make these things know to their senators, gather together, organize themselves as a community, hold meetings, consult with each other, and say "okay, this is what we need. We are going to take it to the representative." If he doesn't deliver, we are gonna remove him from the seat next election [21].

The diversity of responses regarding strategies for achieving security functionings and working within the social and political structure highlights a broad understanding of how local agency can be applied. Informants had clear concerns regarding insecurities, types of preferred responses, and strategies on how they would address them. What emerges from this threefold: firstly, local actors have defined values in regards to security; secondly, local actors have priorities and preferences relating to the solutions to insecurities; and thirdly, local actors have a strong concept of their own agency and strategies for achieving their valued security functionings. We can then say that interviewees have a strong sense of which security functionings they value, and at least some notions of how they would prefer to see them addressed. In the next sections we will explore the reality of how some local actors attempt to achieve security functionings. In doing so we will see the challenges for local actor efforts to move beyond valued functionings into the realm of real capabilities.

4.2. Case One: A Local NGO—Lobbying and Legitimacy

The first case for discussion in this study is that of a locally operating NGO called Youth Crime Watch of Liberia (YCWL). The organization was founded by a group of community dwellers who recognized that crime and a lack of youth engagement were a persistent problem in their community. Young people were regularly exposed to drugs, alcohol, and were at risk for recruitment into criminal gangs. The focus has evolved over time, moving beyond crime reduction into issues of youth employment, gender-based violence, amongst others [32]. A senior manager with YCWL describes the organization as ". . . engaging the minds of young people for positive outcomes. We believe in awareness raising education as well as. . . programs such as life skills and job creation" [30]. YCWL has at times used a branch structure with groups operating across a number of communities and educational institutions, enabling them to build networks and leverage the social capital of their

members. As such, YCWL has employed a strategy of consolidating public support and coordinating with other actors in the pursuit of their goals.

In the first year of operation, YCWL pursued accreditation from the Ministry of Planning and Economics Affairs and Ministry of Youth and Sports, and also sought membership with the Federation of Liberian Youth [31]. Recognizing that connections with local police would be essential towards their success as an organization, YCWL signed a memorandum of understanding with the LNP. The organization focused on building a reputation among national-level organizations, leading to opportunities with international organizations such as the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), the UNDP, amongst others [31]. These connections built credibility amongst national and international actors.

Following accreditation, YCWL expanded to different educational institutions. During this time YCWL recognized that gender issues needed to be a priority, in particular, gender-based violence. YCWL sought support from UNMIL to plan a rally against gender based violence as a way of "buttressing National Government and women organizations who have continued to struggle for rape prevention, education and public awareness" [31]. The aim of the program was to give community youth and elders an opportunity to discuss sexual violence and prevention strategies. Recognizing the sensitivity of the issue, YCWL invited Liberian comedian Georgio Boutini to draw in participants. By partnering with actors across all levels, including Liberian celebrities, YCWL built a reputation as an organization that understands the local people and acts as a bridge with international organizations [30]. This kind of social capital granted them a great deal of credibility and legitimacy when speaking on behalf of communities.

Gender issues have continued to be a theme for the organization. By 2010 YCWL resolved that the best way to improve security for women was through local empowerment and education opportunities for women and girls [33]. YCWL began holding seminars aimed at empowering young women and raising awareness of gender issues with public rallies and retreats. Moreover, the organization was able to procure funding to build their Young Women's Empowerment through approaching the Japanese Government Grant for Grassroots Human Security Projects (GGP) scheme [34]. Their success in these areas has led to them finding opportunities to influence other security endeavours, such as the Early Warning Early Response Working Group [35].

At of the end of the field phase of this research, YCWL had yet to officially open and commence programming at the Empowerment Center. The GGP grant contained the restriction that it could only be used to finance the construction and outfitting of the center with basic equipment [36]. Moreover, the group lacked female leadership to lend credibility to their role as an organization for empowering women, and the current leadership expressed concerns regarding their ability to secure funding for women's programming [36]. By the end of the research period, the leadership of the organization was laying plans for the drilling of a well, recruiting candidates for a female head of the center, and searching for fundraising opportunities. The group has since secured further funding from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) to continue their efforts.

