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HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2016 - Regional Press Release Asia and the Pacific

Exclusion and inequality lead to uneven development across Asia and the Pacific

Disparate progress in South and East Asia and the Pacific due to discrimination towards women, ethnic minorities and populations in remote areas, says UNDP Report.

Stockholm, 21 March 2017 – Exclusion of women, ethnic minorities, and people living in remote areas create chronic barriers that have stymied human development progress and led to significant disparities within the Asia and the Pacific region, leaving many behind.

A stronger focus on those excluded groups, and on actions to dismantle these barriers is urgently needed to ensure sustainable human development for all.

These are among the key findings of the [Human Development Report 2016 entitled ‘Human Development for Everyone’](#), released today by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The report finds that although on average human development improved significantly across all regions from 1990 to 2015, worldwide almost 1.5 billion people live in multidimensional poverty – reflecting acute deprivations in health, education and standards of living.

“The world has come a long way in rolling back extreme poverty, in improving access to education, health and sanitation, and in expanding possibilities for women and girls,” said UNDP Administrator Helen Clark, speaking at the launch of the Report in Stockholm today alongside Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven and the report’s lead author and Director of the Human Development Report Office, Selim Jahan.

“But those gains are a prelude to the next, possibly tougher challenge, to ensure the benefits of global progress reach everyone,” Helen Clark said.

The report makes clear that progress in the Asia and Pacific region has not benefited everyone. Despite a steep drop in poverty between 1990 and 2013 – in East Asia, the proportion of people living on less than \$1.90 a day fell from 60 percent to under 4 percent, and in South Asia from 45 percent to 15 percent – some 54 percent of the world’s multidimensional poor live in South Asia, as measured by the Multidimensional Poverty Index.

South Asia also has the highest levels of malnutrition in the world at 38 percent (measured by the prevalence of severe or moderate stunting in children under five years), and the lowest public health expenditure globally as a share of GDP, at 1.6 percent (2014).

“This report uncovers a deeper story behind the statistics,” said Haoliang Xu, Director of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific. *“Even in a region that has made such remarkable progress, pockets of exclusion continue to prevent millions of people from fulfilling their true potential.”*

The report shows that the disparities disproportionately impact certain groups. Women, ethnic minorities and people living in remote areas can suffer deprivations both overt and hidden.

“We place too much attention on national averages, which often mask enormous variations in people’s lives.” stated Selim Jahan. *“In order to advance we need to examine more closely not just what has been achieved, but who has been excluded and why?”*

Asia-Pacific has the largest gender gap of all developing regions.

The report shows that gender-based inequalities linked to patriarchal social norms afflict women over their entire lives. Such disparities manifest in myriad ways: higher malnourishment, morbidity and mortality for women; starkly imbalanced sex ratios due to sex discrimination; lower labour force participation rates for women, but higher workloads and less rest; less access to financial decision-making; and the pervasive risk of violence against women.

Between their first and fifth birthdays girls in India and Pakistan have a 30 to 50 percent greater chance of dying than boys. Women consistently have, on average, a lower HDI value than do men across the world, but the largest difference is in South Asia, where the female HDI value is 20 percent lower than the male value. Indeed, according to the report, the Asia-Pacific region is the second most gender-unequal of all developing regions, after the Arab States region. In South Asia, gender gaps in women’s entrepreneurship and labour force participation account for an estimated income loss of 19 percent.

Minority groups, whether by ethnicity, language or religion, continue to face barriers to social, economic and political participation. For example, the report shows that in Vietnam some 85 percent of children ages 12–23 months from the Kinh-Hoa majority were fully immunized in 2014, compared with only 69 percent of ethnic minority children.

Evidence from Nepal in 2011 shows similar patterns of disadvantages among ethnic minorities, with wide variations in HDI values across population groups, albeit with trends towards less inequality. The Newar people have the highest HDI value (0.565), followed by the Brahman-Chhetris (0.538), Janajatis (0.482), Dalits (0.434) and Muslims (0.422). The variations in HDI values are significant within these groups, depending on location. The highest inequalities are in education, which impact capabilities over the lifespan.

Geographic remoteness and location also pose barriers for those who live there. The report cites the Pacific islands, where youth unemployment is estimated at 23 percent – but reaches 63 percent in the Republic of the Marshall Islands, 54 percent in Kiribati and 46 percent in the Solomon Islands.

It is time to face up to deep-rooted barriers to development

“By eliminating deep, persistent, discriminatory social norms and laws, and addressing the unequal access to political participation which have hindered progress for so many, poverty can be eradicated and a peaceful, just, and sustainable development can be achieved for all”, Helen Clark said.

Marginalized groups often have limited opportunities to influence the institutions and policies that determine their lives. Changing this is central to breaking the vicious circle of exclusion and deprivation.

To this end, the report calls for far greater attention to empowering the most marginalized in society and recognizes the importance of giving them a greater voice in decision-making processes.

It also calls for a more refined analysis to inform actions including making a shift toward assessing progress in such areas as participation and autonomy. Key data, disaggregated for characteristics such as place, gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity is vital to identifying who is being left behind.

The report stresses the importance of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to build on past development gains noting that the agenda and human development approach are mutually reinforcing.

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