

# Indicators of human development and human rights – overlaps, differences ... and what about the human development index?

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**Abstract.** The Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure of human development. This paper reviews the strengths and limitations of the HDI as a monitoring instrument of human development and of human rights in economic and social areas. It focuses on the following questions:

- The what and why – the purpose of the HDI as a summary measure of average national achievement in human development, focussing on survival, knowledge and decent standard of living.
- Beyond the HDI – beyond national average achievements to focussing on deprivation and inequality perspectives.
- Beyond the HDI – beyond the 3 HDI dimensions (survival, knowledge and decent standard of living) to other important dimensions of human development such as personal security, participation.
- HDI and human rights – human rights and human development are two sides of a coin but not the same thing.
- HDI and human rights – human rights measures focussing on accountability.
- Statistics and human rights.

The paper draws from the Human Development Report 2000, especially the following sections: Chapter 1, Chapter 5 and 'What do the Human Development Indices Reveal?'

The Human Development Report 2000 is available on line <http://www.undp.org/hdro/hdr2000.html>.

## 1. Introduction

Human development and human rights are in fact two sides of the same coin – there is no development without human rights. The Human Development Report 2000 points out that human rights and human development share the common objective of *advancing human freedoms, dignity and equality*. And these include the broad, comprehensive range of freedoms covering economic, social, political and civil areas. They include: freedom from discrimination, freedom from want, freedom to develop one's personal potential, freedom from fear of threats to personal security from torture, arbitrary arrest and other violent acts, freedom from injustice and violation of rule of law, and freedom of thought and speech and to participate in decision making, and freedom for decent work without exploitation.

My starting point is to ask whether economic and social rights are the same as economic and social development goals and whether the same indicators can monitor both. By contrasting the key concerns of human rights and human development, I argue that the two overlap but are different. The two schools of thought and strategies have different priority goals and human rights concepts bring new issues and

new priorities to monitoring progress. Second, I look at data needs and availability. Human rights concerns bring more complex dimensions in monitoring progress. Most of these are difficult to quantify and are likely to be location specific. In the third part, I take the opportunity to clarify the motivation and rationale behind the Human Development Index (HDI) and other indicators in Human Development Reports.

## **2. Are economic and social rights the same as economic and social development goals? – They overlap but are different**

Even if human rights and human development share common concerns and ends, it does not necessarily follow that they are identical in concept, identical in strategy and thus can be monitored using the same indicators. In fact, human rights and human development have quite different – though consistent and mutually reinforcing – conceptual frameworks. They involve quite distinct strategies and methods. And these require measurement of achievements and shortfall in quite distinct and different ways.

What is the difference between human rights and development goals?

- First, development goals are aspirations but human rights are claims that involve claims on others to help secure their rights.
- Second, claims should be enforceable – to be secured in law, with specific criteria, so that there is remedy in case of violations.
- Third, human rights are not just to be enjoyed but secured by social arrangements. Strategies for promoting human rights are concerned not only with achieving better human outcomes but also focus on making social arrangements, and monitoring focus on the behaviour of the ‘duty bearers’ – individuals, groups, communities and states – in fulfilling their duties and obligations. It is not enough that all children are in school if social arrangements do not secure the rights of children to schooling and if a crisis – economic or political – wipes out those entitlements.

## **3. Three concerns in monitoring human rights**

These basic conceptual differences between human rights and human development lead to quite distinct concerns that dominate the respective strategies that are followed. In the Human Rights framework, monitoring progress centre around three key concerns:

- Accountability – requiring identification of the major actors (duty bearers);
- Conduct (of duty bearers) as well as result;
- Progress in four dimensions: no discrimination, adequate progress, true participation, effective remedy.

### *a) Accountability of duty bearers*

Accountability of duty bearers is central to security and promoting human rights. This means identifying the principal actors defining precisely what their accountabilities are. Box 1 shows an illustration of the accountabilities of the right to education. This includes not only the state which must provide the facilities, but also parents who must be willing to send their children to school, and the community which must support the school, its teachers and the parents. Obligations also extend to others, such as the media which should report on the neglect or best practices in education as a priority social concern.

Accountability means assessing the fulfilment of obligation with clearly defined criteria of performance. This requires setting of benchmarks and standards.

