

## FAST FACTS

### Human Development Reports: Measuring Development and Influencing Policy

*“Through a skillful combination of unapologetic scholarship and editorial independence, Human Development Reports have made strong policy recommendations over the years, for both national and international action. They have had a significant impact by drawing attention to the political elements of social and economic development; advocating for an empowerment approach; and by offering analysis and policy ideas that reflect the real needs of women, children and the poor.”*

**Mark Malloch Brown**, UNDP’s Administrator

#### **Redefining Development and Poverty**

The first *Human Development Report* (HDR), commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1990, was created under the leadership of Pakistani economist and finance minister Mahbub ul Haq with strong intellectual support from Indian Nobel Laureate for Economics Amartya Sen. It came at a time when concern for balancing budgets and payments seemed a higher international priority than concern for people. The *Human Development Report* series, and subsequent national, sub-national and regional *Human Development Reports* in 135 countries, advocate a shift in the development debate away from a sole concern with economic growth (which is only a means—although a very important one—to serve human ends) toward a balanced concern for equity, sustainability, productivity and empowerment. The Report’s signature trademark, the human development index (HDI), serves as a successful alternative to GNP as a measure of development.

#### **Policy Impact of the Global Human Development Reports :**

Through timely, well-researched analysis, the *Human Development Report* series has provoked greater public dialogue on the many dimensions of human poverty and inequality, women’s rights and political freedom, and the repercussions of globalization. Armed with the HDRs, civil society groups and the media are now better equipped to hold national and international policy-makers accountable on key social indicators of poverty, health, education and opportunities for women.

The HDR is used by heads of state, policymakers, the media, civil society organizations and researchers in academia, and has inspired many policy initiatives, including:

- Brazil’s decision to use the HDI to allocate US\$6.5 billion to combat human poverty at the municipal level, benefiting 53 million people.

- Japan and South Korea's adoption of the HDR's Gender Empowerment Measure in the formulation of national legislation.
- Thailand's use of HDR analysis in the preparation of the country's technology policy.

Overall, the HDR has played a major role in the shift in global development policy debates toward a broader and people-centered approach.

### **National and Regional Human Development Reports:**

Supporting Global Change by Advocating for Local Development Priorities

The *National Human Development Reports* take the HDR approach to the national level and are prepared and owned by national teams. More than 474 national and sub-national HDRs have been produced so far by 135 countries, in addition to 24 regional reports. They have introduced the human development concept into national policy dialogue—not only through human development indicators and policy recommendations, but also through the country-led and country-owned process of consultation, research and report writing. Data that is often not published elsewhere—such as statistics disaggregated by geographic location, ethnic group or along rural/urban lines—help pinpoint development gaps, measure progress and flag early warning signs of possible conflict. As advocacy tools designed to appeal to a wide audience, the reports also spur lively public debates and mobilize support for action and change. They have helped to articulate people's perceptions and priorities, as well as serve as a resource of alternate policy opinion for development planning.

- As a result of the Roma in **Central and Eastern Europe 2002 Report**, substantial resources have been mobilized for long-term strategies to break the dependency trap and integrate the Roma minority into society in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. The Report's impact on influencing the work of other development agencies, as well as on national and regional public debates has been enormous, generating record-breaking media coverage, including over 200 mentions in the month following its launch.
- With the launch of the **Argentina Report 2002**, "18 Specific Proposals for Human Development" targeting inequality, poverty, competitiveness and democracy, have been debated. The need to address human development issues during severe political and economic crisis is now widely understood. Human development is a core topic on political, economic and social agendas, with plans to make the Report required reading in all schools.
- In India, the **West Bengal Sub-National Report 2004** has succeeded in identifying the effects of this state's land reform and decentralization policies on its population of 82 million. The Report lays out a comprehensive human development plan emphasizing employment generation and increased literacy, especially among females and other marginalized groups.
- The **Colombia Report 2003** provides documentation of 40 years of national conflict, its toll on human lives and the economy, and the harm it has caused to Colombia's international relations. By drawing on the experience of many groups, including religious leaders, labor unions, military and police commanders, teachers, and business leaders, the Report was able to outline practical proposals to dissuade youth from recruitment into violence, cut off funding sources for the conflict, increase public security, and create a stronger education system.
- The **Latvia Report 2002-2003** challenges the traditional focus on military and police security, looking instead at the broader concept of human security. By introducing the concept of "securitability" (the capacity to be and feel secure), the Report has succeeded in shifting national policy debates to spotlight the roles and responsibilities of the state, societal groups and even the individual to address polarizing issues of health and economic security.
- As a direct result of the **2002 and 2003 Arab Regional Reports**, efforts to address human rights and freedom, women's empowerment, and education are increasing in the Arab world. The Report's recommendations are being used by national and international policy-makers,

universities and other civil society organizations to launch such new initiatives as the Higher Education Quality Assurance Agency; Arab Science and Policy Research Center; the Arab Institution to Advance the Arabic Language; and a regional Research and Development Fund.

- Through an analysis of the root causes of poverty, the **Zambia Report 2003** offers hope and practical solutions to a country in which two-thirds are facing food insecurity. It has been widely circulated among policy-makers and civil society and is being used to shape new policy debates led by the President, Parliamentary committees, universities, and NGOs.
- In **Egypt** an annual series of sub-national human reports is supporting a comprehensive participatory development process in each of the country's 26 governorates. The Government's "Local Development Information Centers Project", adopted in 2002, now employs 30,000 workers gathering data on all human development issues at the local level.
- The **South Africa Report 2003** has reignited a debate on sustainable development issues, including poverty, unemployment, and lack of social services. Through a strong advocacy campaign targeting national and international policy-makers, scholars, and civil society, and wide media coverage, national focus is being redirected on human-centered policies.
- In **Kazakhstan, the 2003 Report** has attracted attention to one of the most basic and pressing human needs - water and the management of water resources. The Report's findings and participatory debates have resulted in a proposal for a "Law on Potable Water" and discussions with neighboring countries on trans-boundary water issues. Its recommendations are being considered now to develop a new national water tariff policy.

### **Advancing the Human Development Dialogue :**

To further expand the policy debate on human development, UNDP has supported several initiatives, including the creation of *Knowledge Networks* bringing together those involved in the HDR process into a virtual "community of practice." The HDR networks include a growing number of researchers and scholars, policymakers, statisticians, members of think tanks, the UN and other development experts. To join the HDR networks, please go to <http://hdr.undp.org/nhdr/networks/>.

The *Journal of Human Development* was launched in 2000 and now publishes original works on the concepts, measurement and practice of human development, providing a forum for the exchange of ideas on this "school of thought" in close association with the Human Development and Capability Association (HDCA). To read more about the Journal and the HDCA, please see: <http://www.hd-ca.org>

**For more information on UNDP Human Development Reports, please visit: <http://hdr.undp.org>**

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