

## Social Development is the promotion of a sustainable society that is worthy of human dignity: An Emerging Issues and Policy Perspectives

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### Abstract

The concept of human development emerged in the late 1980s based on the conceptual foundation provided by Dr. Amartya Sen and Dr. Mahbubul Haq. The HD approach puts people at the centre of the development agenda, where economic growth and wealth are considered means to development, not an end by itself. Put simply, the starting point for the human development approach is the idea that the purpose of development is to improve human lives by not only enhancing income but also expanding the range of things that a person can be and can do, such as be healthy and well nourished, be knowledgeable, and to participate in community life. Seen from this viewpoint, development is about removing the obstacles to what a person can do in life, obstacles such as lack of income, illiteracy, ill health, lack of access to resources, or lack of civil and political freedoms. As expressed by Sen: "...the twin recognition that human beings can 1) fare far better, and 2) do much more to bring this about may sensibly be seen as the two central thesis of the human development approach."

The first Human Development Report defines human development as a process of enlarging people's choices. To lead a long and healthy life, to be educated and to enjoy a decent standard of living are the three most critical choices identified in the first HDR. Additional

choices include political freedom, guaranteed human rights and self respect. The philosophical underpinnings of the HD approach are not new. In ancient Greece, Aristotle said: "Wealth is evidently not the good we are seeking, for it is merely useful for the sake of something else." However, During the Post Second World War era, the development agenda, however, centered on growth rather than human wellbeing. The focus was on accumulation of physical capital through savings and investments for promoting industrial development and growth in the war torn economies.

Rapid economic growth in the last two decades has lifted many out of poverty, but has been accompanied by depletion of natural resources and weakening in environmental quality. The two decades have also seen an increased concern with climate change and its potential to magnify existing stresses. The last decade has in addition seen the outbreak of new and re-emerging diseases. Identifying and addressing the existing and emerging challenges that are likely to affect most significantly India's prospects for sustainable development is important to increase resilience at the national level.

**Keywords:** Human Development evolution, HDI, Challenges of HD, Policies of HD.

## INTRODUCTION

“Human development is a process of enlarging peoples’ choices... The most critical choices that people should have, include a long and healthy life, access to knowledge and income, assets and employment for a decent standard of living... (But) human development concerns more than the formation of human capabilities such as improved health or knowledge. It also concerns the use of these capabilities - India Human Development Report , 1999

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In essence, social policy or rather, the complex web of related policies, schemes and institutions that are concerned with the social conditions of economic activity reflects the broad social contract between capital and labour. In developing economies this refers to the social contract between capital and labour specifically for the management of the development project. The latter in turn has been defined for much of the past half century, as the project of increasing material welfare for most of the citizenry through economic development, using the agency of the nation

state. For many developing countries, including India, this project remains partially or largely unfulfilled. Although this state of incompleteness still has not prevented it from being very nearly abandoned in several instances.

It is increasingly evident that social policy has a significance that goes beyond even the valid concerns about basic equity and minimal living standards, which form part of the social and economic rights of citizens. In fact, it can play a major role in the capitalist development project, at several levels. At the most basic level, social policies of different types are crucial to the state's capacity to manage modernization, and along with it the huge economic and social shocks that are necessarily generated. Thus, for example, social policies of affirmative action in parts of Southeast Asia (as in Malaysia) have been essential to maintaining ethnic harmony over periods when existing income inequalities and social imbalances across groups within the aggregate population would be otherwise accentuated by economic growth patterns. Similarly, when overenthusiastic and possibly insensitive developmental projects overturn existing local communities or destroy material cultures without satisfactory replacement, social policy can become the basic instrument for rehabilitation and renewed social integration. The massive human shifts (geographic, economic, social) that most development projects entail are potentially sources of much conflict, and often social policy is the most effective means of containing such conflict or at least keeping it within levels that do not destabilise society or derail the development project itself.

