

India's Human Development Journey

from analysis to action

The human development paradigm introduced in the early 1990s sought to shift focus from national income as the only indicator of development to expanding the choices people have. The aim, therefore, was to put people at the centre of the development process.

The concept of human development, pioneered by Mahbub ul Haq, and building on the work of Amartya Sen on the capabilities approach, was introduced by the United Nations Development Programme in 1990 in the first global Human Development Report (HDR). These reports which would become seminal publications also introduced the Human Development Index that measures a country's progress beyond gross national income to include social indicators such as health and education.

In India, this coincided with a period of economic reform and liberalization of the economy. Amidst rapid growth and rising inequalities, a need was felt to reinforce the idea that people matter, and India welcomed the concept of human development. This was reflected in the 8th National Five-Year Plan, formulated in 1992, which stated that "human development was the ultimate goal of all planning." The global release of the HDR in New Delhi in 1993 provided further impetus to the process, and in 1995, Madhya Pradesh, India's second largest state released the first ever sub-national HDR.

India has produced the highest number of HDRs in the world. Twenty-one Indian states have released HDRs and 80 districts are preparing district-level HDRs. Many of these reports have had considerable influence in their respective states' media and policy debates. They have contributed to building greater awareness of human development issues and the human development perspective among the population generally.

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The policy impact of the HDRs is evident as the Government of India and state governments have mainstreamed human development into planning, implementation and monitoring processes, including capacity development. Human development-oriented policymaking has been successfully supported through courses in public administrative training institutes nationally and at the state level. Several universities have introduced courses on human development. Numerous young research scholars have been introduced to the human development approach through orientation workshops. Private sector companies have also engaged with the human development approach to assess the human development impact of their business practices.

Popular thinking on development holds that government ownership and wide-scale participation are mutually exclusive. Yet, India, the world's largest democracy and home to one-third of the global poor, has shown that both can indeed co-exist. State government ownership and leadership of the HDR process is a firm reality and this ensures that states are accountable and sensitive to human development issues. At the same time, the voices of thousands have fed into this understanding of human development through stakeholder consultations, district and village-level reports and community mobilization.



UNDP-Planning Commission Partnership

Responding to the growing emphasis on social sectors and demand for tools that look beyond sectoral boundaries to focus on people, UNDP embarked on a partnership with the Planning Commission in 1999, initially to build state capacity for human development reporting and analysis, and later to help apply the human development approach in planning and policies. The partnership began with an initiative to develop the capacity of state planning bodies to prepare state HDRs and a series of discussion papers on relevant human development issues. As a natural progression, the partnership has also focused on the preparation of district HDRs to strengthen district plans from a human development perspective, capacity development of functionaries on human development challenges, gender sensitization in planning, advocacy on the findings of the state and district HDRs and strengthening statistical systems.

“Many Indian states and districts have human development reports which point to the fact that we have come a long way in defining agreed parameters against which people measure progress.”

(Montek Ahluwalia, Deputy Chairperson, Planning Commission speaking at the India launch of the book *UN Ideas That Changed the World*; New Delhi, India 2010.)

UNDP has helped share the India experience worldwide with a number of countries including Afghanistan, Indonesia and Mongolia. Support has focused on teacher trainings, capacity building for representatives of government and national planning boards, and evaluation of human development curriculum in universities.

Better analysis, better planning

The UNDP-Planning Commission partnership emphasized the need for a human development approach in planning with a focus on including those left behind by the engines of growth. This focus on inclusive growth and the social sectors is evident in the 10th and 11th Five-Year Plans. Unique about India's experience with human development has been the strong ownership amongst state governments which have tried to understand disparities through a human development lens and initiate relevant policies. Several states such as Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra have increased allocation to social sectors. Newer institu-

tional mechanisms have also been developed for holistic planning and monitoring elsewhere. In Karnataka, for example, the government has set up a human development division within the planning department. Several states have dedicated budgets to address human development deficits such as the Government of Maharashtra, which has established a Human Development Mission focusing on districts that rank low on human development indices.