Box 1 – PROBE survey monitors accountability of five actors in securing right to education in India

Realizing the right to primary education in India—are actors meeting their obligations?			
Actor	Obligation	Measure	Result
Parents	Must be willing to send children to school.	Proportion of parents who think it is important for children to be educated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 89% for girls, 98% for boys.</li> </ul>
Government	Must provide schools that are accessible.	Distance of school from house.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 92% of rural population had a primary school within 1 kilometre.</li> <li>• 49% of rural population had an upper-primary school within 1 kilometre.</li> </ul>
		Must provide adequate facilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 12% of primary schools had only one teacher appointed.</li> <li>• 21% had only a single teacher present at the time of the survey.</li> </ul>
	Number of teachers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 58% of schools had at least two rooms.</li> <li>• 60% had a leaking roof.</li> <li>• 89% did not have a functioning toilet.</li> <li>• 59% did not have drinking water.</li> </ul>	
		State of facilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 58% of schools had at least two rooms.</li> <li>• 60% had a leaking roof.</li> <li>• 89% did not have a functioning toilet.</li> <li>• 59% did not have drinking water.</li> </ul>
		Head teacher attendance and activity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On the day of the survey visit to the school:</li> <li>• 25% of head teachers were engaged in teaching activities.</li> <li>• 42% were engaged in non-teaching activities.</li> <li>• 33% were absent.</li> </ul>
Community	Must support school, teachers and parents.	Public discussions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 49% of village education committees had not met in the past year.</li> </ul>
Media	Must report on neglect of basic education.	Proportion of newspaper articles on basic education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In one year's newspaper articles:</li> <li>• 8,550 on foreign investment.</li> <li>• 3,430 on foreign trade.</li> <li>• 2,650 on defence.</li> <li>• 990 on education.</li> <li>• 60 on rural primary education.</li> </ul>

### b) Conduct as well as result

A second important human rights principle that is relevant here is that accountability is judged by both *result and conduct*. While monitoring of human development focuses on human outcomes and associated social and economic conditions, human rights monitoring is concerned not only with these outcomes or 'result' but also 'conduct' of the party accountable (the duty bearer).

Why is 'conduct' important in human rights? Because securing rights depends on making social arrangements – by law, but also by institutions, norms and values of society and an enabling economic environment. Box 1 provides an illustration of the type of conduct criteria and indicators that could be used to judge conduct.

### c) Progress in four dimensions

The third important human rights principle is progress. The principle of 'progressive realisation' recognizes that time is needed to make the necessary changes to secure rights, and for all individuals to enjoy them. This may even take considerable time; achieving universal enrolment in primary school in Haiti where it is 19.4% of the age group, or in Niger where it is 24.4% would require considerable effort in removing a number of obstacles. These obstacles may be rooted in a diverse array of institutional, financial, cultural, and economic factors. Result that reflects progress is as significant in this context as the level achieved.

While progress is normally emphasized in economic and social rights, such as education, there is no reason why this is not applicable to some aspects of civil and political rights. Full enjoyment of civil and political rights cannot realistically be achieved here and now at a stroke of pen that changes legislation

## Box 2 – Human development – concept and measurement

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Human development is a process of enlarging people's choices to lead lives they value, by expanding functionings and capabilities. There is a wide range of choices, functionings and capabilities that people may value. But at all levels of human development, there are some capabilities that are essential for all people and fundamental in that lack of these capabilities foreclose others. Such capabilities include being able to lead a long healthy life, to be knowledgeable and to enjoy a decent standard of living. These are captured in the HDI. But such basic capabilities go further, to participation in the life of a community and important decisions made, personal security, and sustainability.

Human Development Report 2000

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or policy. It requires behaviour changes that require entrenchment of cultural values, the building up of institutions, and the formulation of legislative frameworks, as well as an enabling economic environment.

How should progress be judged? Running through every right, four dimensions by which progress must be judged are relevant to every situation. These are:

- No discrimination – respecting and promoting the rights of each and every individual, removing discrimination and achieving greater equity. Achievements and shortfalls cannot only be measured by average national levels but need to be assessed from a distributional perspective. Disaggregated data and other measures of disparities are required.
- Adequate progress – committing resources and effort within the context of resources available and the obstacles in the way. Monitoring requires trend data.
- True participation – enabling all people to be involved in decisions that affect their well being. Participation is difficult to define and measure in a comprehensive way. Some indicators help reveal critical issues – such as indicators of representation of different groups in institutions of power such as the legislature or cabinet.
- Effective remedy – ensuring redress when rights are violated, through provisions in law and institutions of judiciary that effectively administers justice. This is also difficult to quantify.