The second important, and related, role of social policy is of course that of legitimisation not only of the state, but of the development

project itself. This need for legitimisation arises both for the long run process and in terms of short run crisis management. Thus, over the long run, or planning horizon, it is especially important in growth trajectories that rely on high investment and savings rates, thereby suppressing current consumption in favour of high growth for larger future consumption, and which therefore imply sacrifices typically made by workers and peasants. In such a scenario, social policy that is directed towards providing basic needs and social services to those who are otherwise deprived of the gains from economic growth in terms of increased current consumption would be not just important but even necessary to ensuring social stability and continuity of the process itself.

"Social Development is equality of social opportunities" - Amartya Sen, 1995

In so far as the growth process also generates or entails cyclical volatility in growth or incomes, or has a tendency towards periodic crises of whatever sort, social policy can also serve as a cushion for dampening the worst social effects of crisis, which in turn can contribute to the feasibility and sustainability of the entire process. For example, sudden and severe economic contractions causing sharp peaks of unemployment may be socially easier to tolerate if some forms of unemployment compensation or benefit are provided. Even when the shocks stem from natural rather than economic causes (such as earthquakes or cyclones) social policies in the form of say, public insurance schemes or micro credit schemes can cushion the worst effect of such shocks, in addition to direct relief. Such strategies have macroeconomic consequences as well: thus, it is now accepted that economies with a large public sector presence (in terms of share of GDP or employment) have more



mutated business cycles or tend to suffer fewer extreme recessions.

The fourth crucial role of social policy is in terms of affecting the conditions of labour such that there is an increase in the aggregate social productivity of labour, rather than simply increases in labour productivity in particular sectors which reflect different technological choices. It is now widely recognised that the universal provision of good education and basic health services is an important condition for raising aggregate labour productivity levels. But even other aspects of social policy, such as working conditions, access to other public services, etc., play important roles in this regard. It is even being accepted that the latter can in turn influence technological choices themselves, and nudge growth trajectories towards high road paths rather than low road strategies which are chiefly dependent upon cheap labour.

In capitalist economies which are quite closely integrated with international markets or rely on export markets as an engine of growth, social policy has played a very important but largely unsung role in terms of underwriting a significant part of labour costs for private capital and therefore providing employers greater flexibility and contributing to their external competitive strength. For example (but not exclusively) in some countries of East Asia, the publicly assisted provision of cheap food to the urban population, along with basic housing, cheap and adequate public transport, basic public health and education services, and so on, effectively meant that substantial portions of the wage basket were at least partly provided by the state. This in turn meant that wages paid by private employers could be correspondingly lower, since basic needs were already to a significant extent taken care of, and this gave

such employers a major competitive edge in export markets.

In addition to being an integral part of the economic growth process, social policy also evolves with this process, and changes depending upon how the development process impacts upon different classes and groups. In other words, both the economic policy and the social policy patterns, even when they appear to be unchanging in a statutory sense, are actually quite dynamic and intertwined with the political economy configurations, which also constantly evolve. <sup>1</sup> In case this sounds excessively complicated, consider this example: Certain types of industrialisation strategy generate particular types of employment, for example a small-scale engineering industry may grow based on supply and demand linkages emanating from a large publicly funded railway expansion programme. Such increases in employment in turn generate demands for certain types of social policy such as provision of housing, health and education facilities for workers, families, and so on. This in turn can create not just greater political voice for such groups but also more productive workforces which in turn encourage the demand for certain types of technological change in products and processes, which in turn leads to pressure for certain types of public investment which could incorporate such technological innovation.

In contrast to such a positive dynamic process, consider a different pattern of industrialisation in which relatively few new jobs are generated, but the profits from such economic activity are quite high. The shift in income distribution will not only shift demand in favour of certain types of non-mass consumption goods, but also increase the political and lobbying power of capital in various ways. This in turn can

influence state policy to encourage fiscal patterns (whether in the form of taxation, direct spending, or subsidies), which further accentuate the income and employment inequalities, and so on. Or they can involve the expansion of certain types of employment, effectively creating or enlarging certain classes such as the urban middle classes, which then can become important in terms of political voice and the ability to influence economic policy decisions as well as to demand certain social policy measures which largely benefit these groups only.