YCWL has been effective at communicating, pursuing, and achieving security functionings that they value. Their ability to build networks with other local, national, and international level actors has enabled them to act as a bridge between community dwellers and other actors. Having roots in both the local community and connections to international agencies has put pressure on the small group to be accountable and transparent. Future challenges for the organization include gender inclusiveness in decision making, and staying transparent and accountable. Furthermore, finding stable funding for programming at their new center is certain to come with new donor pressures. YCWL does not yet have the ability to operate completely independently to pursue all the security functionings that they value. Accessing resources remains dependent on appeals to external actors. Despite this, it can be said that the strategies they have applied to pursue security functionings have been effective, clearly indicating the existence of security capabilities.

4.3. Case Two: Independent Community Actors Bottom-Up Securitization?

While YCWL was able to leverage their social resources to build a reputation and establish themselves as a legitimate security actor in their community, not all actors have the capacity to implement the same strategies. Others lack the networks or social capital required to generate legitimacy. One of the informants for this project, Eric, has struggled to overcome these challenges in his attempts to build a school in his remote community. His story is an example of how some local actors can act as security agents but still be frustrated by the self-interest of others.

The conflict in Liberia separated Eric from his family and he ended up as a refugee in Ghana.[7] While there, he managed to get an education and find work teaching in refugee camps alongside volunteer teachers from an international NGO. During this time Eric developed an appreciation for the importance of education in creating opportunities for young people.

After returning to Liberia and reuniting his displaced and scattered family, Eric endeavoured to help meet the needs for primary education in his community. His experience in the refugee camps familiarized him with the problems caused by a lack of education and schools, and he did not want the same to occur in his new community:

When I came, what I experienced was seeing was little kids they just running around. Selling for people, working for people. No education. My brothers, they weren't even in school. It was difficult. Until I came and was able to gather them (. . .) I think would be good is to have at least a primary school. That at least will ease the burden of many Liberians and also help the government [7].

The lack of educational opportunities was seen as a bur-

den on the community and the government. Moreover, the long distance between the community and the local school created fears that the children would be exposed to dangers on their commute. Eric, his friends, and his family decided that they needed to construct an elementary school in their community. The first step in the process was to rally local support, and this would become their first roadblock.

Eric and his colleagues explained that mustering support from their community was not easy. While discussing the school project in a local cafe, Otto explained that "...before you can venture into a community to carry out the projects, you need to synthesize mission, you need to synthesize people. If you just go there and want to begin the project immediately it might somehow be difficult" [32].

Community projects could not be effectively implemented without the support of the community as a whole. This was evident when the group met resistance raising support to build the school. The group decided that maybe the best way to earn support was to focus on a specific audience within the community:

What we did, we went to the women and talked to the women. Because we have this school in one village, about an hour and a half walk to that school, we told the women that if you sit here and refuse that this project comes to your community, you are risking the lives of your children. Your children have to walk an hour and a half. Anybody can sit on the road to rape them. Anybody can harm them while they are going to school and come from school. And they agree that this was true, so they went back to their husbands, and told them, actually this community wants to work here [32].

While initially resistant to the idea, the men of the community recognized the values and concerns of their wives and were convinced for the need for a local school. For Eric and Otto, this was a key step and they quickly rallied support from other community members who agreed to donate land and to help with the construction of the school [7].

The next barrier was finding a donor. Eric reached out to his international contacts from his time teaching in Ghana. One of his former co-workers put Eric in touch with a group in Israel willing to donate. However, the group had expressed concerns about the legitimacy of the project and asked for documentation (building plans, cost estimates, etc.) and for an inspection of the proposed location [37]. Eric was sympathetic and felt that international groups had legitimate fears concerns for working smaller groups because trusting local level actors is not always safe:

...to trust somebody is not easy to do. Because there are a lot of people they offer to, and then they destroy the opportunity. Most NGO and most donor, they being, you know, so tight, because you know, before they give you money they have to trust you and know who to give the money and they want to know information...how you use the money [7].

While the NGO reluctance to trust local level actors with funds was frustrating, it was also understandable by the group. Eric felt that while it restricted local opportunities to freely pursue goals, it was reasonable because some local actors' motives could be dishonest. Eric and Otto prepared the documents while waiting for an inspector to arrive from Accra to compile his report on the site.