#### 4. Four concerns in monitoring human development

In looking at the indicators for monitoring human development, the following questions arise: What are the key achievements and shortfalls that are the focus of attention? What are the priority concerns that dominate human development strategies? Human development is a process of 'enlarging peoples' choices'. It draws on the theoretical framework of capabilities and functioning of A.K. Sen in which people aim at leading a life they value through strengthening their ability and opening opportunities for them. Human development as a development strategy which can be captured in the phrase 'development for, of and by the people' (see Box 2: Human development – concept and measurement).

Four key principles in this conceptual framework of human development strategies help define what we need to measure:

- Focus on human outcomes (rather than on social or economic conditions);
- Multi-dimensional outcomes;
- Progress in three perspectives: national average, equity, and deprivation;
- Participation and empowerment.

##### *a) Human outcomes as the end of development (development for and of the people)*

The idea that human well being is the purpose of development is the centre-piece of the human development approach in the way that accountability is for the human rights approach to development.

Yet much policy debates and strategies focus on means, especially economic growth, neglecting the ultimate purpose or end of development. Human Development Reports were launched in 1990 with the express purpose to advocate priority attention to human development in policies and strategies. In his keynote speech at the memorial meeting for Mahbub ul Haq, Professor A.K. Sen provides a fascinating glimpse of intense debate between them as well as others that reveal these motivations.<sup>1</sup>

In defining human development as the expansion of choices that people have, its measurement focuses directly on human outcomes such as survival, ability to ready, health, etc.

*b) Human development is multidimensional*

The second principle is that human development is multidimensional and cannot be reduced to one dimension. People have many choices to make that make their lives meaningful and capabilities that allow them to make those choices. These choices and capabilities are not substitutable. People want to live long and healthy lives but also be educated and develop their intellectual and creative potential. These are all ends in themselves that have intrinsic value.

So which dimensions should be monitored? The choices people face and can make are infinite, yet some are particularly basic and valued by virtually all people of the world, at all levels of development and in all cultures. They include such choices as to live a long and healthy life, to be knowledgeable and develop one's creative potential, to enjoy a decent standard of living, to be a member of a community enjoying the respect of others and participating in decision making, to enjoy personal security. The HDI focuses on the first three choices because they are fundamental, universal and measurable.

*c) Progress in three perspectives: national average, equity, and deprivation*

The third principle is that progress needs to be monitored not only by national average achievements but also from an equity and deprivational perspective. Human development is concerned with the lives of all individuals. Therefore we need to know if some people are left out, and to implement policies that ensure equity and reduction of deprivations.

In all countries, disparities exist, often among regions, between rural and urban areas, between men and women, among ethnic groups or income groups. Public policies can improve or exacerbate these disparities. But too often, assessments of development progress are made on the basis of national averages.

*d) Participation and empowerment (development by the people)*

The fourth principle is that human development is not just for, and of, the people but also by the people. Ultimately, it is people's struggles that have driven human progress, through entrepreneurship in productive activities, through creative innovations in developing ideas and technologies, through social movements that demanded social justice. But participation is not just a means, it is also an end in itself. People value choices to be a full member of a community, to enjoy the respect of others, and have a voice in decision making

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<sup>1</sup>Sen, in the *Journal of Human Development*, vol 1, 2000.

Table 1  
Accountability for the right to education

Dimensions	Result (human outcomes)	Conduct (inputs, effort)
Key indicators	National average enrolment rate Proportion out of school	Policies on budgetary allocations, teacher-pupil ratios, etc.
Non-discrimination	Disaggregated data showing disparity by: ethnicity, gender, region, disability, income, etc	*Policies measures to remove specific institutional obstacles
Progressive realisation	Time trend from three perspectives: – Average – Deprivation – Disparity	Policy trend on budget allocations, teacher pupil ratios *Reforms to remove institutional obstacles
Participation	*Access to information and involvement e.g. frequency and attendance of PTA meetings	Policies to improve transparency of process and non-discrimination in access
Remedy	Remedy provided, e.g.: Number of cases brought on education Proportion resolved satisfactorily Average time taken to resolve cases	*Policy measures to secure right in law and enable effective judicial and non-judicial remedies

\*Note: many of these indicators are situated specific and may be difficult to quantify.

## 5. Contrasting measurement approaches and indicators for monitoring human rights and human development

The three distinct and important principles of human rights overlap with the four principles of human development, but they introduce new priorities as well as new elements and enrich development strategies.

