

Book Review

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Human Development Report 2014

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The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has been publishing a series of global human development reports since 1990, providing an independent analysis of global development issues, trends, and policies. The recently published 2014 report focuses on sustaining human progress through reducing vulnerabilities and building resilience.

Since 1990 when the first report was published there has been overall progress in human development indices, but natural or human-induced disasters and crises have undermined this progress. I liked the author's idea of starting the report with a quote from Dr Martin Luther King Jr. emphasising that human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable. The overview of the report starts with Charles Dickens's statement about 18th century London and Paris mentioning it was the best of times, the worst of times. In the intervening 250 years since Dickens, the world has become more complex. Vulnerability is the focus of the report and despite recent progress approximately 2.2 billion people worldwide are living in poverty. People are vulnerable due to various reasons ranging from demographic factors, social structure, natural disasters, and lifecycle changes.

Providing a certain degree of social security to the population in developing nations continues to be a challenge despite a certain amount of progress in many countries. A large percentage of the jobs are created in the informal economy where social security is weak and often absent. The report emphasises that to ensure social security governments may have to take an active role and mere dependence on free market policies may not be enough. Creating accountable and responsive institutions of governance is important.

The focus of the first chapter is on vulnerability and human development and begins appropriately with a statement from Pope Francis. In an increasingly globalised world, the global system has created jobs and economic prosperity in many regions, but disruptions in the system are also more likely to fuel crisis and vulnerability. Clear, spare, well-designed figures are a highlight of the book, and I liked the one summarising policies to reduce vulnerability and build resilience. Recently there has been a lot of debate about affirmative action and the chapter mentions that equal treatment for all may mean unequal treatment in favour of the disadvantaged.

The second chapter provides a snapshot of global human development. The pace of progress is uneven and has been slowing down. The lowest human development values are for Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. The graph showing the inequality adjusted gross national income per capita shows how inequality in a country can bring down the per capita income and reduce access to the fruits of economic development. The boxes and the special invited contributions by leading public figures in this chapter and in the report make for interesting reading.

Chapter 4 deals with building resilience and it was interesting to note that many countries with good indicators today had put in place social insurance policies when their per capita income was lower than that of South Asian countries today. Chapter 5 concentrates on deepening progress that has been achieved, and the graph showing the share of profits of different individuals/institutions in the global value chain was an eye opener. More than 50 per cent of profits from the sale of iPhones go directly to Apple, the phone's manufacturer. Developing nations get a lower percentage of the profits from the global economy in many cases.

The notes are interesting and the detailed list of references arranged alphabetically will be useful to those interested in obtaining more information. The statistical annex in the form of tables forms a large part of the report. The tables classify various countries in terms of

very high, high, medium, and low human development, shows gender inequality index and the gender development index in various countries, multidimensional poverty index, children and youth health, adult health and health expenditures, education, social competencies, personal insecurity, international integration, environment, population trends, and perceptions of well being. The report ends with human development index (HDI) rankings for different countries in 2013, and changes in the ranks, if any, compared to 2012.

This report, like all WHO and UNDP publications, has high production values and the tables, figures, and boxes enhance the report's readability. Quotations and colours have been used very creatively and effectively. This report is likely to appeal to readers interested in human development and the data presented and references provided for further reading would be of interest to researchers in the field.

About the book:

United Nations Development Program. Human Development Report 2014. ISBN 978-92-1-126368-8. The report can be downloaded for free from:

<http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr14-report-en-1.pdf>

PEER REVIEW

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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