Once the inspector arrived, Eric's family hosted him for several days, explaining the project and showing him around the community. Afterwards, Eric was told to wait for a response from the donors based on the report [7]. Unfortunately, it never came. After months of waiting to hear from donors, Eric phoned them directly. They explained that they had never received the report. The inspector had taken his payment and could not be contacted. When Eric asked if they were still willing to help the project, they declined but said that they would be willing to support a different project:

...he was so sorry to write, you know, but what I should do is to try to write a project to establish fair trade. He said, through the fair trade, when the fair trade business is moving, then we will be able to work in another direction to order to be able establish as school (...) So I decided to write the project again about soap making, you know for, you know how to produce soap like in the community for people to have for wash their clothes and things [7].

The group drafted a new proposal based on the soap-making initiative suggested by the donors and approached his community again. The new suggestion was met with disappointment. The community had expectations for support in building a school and the news of that evaporating broke their trust in Eric:

Before the Ghanaian man came, the entire community they were so happy. Even to get a piece of land is difficult, but because they are happy, some of the community member promised to give one lot, then the other ones...but at the end result, no all from me [7].

In the end, the cancellation of the school project was a loss of face for Eric in the eyes of his community. Having spent his own time and money on the project, including long taxi rides to the nearest internet café, money spent developing project proposals, and hosting the Ghanaian inspector, Eric felt let down by the experience. Exploitation of the situation by the inspector and the altering of project plans to suit the donor group severely undermined Eric's credibility within his community. Despite this, his group remained hopeful that they could support the education of children in his village by offering tutoring at his home and continuing to seek funds to build a school. This was not the preferred functioning, but the only one within their capabilities.

5. Discussion

In regards to community understandings of security, it is clear that most of the informants hold complex notions of security that included both individual and social aspects. Informants expressed concerns for security in terms of physical safety, nutrition, unemployment, education, and more. Furthermore, informants acknowledged that insecurities were often interrelated, with issues of criminality and personal safety being connected to problems in the economic or social systems. The ability of the informants to readily

identify and discuss human security threats and solutions in their communities illustrates the existence of preferences on human security functionings. In the language of capabilities approach, these types of responses suggest that informants have values in regards to the capabilities needed to feel secure in their lives. These responses suggest that types of security concerns held by community dwellers are well reflected by conventional interpretations of human security. Based on this, it is clear that the human security concept holds relevance and is applicable to the security values and needs of local-level actors in the research area. Whether informants felt they had the real freedom or agency to achieve these human security functionings is another matter.

When interviews explored the role of local actors and communities in addressing and managing insecurities, informants showed similar complex and self-reflective opinions. Informants clearly indicated that in many situations they felt that capabilities existed for implementing certain responses or strategy on their own (e.g. night patrols), in other situations they recognized their limitations (e.g. well-drilling). When it came to discussions of who were the primary actors for achieving security functionings, informants identified a mixed system, where the local communities, the police, NGOs, and government actors all held some responsibility to contribute. Informants stressed the need for local people to be involved in the process of addressing insecurities, citing planning errors and misunderstandings that could have been avoided with the help of local knowledge. These types of responses suggest that informants felt that there is not only a need for community-level actors to be involved in addressing insecurities, but that local actors possessed key knowledge and agency that was often needed to ensure the successful resolution of insecurities. This indicates a mixed level of capabilities in which some human security functionings were considered achievable utilizing local capacity alone, but others required non-local support.

In terms of identifying clear demonstrations of the application of local agency as security actors, the results were less definitive. The cases of YCWL and Eric's group clearly highlight that not all local actors have the same level of capabilities in terms of security. While YCWL represents an example of a successful strategy applied by a local actor, Eric's efforts failed in achieving security functionings. Why did one case succeed and the other fail? Consider the difference in terms of actor characteristics, the responses advocated, and audience receptivity.

YCWL's efforts since its foundation have effectively carved out a position as legitimate and respected speakers for security. The strategies that they have employed have focused on mustering community support and official recognition as a form of legitimacy, and leverage this with international funding agencies. This was a slow but effective process to amplify their social and political capital, gaining recognition as speakers of security regarding community and local level needs. Leveraging this legitimacy, YCWL was able to access the Japanese government's grassroots grant program with a securitizing move around a referent that fell across shared values. Moreover, the fact that the responses advocated by YCWL were tuned to human security needs well recognized by their international audiences was undoubtedly a major factor in their success. The audience-compatible security claims of YCWL in combination with the time spent earning credibility with local community members, national, and international actors undoubtedly helped YCWL secure the resources needed to achieve their desired security functionings.

