

HDR Accords High Priority to Basic Social Services and Social Protection

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As per the recently released Human Development Report 2014, India's Human Development Index (HDI) has improved very marginally from 0.583 to 0.586. It remains slightly lower than the South Asian countries' average of 0.588.

Human Development Report (HDR), the annual assessment carried out by United Nations Development Programme reviews how countries have fared with regard to achieving human development outcomes and presents useful comparisons. The Report's composite indices and other statistical resources draw on a wide variety of data provided by the most reliable sources across countries. The ranking is based on the value of HDI, which reflects a country's overall achievement in its social and economic dimensions- long and healthy life, access to education and standard of living.

'Sustaining Human Development: Reducing Vulnerabilities and Building Resilience', the latest edition in the series published almost every year since 1990, provides a fresh perspective on vulnerability and proposes ways to strengthen resilience. It seeks to answer critical questions like what constitutes structurally vulnerable groups and how to reduce their vulnerability. It notes that though overall progress is continuing, the pace has slowed for all regions during 2013. Only a few countries have registered improvement in ranks in their HDI over this period.

Human Development in India

With HDI value of 0.586 out of a maximum possible 1, India has maintained its position at 135 out of 187 countries, like the year before, reflecting little improvement in the living standard of its people during 2013. It continues to trail in the Medium human development category. As in the previous years, the top category of "very high" human development was dominated by OECD countries.

Between 1980 and 2013, India's HDI value has increased from 0.369 to 0.586 on account of improvements registered in the life expectancy at birth by 11 years, increase in mean years of schooling by 2.5 years and an improvement in expected years of schooling by 5.3 years.

However, India's HDI value is below the average of 0.614 for countries in the Medium human development group. It even remained lower than the South Asian countries' average of 0.588. In South Asia, only Bangladesh and Pakistan remain below India, with HDI ranks of 142 and 146 respectively.

Ranking in BRICS

India lags far behind other members of BRICS - Brazil, Russia, China and South Africa, though none of these finds a place in the very high human development category. Russia stood at the top at 57, followed by Brazil and China at 79 and 91 respectively while South Africa secured 118th position. Among the BRICS nations, India's performance is at the bottom with respect to all categories of HDI, with the exception of life expectancy, which is lower in South Africa as a result of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Measures of Multi- Dimensional Poverty, Gender and Inequality

The HDR 2014 also includes estimates for a newer Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index (MPI), which identifies multiple deprivations in the same households in education, health and living standards. India's 55.3% of population are multi-dimensionally poor, while an additional 18.2% are near multi-dimensional poverty, the report said.

The newly introduced Gender Development Index (GDI), ranked India 132 out of 148 countries. India's HDI for men is higher at 0.627 as compared to HDI for Indian women alone which is 0.519. On the Gender Inequality Index (GII), which is based on reproductive health, empowerment and economic activity, India is ranked 127 out of 152 countries with a GI value of 0.563. This result is not at all surprising given that Indian women's representation in Parliament is just 10.9%, women participating in the labour market constitute 28.8% of workforce as against 80.9% men, and the proportion of girls entering secondary level education is 26.6% as against 50.4% for the boys.

Inequality also poses a considerable threat to human development, particularly because it reflects inequality of opportunity. Though inequality in health and education has been declining overall, but disparities in income have risen in several regions. India loses around 29% of its HDI value when Inequality is factored in.

Recommendations by the HDR

Making a number of important recommendations for addressing vulnerabilities and improving resilience to future shocks, the Report outlines that the principle of universalism should guide public policy. A people-centred policy framework needs to be aligned with macroeconomic and structural policies, labour market interventions and social protection. It further articulates that in most developing countries it is cost-effective to push for universal access to basic social services.

The report argues that failures to protect people against vulnerability are not just a consequence of inadequate policies, but also dysfunctional social institutions. Responsive and fair institutions play a significant role in building community-level resilience.

According to the HDR 2014, universal coverage of basic social services is not only imperative, it is also possible in countries at early stages of development. Putting the

principle of universalism into practice ensuring equal access to basic services requires dedicated attention and resources. The Report **urges governments to commit to the universal provision of basic social services and social protection to build resilience, especially for the poor and other vulnerable groups**. It argues that countries in Asia and the Pacific do not have to wait to become rich in order to provide adequate social protection or basic social services. Countries like Costa Rica, Ghana and South Korea as well as Scandinavian nations enacted social security legislation at lower levels of income per capita than India is at right now.

The report discusses that social protection floor policies reduce poverty. Citing International Labour Organization's 2010 Estimates, it states that a "basic social floor - universal basic old age and disability pensions, basic childcare benefits, universal access to essential health care, social assistance and a 100-day employment scheme" would cost India less than 4 per cent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

All successful experiences demonstrate that the state has the primary responsibility to extend social services to the entire population, in a basic social contract between people and their state. At a more policy-oriented level, looking at budgets is important, but how and when they are deployed is equally critical. Not only are more resources required to extend basic social services to all, but even modest investments at the right time can go a considerable way in reducing vulnerability. Along with budgetary resources, legal and other measures are needed to equalize access to services and opportunities.

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