- Human development monitoring focuses on human outcomes (result) while human rights gives particular emphasis on the fulfilment of obligations (conduct).
- Human development and human rights are both concerned with progress in national average, but also in reducing disparities and deprivations.
- Human rights emphasize concerns with the effectiveness of state policies, and the obligation of other actors, with eliminating discrimination and achieving equitable development, with participation and progress rather than absolute level.
- Issues such as participation and non-discrimination are important concerns but measurement in this area has not progressed.
- Human rights bring new concepts such as effective remedy and accountability which enrich development debates considerably.

These new emphases in development strategies require new ways of defining achievements and shortfalls, and new data to measure them. Table 1 provides an illustration of the type of indicator that would be required in the case of right to education. The table is not intended to provide a comprehensive list of indicators but to illustrate the kind of indicator that might be used to measure achievements and shortfalls by result and conduct along the four dimensions of non-discrimination, adequate progress, true participation and remedy.

Information and data essential to human rights monitoring include:

### *Identifying actors*

To assess achievement and shortfalls in terms of accountability means that the actor – the duty bearer – must be identified. While not necessarily the only duty bearer, the state has a central responsibility in the promotion and protection of human rights. The responsibility of other actors and their accountability should not be neglected. With the right to education, parents and communities have responsibilities.

Table 2  
Contrasting data requirements and availability

Dimensions	Result (human outcomes)	Conduct (inputs, effort)
Key indicators	Conventional socio-economic indicators (national average)	Non-quantifiable Location specific Search for proxy indicators
Non-discrimination	Use conventional socio-economic indicators (from disparity perspective) Data less readily available Important focus of analysis HDRs but not in all socio-economic analyses	Non-quantifiable Location specific Search for proxy indicators
Progressive realisation	Use conventional socio-economic indicators in time trend from three perspectives: – Average – Deprivation – Disparity Data less readily available Conventional analysis often stops at average perspective	Non-quantifiable Location specific Search for proxy indicators
Participation	Non-quantifiable Location specific Search for proxy indicator	Non-quantifiable Location specific Search for proxy indicator

#### *'Conduct' in fulfilling obligations*

Accountability of conduct is specific to the actor and context. In the case of states, it is the effective implementation of policies to promote respect for human rights.

#### *Disaggregated data on human outcomes to assess 'result' from a distributional perspective*

Human rights analysis requires more disaggregated data to make possible analysis of progress from deprivational and distributional perspectives. Average progress is inadequate for monitoring human rights progress. Since goals and achievements focus on removing discrimination means data must be disaggregated to reveal the disparities between human development achievements of disadvantaged groups.

#### *Time trends in data on human outcomes to assess progress*

Because progress is central to the notion of accountability in human rights, trend data are indispensable.

#### *Context specific indicators*

The concern with progress and conduct in human rights emphasize the need for defining indicators of achievement and shortfall that are specific to the context of the country or groups concerned. Removing discrimination in access to education varies from one country to another, and from one historical context to another. If we reject the notion of 'one size fits all' policy prescription for human progress, then we must also accept the notion that 'conduct' cannot be evaluated on a single set of criteria for all countries.

#### *Indicators of participation and remedy*

These are processes that are not quantifiable. Some indicators may give some empirical basis for evaluating an aspect of them. This is a major area of challenge for improving indicators to monitor progress in human rights and human development.

Table 2 illustrates the contrasts in data requirements. It shows that monitoring human rights with data is particularly difficult because key issues such as participation, conduct and remedy are not quantifiable, and because data are not readily available that show distribution of achievements and deprivations.

Box 3

Perspective		Dimensions
Average HD achievement	HDI	Longevity Knowledge Decent standard of living
Deprivational perspective	HPI	Longevity Knowledge Decent standard of living
Disparity adjusted: Average HD adjusted for gender inequality	GDI	Longevity Knowledge Decent standard of living
Disparity in participation: Inequality in political, professional and income earning activities	GEM	Political participation Professional decision making Income earning power

## 6. Indicators in human development reports

An important part of the Human Development Reports has been the use of indicators to monitor human development. The Human Development Index (HDI) is well known and has attracted a great deal of public attention in the media and among politicians. But this is part of a much broader effort to promote debate on human development issues, and one that would be informed by quantitative evidence.

Although the HDR is best known for the HDI the report has consistently attempted to introduce innovative measurement approaches. Examples from past reports include the extensive use of data on unpaid work in the analysis of gender inequalities in the 1995 report. The cover design of the report shows a neglected issue: inequalities in the share of burdens and rewards of unpaid and paid work. The 1998 report on consumption showed inequalities in the levels of consumption beef, energy, cars and other important items that contribute to unsustainably high levels of global consumption. These inequalities in consumption are also highlighted in the cover design of the report to draw policy attention to the neglected element in the debates on sustainable consumption which look at the growth of total consumption and the environmental pressures that it generates without going further to look at the distribution of total consumption.

