

Basic parameters of Human Development

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Teaching of Economics

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Meaning of Human Development:

The term 'Human Development' may be defined as an expansion of human capabilities, a widening of choices, an enhancement of freedom, and a fulfillment of human rights.

At the beginning, the notion of human development incorporates the need for income expansion. However, income growth should consider expansion of human capabilities. Hence development cannot be equated solely to income expansion. Income is not the sum-total of human life. As income growth is essential, so are health, education, physical environment, and freedom. Human development should embrace human rights, socio-economic-political freedoms. Based on the notion of human development, Human Development Index (HDI) is constructed. It serves as a more humane measure of development than a strictly income-based benchmark of per capita GNP.

The first UNDP Human Development Report published in 1990 stated that: "The basic objective of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives." It also defined human development as "a process of enlarging people's choices", and "strengthen human capabilities" in a way which enables them to lead longer, healthier and fuller lives.

From this broad definition of human development, one gets an idea of three critical issues involved in human development interpretation. These are: to lead a long and healthy life, to be educated, and to enjoy a decent standard of living. Barring these three crucial parameters of human development as a process enlarging people's choices, there are additional choices that include political freedoms; other guaranteed human rights, and various ingredients of self-respect. One may conclude unhesitatingly that the absence of these essential choices debar or blocks many other opportunities that people should have in widening their choices. Human development is thus a process of widening people's choices as well as raising the level of well-

being achieved. What emerges from- the above discussion is that economic growth measured in terms of per capita GNP focuses only on one choice that is income. On the other hand, the notion of human development embraces the widening of all human choices—whether economic, social, cultural or political. One may, however, contest GDP/GNP as a useful measure of development since income growth enables persons in expanding their range of choices.

This argument is, however, faulty. Most importantly, human choices go far beyond income expansion. There are so many choices that are not dependent on income. Thus, human development covers all aspects of development. Hence it is a holistic concept.

Parameter of Human Development:

The noted Pakistani economist Mahbub ul Haq considered four essential pillars of human development.

These are followings:

- i. Equality,
- ii. Sustainability,
- iii. Productivity, and
- iv. Empowerment.

Equality:

If development is viewed in terms of enhancing people's basic capabilities, people must enjoy equitable access to opportunities. Such may be called equality-related capabilities. To ensure equality-related capabilities or access to opportunities what is essential is that the societal institutional structure needs to be more favourable or progressive.

In other words, the unfavourable initial asset distribution, like land, can be made more farmer-friendly through land reform and other redistributive measures. In addition, uneven income distribution may be addressed through various tax-expenditure policies. Economic or legislative- measures that interferes with market exchange may enable people to enlarge their capabilities and, hence, well-being.

Further, to ensure basic equality, political opportunities need to be more equal. In the absence of effective political organisation, disadvantaged groups are exploited by the 'rich' to further their own interests rather than social goals. However, participatory politics gets a beating by the inequality in opportunities in having basic education. It is to be added here that basic education serves as a catalyst of social change. Once the access to such opportunity is opened up in an equitable way, women or religious minorities or ethnic minorities would be able to remove socioeconomic obstacles of development. This then surely brings about a change in power relations and makes society more equitable.

Sustainability:

Another important facet of human development is that development should 'keep going', should 'last long'. The concept of sustainable development focuses on the need to maintain the long term protective capacity of the biosphere. This then suggests that growth cannot go on indefinitely; there are, of course, 'limits to growth.'

Here we assume that environment is an essential factor of production. In 1987, the Bruntland Commission Report (named after the then Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland of Norway) defined sustainable development as '... development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their basic needs.' This means that the term sustainability focuses on the desired balance between future economic growth and environmental quality. To attain the goal of sustainable development, what is of great importance is the attainment of the goal of both intra- generation and inter-generation equality.

This kind of inequality includes the term 'social well-being' not only for the present generation but also for the people who will be on the earth in the future. Any kind of environmental decline is tantamount to violation of distributive justice of the disadvantaged peoples. Social well-being thus, then, depends on environmental equality.

Productivity:

Another component of human development is productivity which requires investment in people. This is commonly called investment in human capital. Investment in human capital in addition to physical capital can add more productivity.

The improvement in the quality of human resources raises the productivity of existing resources. Theodore W. Schultz—the Nobel Prize-winning economist—articulated its importance: “The decisive factors of production in improving the welfare of poor people are not space, energy, and crop land; the decisive factor is the improvement in population quality.” Empirical evidence from many East Asian countries corroborates this view.

Empowerment:

The empowerment of people—particularly women—is another component of human development. In other words, genuine human development requires empowerment in all aspects of life. Empowerment implies a political democracy in which people themselves make the decisions about their lives. Under it, people enjoy greater political and civil liberties and remain free from excessive controls and regulations. Empowerment refers to decentralisation of power so that the benefits of governance are reaped by all peoples.

It focuses on grassroots participation which promotes democracy by enfranchising the disadvantaged groups. Unfortunately, benefits are cornered by the elites because of lack of empowerment of people. Participation as a goal is a feature of ‘bottom-up’ development strategy rather than ‘top-down’. Further, development policies and strategies are male-dominated. But the benefits of development are to be made ‘gender-sensitive’.

Discrimination against women in health and education is very costly from the viewpoint of achieving development goals. Education of women can lead to a virtuous circle of lower fertility, better care of children, more educational opportunity, and higher productivity. Above all, as women’s education rises, women’s independence in making their own choices also increases.

Anyway, decentralization and participation empower people, especially the women and the poor. It then breaks the 'deprivation trap'. Mahbub ul Haq asserts: "If people can exercise their choices in the political, social and economic spheres, there is a good prospect that growth will be strong, democratic, participatory and durable in nature."

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