The HDRs prepared by states and districts are widely credited with ensuring that crucial human development indicators on health, education and livelihoods are available for planning and action on the ground. These exercises have helped draw state attention to social and geographic disparities, environmental sustainability and decentralization. Several states have gone one step further and undertaken intensive studies on priority issues for policy action such as Sikkim which focused on the education system and West Bengal's study on the landless.

The 11th Five-Year Plan of the Government has recommended districts to prepare HDRs to provide crucial inputs to district planning

Building capacity in human development at all levels

Capacity development is crucial at all levels of governance to generate greater awareness of human development approaches

and the way it can be integrated into planning and applied to policy. UNDP has supported human development training programmes and curriculum development to facilitate this process. Fifteen state administrative training institutes deliver e-modules

on human development. Human development training has also been mainstreamed by the premier government administrative training institute, the Lal Bahadur Shastri

Thousands of elected representatives are trained on human development and gender by the government of Karnataka through satellite communication that help enable functionaries to develop an understanding of the complex dimensions of human development

National Academy of Administration. Human development has also found place in the curriculum of several universities. Innovation in training has also ensured that location does not act as a barrier to learning. The government of Karnataka, for example, uses satellite training to train thousands of elected representatives.

People's voices: Redefining participation

The process of preparing an HDR is as important as the report itself. Several states have adopted participatory processes that include the voices of a range of stakeholders in the report formulation process. PAHELI or the People's Audit of Health, Education and Livelihoods supported by UNDP is a unique tool that aims to provide a quick assessment of human development in a district. It focuses on four key sectors that matter — livelihood, water and sanitation, mother and child health, and education and literacy. Piloted in 11 backward districts in 2006, it will be a valuable human development monitoring tool to be used in over thirty of the poorest districts in the country as part of the joint UN Convergence programme.

Making women count

Human development is a process of enlarging choices for all people, not just one part of the society. The continued exclusion of women from greater economic and political opportunity remains a key challenge to realizing human development. Gender sensitization exercises including gender budgeting across states contributed to an improved understanding of gender and the importance of gender disaggregated data. Many states such as Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Nagaland and Orissa have invested in gender trainings. This, in turn, has resulted in gender sensitive budget allocations and planning. Several states such as Orissa have also established Gender Resource Centres to monitor and ensure gender issues are mainstreamed in planning. Assam and West Bengal have published compendiums on laws and schemes re-

lating specifically to women in local languages to increase awareness among Panchayati Raj institutions, i.e. local government bodies and other government officials.

Meaningful statistics for people-centered planning

As UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon has pointed out, "For development to succeed, we need data collection and statistical analysis of poverty levels, access to education and the incidence of disease." State HDRs are a vital step in this direction by highlighting gaps in statistical systems. Methodologies for estimating district incomes, poverty and other crucial statistics have helped pave the way for a better understanding of human development needs in the states.

Attention has been paid to capacity development of statisticians from state governments to strengthen reporting on state and district incomes. This has ensured greater availability of district income estimates for 23 states and Union Territories.

The Chhattisgarh State Human Development Report (2005) adopted a unique participatory process to develop its report. More than 17,000 village-level HDRs were collated into 16 district reports. The mammoth exercise involved more than 6,000 facilitators, focusing on capacity development and community mobilization.





The Road Ahead

As the Indian economy continues to grow rapidly, the challenge ahead is for the country to delve deeper into the human development shortcomings highlighted by reports and analyse the barriers that prevent national and state level policies from translating into effective delivery of services and rapidly improving social indicators. Efforts to address deprivation and exclusion, and sustain human development action will call for greater decentralized governance. District HDRs can be powerful tools in district planning and furthering more people-centered monitoring of the Millennium Development Goals and human development indicators. While eighty are already in the pipeline all 600 districts are mandated to produce HDRs. In a vibrant democracy such as India, human development cannot remain confined to action by central and state governments. A strong and vocal constituency that seeks to deepen the debate and advocate for human development outcomes such as a network of young research scholars, the media, civil society and government officials could go a long way in addressing inequality and accelerate human development progress.



For any queries, please email:
info.in@undp.org

Or contact:
United Nations Development Programme
55, Lodi Estate, P.O. Box 3059
New Delhi- 110 003, India
Tel: +91-11- 4653 2333
Fax: +91-11- 2462 7612
<http://www.undp.org.in>

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