In addition to the HDI, the HDRs have developed other summary measures of human development and deprivation: the Human Poverty Index (HPI) which is a summary measure of HDI from the deprivational perspective – a non-income, multi-dimensional measure that is a departure from the widely used measure of poverty based on income. The Gender-related development Index (GDI) is HDI adjusted for gender disparity, penalizing achievement in human development that is marked by gender inequality. The Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) is a measure of women's participation and empowerment in society – in key areas of national political decision making, in professional activities, and in income earning activities (see Box 3).

Despite the wide range of data and measures used and disseminated in the HDRs, it is the HDI that has generated a great deal of public attention and policy impact. HDI and the ranking of countries continues to stimulate debate and action on more effective policies to promote human well being – from education, health, equity, gender equality and so on.

These measures provide an empirical and quantifiable basis for policy making. In Brazil the HDI level provides an objective basis for selecting target provinces and municipalities for a \$6 billion anti-poverty programme. This is just one of many other examples.

## 7. HDI – controversies and clarifications

The HDI has also generated a great deal of debates and controversies over its methodology. We study these critiques seriously in the Human Development Report Office (HDRO). Many propose improvements to the HDI, with adding dimensions not captured. Others point out the weaknesses of the data used, question some assumptions made, and most often point out aspects of human well being that are missed.

Many of these debates have stimulated review of the structure and methodology of the HDI and as a consequence, the HDI has evolved over the last 11 years. HDRO has also prepared some reviews of the critiques and will do so in the future on specific points.

However, many of these critiques also reflect expectations about HDI that go beyond its intended basic purpose, i.e. they reflect the type of mismatch between the purposes of HDI as it was conceptualised and what readers expect from it.

The purpose of HDI is to provide a *summary measure, not a comprehensive measure*, of human development. It measures *average achievement* and does not reflect disparities and deprivation.

A summary measure is needed to supplement GDP per capita without which ‘busy’ policy makers would continue to ignore the human aspects of development progress. ‘*A measure that is not as blind to social aspects of human lives as the GNP is*’. (Mahbub ul Haq). *An instrument of communication that monitors development by level of human well being rather than material production* (Sen).

The concept of human development is much larger than the HDI. The HDI does not capture the whole concept. For one thing, the indicators used such as life expectancy, do not capture all of the capability to ‘live a long and healthy life’. More importantly, the HDI captures only three of the several important dimensions, excluding important choices and capabilities such as participating in the life of a community, enjoying personal security.

A summary measure that is not comprehensive needs to be used together with more detailed indicators in the analysis of HD in any country, region or the world. ‘*HDI is the door to entering the house of human development accounting.*’ (Selim Jahan); ‘*HDI is the first page – turn the pages for a fuller picture.*’ (Kate Raworth).

A full reading of the annual HDRs will also show that the analysis of trends in human development draws on a very rich array of indicators. Whereas HDI focuses on outcomes, the analysis looks at socio-economic conditions that determine these outcomes. So in the area of survival, we look not only at life expectancy but infant and child mortality, nutrition, health status, and expenditure priorities. We also draw on specific data for which sharper policy attention is needed – the impact of HIV/AIDS is an example. We also draw on data available for only a few countries of the world – such as maternal mortality and the access people have to health facilities.

Though disparities are a major concern in human development analysis, HDI is a measure of national average and does not integrate inequality. But the HDI can be disaggregated for different population groups to document disparities in achievements. National Human Development Reports have taken such analysis very far – disaggregating HDI by region, or by ethnic groups, by racial groups.

The HDI and composite indices are innovations in measurement of human development that is still a new field. It was introduced with the full appreciation of the audacity involved in the attempt to produce a summary index for a complex phenomenon such as human development. Its impact and increasing acceptance over the last decade has shown that the attempt was worthwhile and the index continues to be of interest. Over these years, the data quality and coverage has improved with fewer gaps. There are challenges ahead, especially to improve data quality and availability, and to make the measure more complete by capturing additional important dimensions. HDI and associated indices are by no means the final word on measuring human development.

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She has been the chief author with Richard Jolly of the Human Development Report 2000 on Human Rights, of the 1999 report on Globalisation with a Human Face, the 1998 report on Consumption, the 1997 report on the Eradication of Poverty and the 1996 report on Economic Growth. She also worked on the 1995 report on Gender with Mahbub ul Haq.

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