



## Human development for everyone: Issues and challenges

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### Abstract

Human development is about expanding the richness of human life rather than simply the richness of the economy. It focuses on people and their opportunities and choices. However, there are still many challenges to achieving human development for everyone. These challenges include poverty, inequality, gender discrimination, climate change, and conflict. This article discusses the key issues and challenges to human development. It also explores some of the strategies that can be used to address these challenges. The article concludes by arguing that human development for everyone is essential for building a more just and sustainable world.

**Keywords:** Human development, poverty, inequality, inclusion, sustainable development

### Introduction

Human development focuses on the richness of human lives rather than on the richness of economies. Our planet is now home to more than seven billion people, a quarter of them young. Developing countries have emerged as a major economic force and political power. Globalisation has integrated people, markets and work, and the digital revolution has changed human lives. Progress in human development has been impressive over the past 25 years. People now live longer, more children are in school and more people have access to basic social services. The Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals which are the global commitments at the turn of the century to end basic human deprivation within 15 years added to this momentum. In spite of all these commitments, human development has been uneven and human deprivations persist. Progress has bypassed groups, communities, societies and people have been left out. Some have achieved only the basics of human development, and some not even that. New development challenges ranging from inequalities to climate change, from epidemics to desperate migration, from conflicts to violent extremisms have emerged.

As universalism is the centerpiece of human development, it must be and can be attained for everyone. There are some encouraging positive evidences in this direction. By 2015 the world had achieved some of what seemed to be daunting challenges 25 years ago. More than 1 billion people escaped from extreme poverty, 2.1 billion gained access to improved sanitation and more than 2.6 billion gained access to an improved source of drinking water (United Nations, 2015a). The global under-five mortality rate was more than halved (from 91 per 1,000 live births to 43) between 1990 and 2015. The incidence of HIV and tuberculosis declined between 2000 and 2015. The proportion seats held by women in parliament worldwide rose to 23 percent in 2016 – up 6 percentage points over the preceding decade. The global net loss of forested area fell from 7.3 million hectares a year in the 1990s to 3.3 million during 2011-2015 (United Nations, 2016h). Yet, even with all this commendable progress, the world still faces many complex development challenges. Some of these are:

#### ▪ Lingerings deprivations and inequalities

Even with all the impressive progress in reducing poverty over the past two and half decades, 766 million people, 385 million of them children (World Bank, 2015a), lived on less than \$1.90 a day in 2013. Poor nutrition causes 45 percent of the deaths among children under age 5 (UNDP, 2015a). Children born in developing countries in 2016 will lose nearly \$177 billion in potential lifetime earnings because of stunting and other delays in physical development. About 758 million adults, including 114 million young people, still lack basic reading and writing skills. Lingerings deprivations are evident in various aspects of human development.

Poverty is no longer a problem of developing regions only; it is also on the rise in developed countries. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that in 2012 more than 300 million people in developed countries lived poverty (ILO, 2016a).

Rising incomes around the world have been accompanied by widening inequality. The World Bank reports that between 2008- and 2013-income gaps widened in 34 of the 83 countries monitored as income grew more quickly for those in the wealthiest 60 percent of the income distribution than for those in the poorest 40 percent (World Bank, 2016i). And in 23 countries people in the poorest 40 percent saw their income decline. Global wealth has become far more concentrated. The wealthiest 1 percent of the population had 32 percent of global wealth around 2000 and 46 percent around 2010. The super-rich- the wealthiest 0.1 percent-loom larger.

#### ▪ Widespread conflict and violent extremism

Widespread conflict and violent extremism have become a challenge of our time. Conflict-related deaths are a proxy measure for the absence of peace. With the escalation of conflict and extreme violence in the Syrian Arab Republic, 2014 saw the highest number of battle related deaths since 1989: more than 50,000.

#### ▪ Global gender inequality

A challenge to global progress in human development across all regions and groups, gender inequality is most severe in its most severe in low and medium human development countries and in the Arab States, South Asia and Sub-Saharan

Africa. As countries' human development improves, women's choices and opportunities must be equal to those of men so that everyone benefits from advances in human development.

#### ▪ **Regional water stress**

Water stress is a major challenge affecting more than 4 billion people worldwide. The combined effects of growing populations, rising incomes and expanding cities will cause the demand for water to rise exponentially, while supply becomes more erratic and uncertain. Water is becoming scarcer in the Arab States and in the African Sahel where it is already in short supply, and may start disappearing in Central Africa and East Asia. These regions could see declines of as much as 6 percent of GDP by 2050 because of water related impacts on agriculture, health and income (World Bank, 2016a).

