

HDR-2014: Poor Human Development Belies Hopes

The slowdown in human development across the regions worldwide, as reported in the Human Development Report- 2014 released by the United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) on July 24 is quite worrisome. India's rank in the Human Development Report (HDR) 2014 continues to be far behind in 2014 as well, at 135 out of 187 countries. Even the smaller SAARC countries like Sri Lanka at 73 and Maldives at 103 have pipped India in the ranking which is strange enough. India has the lowest place in the Human Development Index (HDI) among the BRICS nations as well, with its life expectancy only higher than South Africa alone, which is grappling with second generation HIV-AIDS patients. Otherwise, all other BRICS nations viz. the Russia, Brazil and China are in the high HDI category with rankings at 57, 79 and 91 respectively.

In the global perspective as well, it is quite worrisome that a slowdown in Human Development growth has been reported across all regions, worldwide as shown by the Human Development Index (HDI). Central African Republic (CAR), Libya and Syria recorded the steepest decline in HDI values in the year 2012. Latin American and the Caribbean nations had the largest drop in overall inequality but, still face extensive income inequality. In South Asia, over 71% of the population is poor or near-poor, making it the largest multi-dimensionally poor population. According to the report almost 105 billion people are multi-dimensionally poor, across the world with deprivations in education, health and living standards, while another 800 million are at risk of falling back into poverty. The top five countries ranked in terms of the human development in the report are Norway, Australia, Switzerland, Netherlands and the US. The bottom five in this ranking are Niger, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Chad and Sierra Leone. The HDR notes that over 200 million people across the world are affected by natural disasters and 45 million, the largest number in 18 years, were displaced by conflicts at the end of 2012. All of these factors have contributed to decelerate the improvement in human development.

On coming back to India, the report ranks India among the 'medium development' countries like Egypt, South Africa, Mongolia, Philippines and Indonesia. Among the India's neighbors, Bhutan and Bangladesh too figure in this category only Pakistan ranked 146 and Nepal at 145 are in the 'low development' category, while Sri Lanka ranked at 73 is in the 'high development' category. In case of India, though there is significant acceleration on its road the millennium development goals; the deadline for which expires next year. But, the "Gender Inequality Index", introduced for the first time this year, again exposes India's weaknesses. However India's HDI for males was 0.627 — the highest in South Asia but, its HDI for females was just 0.519; higher only than the Pakistan — which has pulled down its overall score. Inequalities has also been widening and India has fared worse in redressing the inequalities — the social as well as economic disparities are rampant. On discounting for the inequality, India's HDI falls to 0.418; with a significant loss of 28.6 per cent. Though the average loss for inequality for medium HDI countries is only up to 25.6 per cent. For South Asia, the average loss is 28.7 per cent. India has fallen in line with them. Among the BRICS countries Brazil comes second in terms of inequality losses with its HDI reduced by 26.3 per cent. Among 145 countries, India ranks 98 on inequality adjusted HDI, against 95 for Brazil and 45 for Russia.

In spite of a significantly higher gross national income of the country as whole than other countries in the region like Bangladesh (142) and Pakistan (146), India's ranking remained low because of poor social indicators. India has the lowest life expectancy (66.4 years) and the lowest mean years of schooling (4.4 years) in the region which is most worrisome. India's human development index (HDI) as, a measure of health, education and standard of living, could grow marginally by less than half a per cent between 2012 and 2013, which is quite disappointing. Though, this slow growth is similar to most other countries, yet, it is much below the India's growth in the past. In last 3 decades, i.e. between 1980 and 2013, India's HDI has increased by nearly 59% with a yearly growth of about 1.4%. But since 2010, India's growth in human development measures has slowed down considerably.

The life expectancy in India has though improved from 58.5 years in 1990 to 66.4 years in 2013, yet, even the Pakistan and Bangladesh have slightly better life expectancy. Among the BRICS countries, only South Africa has a lower expectancy of 56.9 years, primarily due to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Otherwise all the BRICS countries have a better record and the China's life expectancy is 75.3 years. The average for the whole world is 70.8 years, while among the developed countries with very high human development levels; it is 80.2 years. On the per capita income measure, India has badly failed. The annual income per person (measured in purchasing power parity terms) for India is \$5,150, slightly more than its neighbors, but it is the lowest among the BRICS countries, and less than half the global average of \$13,723. The developed countries' average is way ahead at \$40,046. From the point of view of the educational indicators as well India performs no better than the medium human development countries with 11.7 expected years of schooling. The world average is 12.2 years, while the developed countries' average is 16.3 years. Among the BRICS countries, India's average is the least. Currently, Indians of 25 years or more have received just 4.4 years of schooling on average, compared to a global an average of 7.7 years.

India being the second most populous country and the largest democracy of the world with highest youth population, needs to enhance its human development endeavors. This needs investment in human capital and human centric focus in all economic activities.

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