

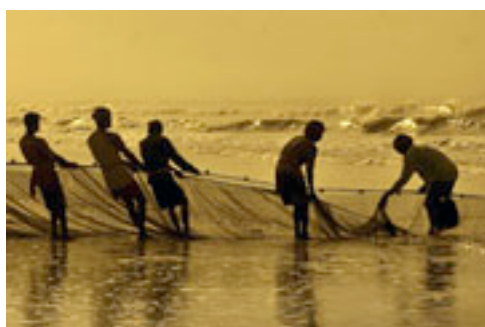


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Landmark UN report reveals global gains in development even in poorer nations



Fishermen from West Bengal and Orissa, India, work together to bring in the sea's harvest

4 November 2010 – The majority of developing countries have made dramatic but underestimated gains in health and education in recent decades, despite the fact that severe inequalities within and between countries remain, according to the United Nations flagship report on comprehensive human development, which was released today.

The Human Development Report, [released](#) annually by the UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)), assesses the state of human development on the basis of health, education and income indicators, as an alternative to purely macroeconomic assessments of national progress.

In this 20th edition, the report reviews trends over the past four decades and concludes that people today are generally healthier, wealthier and better educated than they were in 1970.

Human development is different from economic growth, and substantial achievements are possible even without fast growth.

These advances are not directly linked with national economic growth, showing that impressive long-term gains can and have been made even without consistent economic performance, according to the report.

“Our results confirm... two central contentions of the Human Development Report from the outset,” said the report’s lead author, Jeni Klugman. “Human development is different from economic growth, and substantial achievements are possible even without fast growth.”

Globally, life expectancy has risen from 59 years in 1970 to 70 in 2010, the report states. Primary and secondary school enrolment has risen from 55 per cent to 70 per cent in the same period. While all regions shared in this progress, there were wide variations in scope; for example, life expectancy rose by 18 years in the Arab world but 8 years in sub-Saharan Africa.

Among the top ten countries showing marked improvement are Oman, Nepal and Laos, while Ethiopia, Cambodia and Benin are in the top 20 – countries which the report notes are “not typically described as success stories,” according to Ms. Klugman.

The report also highlights serious inequalities, both within and between countries. Over the past 40 years, countries at the lower end of the Human Development Index experienced an improvement of less than 20 per cent, compared to the top-performing group, which averaged gains of 54 per cent.

“We see great advances, but changes over the past few decades have by no means been wholly positive,” the authors stressed. “Some countries have suffered serious setbacks, particularly in health, sometimes erasing in a few years the gains accumulated over several decades.”

“The gaps in human development across the world, while narrowing, remain huge.”

“The Human Development Reports have changed the way we see the world,” [said UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon](#), launching the report with UNDP Administrator Helen Clark and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen, who helped devise the HDI for the first Human Development Report in 1990.

“We have learned that while economic growth is very important, what ultimately matters is using national income to give all people a chance at a longer, healthier and more productive life,” he said.

Mr. Ban added that there was a “straight line from the Human Development Report to the Millennium Development Goals,” the eight poverty alleviation and social development targets which States and their partners have agreed to achieve by 2015. “The HDR was designed to measure results. The MDGs set specific targets for a better world,” he said. “Putting people first means tackling poverty, hunger and disease. That approach is embodied in the MDGs.”

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