#### ▪ **Local natural disasters**

Natural disasters- earthquakes, floods, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions and the like-can generate enormous loss of life, drive people into poverty and even reverse progress in human development. The effects of disasters on human well-being can be greatly reduced, especially among the groups that are most exposed. Building disaster resilience into policies and programmes can reduce the associated risks and greatly mitigate the effects.

Despite all the challenges, what humanity has achieved over 25 years gives hope that fundamental changes are possible. This is evident from the fact that all over the world people are increasingly engaged in influencing the processes that shape their lives. Human ingenuity and creativity have initiated technological revolutions and translated them into the way work, think and behave. Awareness of sustainability has been growing. The 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement on climate change are the prime examples. All these promising developments give the world the hope that things can be changed and that transformation is possible. Closing the human development gaps is critical, but so is ensuring that future generations have the same, or even better opportunities.

#### **Basic deprivations abound**

One person in nine in the world is hungry, and one in three is malnourished (United Nations, 2016h). About 15 million girls a year marry before age 18, one every two seconds (UNICEF, 2014a). Worldwide 18,000 people a day die because of air pollution (IEA, 2016b), and HIV infects 2 million people a year (UNAIDS, 2016a). Every minute an average of 24 people is displaced from their home (UNHCR, 2016a).

Such basic deprivations are common among various groups. Women and girls, ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, migrants – all are deprived in the basic dimensions of human development. Shortfalls in basic human development among various groups often persist because of discrimination. Women are particularly discriminated against with respect to opportunities and end up with disadvantaged outcomes. Ethnic minorities and other groups are often excluded from education, employment and administrative and political positions, resulting in poverty and higher vulnerability to crime, including human trafficking.

More than 370 million self-identified indigenous people in 70 countries also face discrimination and exclusion in the legal framework, in access to education in their own language and in access to land, water, forests and intellectual property rights (UNDESA, 2016a). More than a billion people are estimated to live with some form of disability and are among the most marginalized in most societies. They face stigma, discrimination and inaccessible physical and virtual environments (WHO, 2011b).

Human deprivations are dynamic. Moving above the low human development threshold does not necessarily ensure that people will be protected from emerging and future threats. Even where people have more choices than before, there may be threats to the security of these choices. The deprivations of the current generation can carry over to the next generation. Parents' education, health and income can greatly affect the opportunities available to their children.

#### **Barriers to universal human development**

Groups of people who remain deprived may be the most difficult to reach – geographically, politically, socially and economically. Surmounting the barriers may require greater fiscal resources and development assistance, continuing gains in technology and better data for monitoring and evaluation. The barriers to universal human development are:

- Blatant violence
- Discriminatory laws
- Exclusionary social norms
- Imbalances in political participation
- Unequal distribution of opportunities

Overcoming these barriers will require putting empathy, tolerance and moral commitments to global justice and sustainability at the centre of individual and collective choices. People should consider themselves part of a cohesive global whole rather than a fragmented terrain of rival groups and interests.

Moving towards universal human development requires an awareness and understanding of the drivers and dynamics of how groups are marginalized, which inevitably varies across countries and regions. Realising universal human development in practice is possible, but the key barriers and forms of exclusion must first be overcome.

#### **Human development for everyone**

Human development involves expanding choices, which determine who we are and what we do. Several factors underlie these choices: The wide range of options that we have to choose from – our capabilities; the social and cognitive constraints and social norms and influences that shape our values and choices; our own empowerment and the agency we exercise individually and as part of groups in shaping our options and opportunities; and the mechanisms that exist to resolve competing claims in ways that are fair and conducive to realizing human potential.

Human development is a matter of promoting not only the freedoms of individuals, but also the freedoms of groups or collectives. For the most marginalized and most deprived people collective agency can be much more powerful than individual agency. An individual is unlikely to achieve much alone, and power may be realized only through collective action.

Human development for everyone is not a dream; it is a realizable goal. We can build on what we have achieved. We can explore new possibilities to overcome challenges. We can

attain what once seemed unattainable, for what seem to be challenges today can be overcome tomorrow. Realising our hopes is within our reach.

The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals are critical steps towards human development for everyone. Human Development Report 2016 suggests a five-point agenda to ensure human development for everyone. The actions cover policy issues and global commitments.

### **1. Identifying those who face human development deficits and mapping where they are:**

Identifying those who have been left out of the progress in human development and mapping their locations are essential for useful advocacy and effective policymaking. Such mapping can help development activists demand action and guide policymakers in formulating and implementing policies to improve the well-being of marginalized and vulnerable people.

