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## **Exclusion and inequality lead to uneven development across Asia**

*New Delhi, 21 March 2017* – A quarter-century of impressive human development progress continues to leave many people behind, with systemic, often unmeasured, barriers to catching up. Exclusion of women, ethnic minorities, and people living in remote areas create chronic barriers that have stymied human development progress and led to significant disparities within the Asia and the Pacific region.

A stronger focus on those excluded groups, and on actions to dismantle these barriers is urgently needed to ensure sustainable human development for all.

These are among the key findings of the [Human Development Report 2016 entitled ‘Human Development for Everyone’](#), released today by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The report finds that although on average human development improved significantly across all regions from 1990 to 2015, worldwide 1.5 billion people live in multidimensional poverty – reflecting acute deprivation in health, education and standards of living.

*“The world has come a long way in rolling back extreme poverty, in improving access to education, health and sanitation, and in expanding possibilities for women and girls,”* said UNDP Administrator Helen Clark, speaking at the launch of the Report in Stockholm today alongside Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven and the report’s lead author and Director of the Human Development Report Office, Selim Jahan. *“But those gains are a prelude to the next, possibly tougher challenge, to ensure the benefits of global progress reach everyone,”* Helen Clark said.

“This report uncovers a deeper story behind the statistics,” said Haoliang Xu, Director of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific. “Even in a region that has made such remarkable progress, pockets of exclusion continue to prevent millions of people from fulfilling their true potential.”

Yuri Afanasiev, UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in India, noted India’s impressive progress in its Human Development Index score, which rose by nearly half between 1990 and 2015. He said: “The success of national development programmes like Skill India, Digital India, Make in India and Beti Bachao Beti Padhao aimed at bridging gaps in human development will be crucial in ensuring the success of Agenda 2030. These programmes, and the long-running affirmative action measures, illustrate the government’s commitment to identifying and mapping human development deficits, as well as taking action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.”

The report does make clear that progress in the Asia and Pacific region has not benefited everyone. Despite a steep drop in poverty between 1990 and 2013 – in South Asia, the proportion of people living on less than \$1.90 a day fell from 45 percent to 15 percent – some 54 percent of the world’s multidimensional poor live in South Asia, as measured by the Multidimensional Poverty Index.

South Asia also has the highest levels of malnutrition in the world at 38 percent (measured by the prevalence of severe or moderate stunting in children under five years), and the lowest public health expenditure globally as a share of GDP, at 1.6 percent (2014). Public health expenditure in India, for instance, is 1.4 percent of the GDP. Yet India made some progress on these indicators between 1990 and 2015, with life expectancy at birth rising by 10.4 years in that period. Child malnutrition has declined by almost 10 percentage points from the 2015 edition of the report, accompanied by modest gains in infant and under-five mortality rates.

The report shows that the disparities disproportionately impact certain groups. Women, ethnic minorities and people living in remote areas can suffer deprivations both overt and hidden.

“We place too much attention on national averages, which often mask enormous variations in people’s lives,” stated Selim Jahan. “In order to advance we need to examine more closely not just what has been achieved, but who has been excluded and why?”

### **Asia-Pacific has the largest gender gap of all developing regions.**

The report shows that gender-based inequalities linked to patriarchal social norms afflict women over their entire lives. Such disparities manifest in myriad ways: higher malnourishment, morbidity and mortality for women; starkly imbalanced sex ratios due to sex discrimination; lower labour force participation rates for women, but higher workloads and less rest; less access to financial decision-making; and the pervasive risk of violence against women.

Women consistently have, on average, a lower HDI value than do men across the world, but the largest difference is in South Asia, where the female HDI value is 20 percent lower than the male value. Indeed, according to the report, the Asia-Pacific region is the second most gender-unequal of all developing regions, after the Arab States region. In South Asia, gender gaps in women’s entrepreneurship and labour force participation account for an estimated income loss of 19 percent. Between their first and fifth birthdays girls in India and Pakistan have a 30 to 50 percent greater chance of dying than boys.

Again, India has taken some steps to close this gap. The report cites the Indian inheritance law reform, which improved the economic freedom of women, who were then able to double their spending on their daughters’ education thanks to increased savings.

On the HDI, India ranks 131 out of 188 countries with a value of 0.624, and third among the SAARC countries (behind Sri Lanka and Maldives). This puts the country in the medium human development category. Between 1990 and 2015, India’s HDI value increased from 0.428 to 0.624 (an increase of around 46 percent), and its GNI per capita increased by about 223.4 percent between 1990 and 2015. India’s improvement in its HDI value between 1990 and 2015 is second among BRICS countries, with China recording the highest improvement – 48 percent. The annual average growth in HDI (1990-2015) is higher than that of other medium HD countries. The HDI is a summary measure for assessing progress in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living.

Geographic remoteness and location also pose barriers for those who live there. The report notes that in 2005, India aimed to connect every community with more than 1,000 people (and every community with more than 500 people in hilly, tribal and desert areas) to an all-weather road. Four years later, 70 percent of the target communities were connected.

### **It is time to face up to deep-rooted barriers to development**

*“By eliminating deep, persistent, discriminatory social norms and laws, and addressing the unequal access to political participation which have hindered progress for so many, poverty can be eradicated and a peaceful, just, and sustainable development can be achieved for all”, Helen Clark said.*

Marginalized groups often have limited opportunities to influence the institutions and policies that determine their lives. Changing this is central to breaking the vicious circle of exclusion and deprivation.

To this end, the report calls for far greater attention to empowering the most marginalized in society and recognizes the importance of giving them a greater voice in decision-making processes.

It also calls for a more refined analysis to inform actions including making a shift toward assessing progress in such areas as participation and autonomy. Key data, disaggregated for characteristics such as place, gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity is vital to identifying who is being left behind.

The report stresses the importance of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to build on past development gains, noting that the agenda and human development approach are mutually reinforcing.

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*ABOUT THIS REPORT: The Human Development Report is an editorially independent publication of the United Nations Development Programme. For free downloads of the 2016 Human Development Report, plus additional reference materials on its indices, please visit: <http://hdr.undp.org>*

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*UNDP has worked in India since 1951 in almost all areas of human development, from democratic governance to poverty eradication, to sustainable energy and environmental management. UNDP's programmes are aligned with national priorities and are reviewed and adjusted annually.*

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