It thus emerges that while social policy is both a desirable and a necessary concomitant of the development process; its existence and form in each social context cannot be taken for granted, but rather depends upon political economy configurations which influence both its extent and its evolution. This is clearly evident from the Indian experience, which shows both the clear need for effective social policy and the relative inadequacy of what has been provided by the state in terms of meeting the basic objectives of the nationalist developmental project. It is argued in this paper that the relative inadequacy of social policy in India over the post-independence period is one important reason why the development project itself has remained incomplete and unsatisfactory in terms of fulfilling the basic requirements of the majority of citizens.

“Social Development is the promotion of a sustainable society that is worthy of human dignity by empowering marginalised groups, women and men, to undertake their own development, to improve their social and economic position and to acquire their rightful place in society.....- Bilance, 1997

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## **The Copenhagen Social Summit 1995 defined Social Development in terms of three basic criteria:**

- Poverty Eradication
- Employment Generation
- Social Harmony

The Human Development Reports of United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) have developed indices such as the Human Development Index (HDI), the Human Poverty Index (HPI) & the Gender-related Development Index (GDI).

## **The Human Development Index (HDI) is in terms of capabilities of three basic dimensions of human development:**

- Life longevity
- Knowledge (adult literacy and combined primary, secondary and tertiary enrolment)
- Decent standard of living (real per capita income)

The Human Poverty Index (HPI), meant for most deprived sections of the community, is based on deprivations in the essential elements of decent human life: Basic Survival (Death before age 40, child and maternal mortality) Educational levels (% of illiterate adults) Overall economic provisioning (% of people without access to health services and safe

water) Sustainability (% of underweight children under 5)

The Gender-related Development Index (GDI) measures the above variables in terms of inequality between women and men.

Social Watch, Uruguay (using inputs from mass movements and development networks across the globe) has developed “An index of Fulfilled Commitments” (made by Governments in the 1995 Global Summit). It monitors countries under the following “Goals for 2000”:

- Basic education for all
- 80% of children finish primary school
- Reduce by a third 1990 infant mortality rates
- Blanket vaccination
- Reduce by half 1990 malnutrition levels
- Medical attention during pregnancy and birth for all women
- Health services for all
- Life expectancy over 60 years
- Drinking water and sanitation for all
- Reduction in military expenditure
- Designate 0.7% of GNP (of rich countries) to aid
- Eliminate gender gap in literacy
- Equal access for girls and boys to primary school

Bilance, Holland, the development agency, speaks of three components of social development:

- The Fight against Poverty
- Development by people themselves
- A Rightful place in society

**Three fields of operation (within Social Development)**

- Basic Services

- Means of Existence
- Human Rights and Democratic Domain

**Three Fixed Measuring points for Social Development**

- Gender
- Sustainable development
- Social Cohesion

In the backdrop of these issues, the Institute for Human Development (IHD) organised an International Consultation on ‘Human Development in India: Emerging Issues and Policy Paradigms’, on February 5-6, 2010, at New Delhi, with support from the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) and The World Bank. The Consultation sought to deliberate on the concerns emerging from the contradiction of persistent deprivation, poverty and insecurities amidst growing wealth and prosperity. The idea was to revisit these issues under the changing context and emergence of new opportunities and challenges caused by the growth process, which influence various aspects of human development. The five major themes of discussion were: (i) education (ii) health and nutrition (iii) employment and skills (iv) social protection and (v) improving the effectiveness of social programmes for attaining better human development outcome. While the above definitions and descriptions open us out to the wide horizons of human social development, we need to develop our own indigenous definitions and indices of human / social development in India, using all the variables deemed appropriate for our specific conditions. Indices need to be developed, with usefulness for policy planning purposes being kept in mind. We need to see social development

- As a Socio-Economic Cultural Right as the root of democracy and a process of



participative decentralization as the process of removing inequalities and ensuring social justice as the mechanism of empowering the marginalized sections of our State: dalits, women, children, fisher folk, tribals, labour given the large heterogeneous nature of India, national indicators often hide the considerable variations that exist from state to state, region to region. There is surely the need to break national human development Indices into inter-State variations.

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