### **2. Pursuing a range of available policy options with coherence**

Human development for everyone requires a multipronged set of national policy options: reaching those left out using universal policies, pursuing measures for groups with special needs, making human development resilient and empowering those left out. Country situations differ, so policy options have to be tailored to each country. Policies in every country have to be pursued in a coherent way through multi-stakeholder engagement, local and subnational adaptations and horizontal and vertical alignment.

### **3. Closing the gender gap**

Gender equality and women's empowerment are fundamental dimensions of human development. Gender gaps exist in capabilities as well as opportunities and progress is still too slow for realizing the full potential of half of humanity.

### **4. Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals and other global agreements**

The Sustainable Development Goals, critical in their own right, are also crucial for human development for everyone; the 2030 Agenda and the human development approach are mutually reinforcing. Further, achieving the SDGs is an important step for all human beings to realise their full potential in life.

### **5. Working towards reforms in the global system**

To move towards a fairer global system, the agenda for global institutional reforms should focus on global markets and their regulation, on the governance of multilateral institutions and on the strengthening of global civil society. That reform agenda should be advocated vigorously and consistently by bolstering public advocacy, building alliances among stakeholders and pushing through the agenda for reform.

From human development perspective, we want a world where all human beings have the freedom to realise their full potential in life so they can attain what they value. In the ultimate analysis, development is of the people, by the people and for the people. People have to partner with each other. There needs to be a balance between people and the planet. And humanity has to strive for peace and prosperity. Human development requires recognizing that every life is equally valuable and that human development for everyone must start with those farthest behind.

## **Human Development for everyone: What's to be done?**

Human Development Report 2016 builds on its analysis and findings and suggests a five-point action agenda for ensuring human development for everyone

### **1. Identifying those who have been left out of the progress in human development and mapping their locations**

Identifying those who have been left out of the progress in human development and mapping their locations are essential tasks for useful advocacy and for effective policymaking. Such mapping can help development activists demand action and guide policymakers in formulating and implementing policies to improve the well-being of marginalized and vulnerable people. A critical element of such a mapping exercise is collecting relevant information and data. Rather than traditional census and household surveys, innovative data collection mechanisms, such as administrative registries can be more effective.

### **2. Pursuing policy options**

Human development for everyone requires a multipronged set of national policy options: reaching those left out using universal policies, pursuing measures for groups with special needs, making human development resilient and empowering those left out. Country situations differ and policy options have to be tailored to each country. Policies in every country have to be pursued in a coherent way through multistakeholder engagement, local and subnational adaptations and horizontal and vertical coherence.

### **3. Closing the gender gap**

Gender equality and women's empowerment are fundamental dimensions of human development. With half of humanity lacking equal progress in human development, human development is not universal. Gender gaps exist in capabilities as well as opportunities. As the 2016 Global Gender Gap Report indicates, progress is still too slow for realising the full potential of humanity within our lifetimes.

### **4. Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals and other global agreements**

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), critical in their own right, are also crucial for human development for everyone. Achieving these goals is an important step for all human beings to realise their full potential in life. Tracking and monitoring the SDGs are important to measure progress, identify gaps in sustainable development and change policies and implementation of plans.

### **5. Working towards reforms in the global system**

In today's globalized world, national policies for universal human development must be complemented and supplemented by a global system that is fair and that enriches human development. The current architecture of the global system has five glaring shortcomings: the governance of economic globalisation is unbalanced, globalisation remains inequitable, imbalances exist in the governance of multilateralism remains reactive to human security and the potential of global civil society remains untapped. To move towards a fairer global system, the agenda for global institutional reforms should focus on global markets and their regulation, on the strengthening of global civil society. That reform agenda should be promoted vigorously and consistently by bolstering public advocacy, building alliances among stakeholders and pushing through the agenda for reform.

## Conclusion

From human development perspective, it is desirable to have a world where all human beings have the freedom to realise their full potential in life so they can attain what they value. This is what human development is all about-universalism, leaving no one behind. Universal human development must enable people all people-regardless of their age, citizenship, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or any other identity-to expand their capabilities fully and put those capabilities to use. Those less endowed or lagging behind need support from others-from individuals, communities and states-to realise their full potential. In the ultimate analysis, development is of the people, by the people and for the people. People have to partner with each other. There needs to be a balance between people and the planet. And humanity has to strive for peace and prosperity. Human development requires recognising that every life is equally valuable and that human development for everyone must start with those farthest behind.

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