The strategies applied by Eric's group were focused on using security rhetoric to accomplish their goals and shape public opinion. This strategy was very effective at mustering local support and is essentially a type of bottom-up securitization strategy. Targeting women as an initial audience for security claims, and then leveraging that with local men resulted in special handling at the local level in the form of donated land. Unfortunately, this strategy hit a ceiling when it came to international actors. The reasons for this appear to be two-fold: firstly, the group's lack of legitimacy in that field created a barrier between them and funders; and secondly, the funders - while open to hearing security claims - were not entirely in agreement with the proposed resolution to the security problem. They did not accept the security objectives advocated by Eric as a securitizing agent, instead, the funders advocated for an alternative solution to the one advocated by Eric's group. The free-trade business solution proposed by the funders did not match the values of the community. One can speculate as to whether something like NGO accreditation would have made a difference, but it is clear that the audience failed to resonate with Eric's security claims. Not only was the community unable to address the source of insecurity in their community, but Eric suffered a loss of social capital. Failure to securitize in this situation came at a significant social cost to the securitizing agent.

Even though Eric's claims were relatively non-controversial— bridging themes of education and sexual violence—they failed to resonate strongly with the audience. Given Liberia's post-war, less developed country context it is unlikely that the claims were rejected based on the nature of the threat alone. The key difference between YCWL and Eric's group was in the form of social capital and power they had at their disposal. While the aims of both actors were similar— situated around issues of gender, crime, violence, and education—YCWL was more successful in their strategy. In terms of Balzacq's (2005) criteria [12], audience receptivity to Eric's claims was likely weakened by the lack of social capital, thereby shifting the power relations to favour a response alternative to that of the securitizing agent. The failure to achieve these security functionings at a comparable level indicates an inequality or deficiency in regards to security capabilities. From the cases here, it is apparent that local actors may not be able to assume the same expectation of agency and thereby the same level of capabilities when it comes to achieving human security functionings. Differential capacity may drive actors to adopt more conventional strategies, as YCWL did, or alternatively, to employ more strategic methods, such as the type of bottom-up micro-securitizations we saw from Eric's group.

6. Conclusion

This research has shown that sufficiently empowered local actors can be effective agents for improving human security conditions in their communities. Local actors are clearly able to put voice to security claims and functionings, however, the ability of local actors to achieve human security functionings that are beyond their normal means are dependent on the ability of to augment their resources through external sources. This requires legitimacy as a speaker of security, and cultivating legitimacy was a key part of the strategies employed in both the cases presented. Unfortunately, as Eric's case illustrates, not all local actors have the social or political capital required to generate legitimacy at higher levels, and thus they may lack capabilities to pursue valued security functionings. Moreover, when bottom-up securitization strategies are applied by local actors, their effectiveness appears to be dependent on the value placed on socio-political factors by audiences, which fell outside of the objective of this research. Understanding how bottom-up securitization strategies work as a means of enhancing capabilities requires a deeper investigation of actor/audience relations and what types of factors influence the receptivity of audiences; however, it is clear that securitization is a strategy that can be applied by local actors to leverage agency. As such, this research suggests two considerations to human security minded actors both in Liberia and abroad: firstly, local actors should evaluate how their legitimacy as speakers of security is interpreted by funding audiences; secondly, funding audiences should consider the ways in which their criteria for legitimate claims may actually worsen local security conditions. Cases such as this highlight the challenges for local actors to achieve their security. More importantly, they illustrate how the capabilities for local actors to achieve security functionings is heavily contingent on the expansion of opportunities for community-level actors to participate in security-making processes.

Recommendations for further research include a fuller exploration of the theoretical basis for bottom-up securitization, a meta-analysis of the cases examining the effectiveness of local actors as securitizing actors, as well as an empirical study of how audiences perceive bottom-up securitizing acts in order to confirm whether audiences perceive local actors as securitizing agents, or at least speakers for security. The question as to which kinds of social and political capital generate the legitimacy in a bottom-up securitizing act is of key interest to this research. Understanding how the audiences of bottom-up security claims interpret legitimacy of both claimants and responses is a key question for future research. If such questions can be answered, both local and non-local actors can potentially improve their ability to ensure the achievement of the most critical and locally valued human security functionings.

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