

## Issues of Interest from UNDP's Latest Human Development Reports

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**ABSTRACT:-** When United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) first published its Human Development Report (HDR), the philosophy in which human is placed at the center of the development, the nucleus of which is human development, has attracted the attention and agreement of most country of the United Nations (UN). So far, there have been more than 800 HDRs on a global, regional, national scale and many conferences and initiatives around this content to promote strong human development. The paper presents the basic points of view in UNDP's conception of human development based on the analysis of the HDR in recent years. From there, the author summarizes the issues in real context of human development.

**Keywords:-** human development, HDI, policy, sustainable human development

### I. INTRODUCTION

The assessment of what countries and the world community have accomplished is always associated with the identification of the problems of human development. The themes and content that the UNDP Global HDR have mentioned over the years are not random choices, but they reflect the real challenges of human development in each stage of development. Major issues surrounding human development are multidimensionally analyzed in HDRs, ranging from economic growth, incomes to healthcare, from education, democracy to human security, from gender equality and social power to poverty reduction, climate change, sustainable development, etc. In early 2015, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the first global human development report, UNDP introduced a new approach to promote prosperity and this approach continued to be mentioned in 2016 HDR and 2018 HDR. Issues of human development mentioned by UNDP in recent years focus on the following contents:

1. HDI and quality of human development
2. Attention should be paid to vulnerable groups in the process of human development.
3. Some implications regarding policies to overcome fundamental barriers towards sustainable human development

#### 1. HDI and quality of human development

Since 1990 when the first HDR was released, UNDP has proposed the HDI (Human Development Index) "to measure basic aspects of human capacity." [1]. Research does not stop at reasoning, but must be demonstrated by specific numbers. Human development is a big issue, but the level of human development must be interpreted through quantitative studies. Accordingly, the HDI consists of three indicators: economic indicator interpreted through per capita GDP, which represents the quality of life; the average life expectancy indicator reflects the biological capacity - long and healthy life; education indicator - adult literacy rate and annual enrollment rate - reflecting people's mental capacity (knowledge and qualification). These quantitative studies are extremely important because they measure the level of human development of each country and the level of implementation of previous goals. So far, the number of indicators that has been supplemented annually by UNDP through its HDR, such as: Human Poverty Index (HPI), Gender Development Index (GDI), Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), Gender Inequality Index (GII), Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI)... to clarify the different aspects of HDI.

Nearly three decades have passed and human development has made significant progress. The global HDI value in 2017 is 0.728 - an increase of about 21.7% compared to 0.598 in 1990 [2]. Around the world, people live longer, receive more education and have greater livelihood opportunities. Life expectancy is 7 years longer than in 1990 and more than 130 countries have universal enrollment in primary education. South Asia is the fastest growing region with 45.3%, followed by East Asia and the Pacific with 41.8% and Sub-Saharan Africa at 34.9%. In contrast, the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries gained an increase by 14.0%. [3] *But as human progress increases, the slower growth rate of HDI is inevitable.* This is because there is a biological limit to life expectancy, the number of years of schooling and enrollment rate cannot grow indefinitely. Income is the only component of HDI that can continue to increase, but even income growth will slow down as economies mature. However, with the generalization and refinement to find relative quantities that reflect the material life, biological capacity and mental capacity of the population, the HDI toolkit can hide the limitations in economic development, weaknesses in education and health development as well as negativity in the bureaucracy, culture and other social services. Selim Jahan - Director of UNDP's Human Development Report Office - conveyed in the article "The Human Development Index - what it is and what it is not" that: "If a metaphor is used, human development accounting represents a house and the HDI is the door to the house. One should not mistake the door to be the house and one should not stop at the door, rather one should enter the house" [4]. It is necessary to see the quality of human development that humanity achieves through those indicators. Quality is an important measure to check the progress of human development across countries. The concept of quality can be exploited through people's participation opportunities in each specific area.

Health quality: Although the average life expectancy of people increases in most countries, this figure does not reveal the years of healthy and interesting life. UNDP addresses two aspects that can measure health quality. The first is people's level of access to doctors and beds. For example, in Europe there are 24.7 doctors per 10,000 people, in South Asia 7.8 and Sub-Saharan Africa 1.9. The average number of beds per 10,000 people in countries with high HDI is 58, 9 in medium HDI countries and 13 in low HDI countries. [5]. The second is healthy life expectancy - the World Health Organization has tested the healthy life span by measuring years of living in good health conditions without being sick. The difference between life expectancy and healthy life expectancy among countries also reflects the health quality of people. Healthy life expectancy in high human development countries is 69.9 years, while in low human development countries being only 53.3 [6]. The quality of education is address by UNDP through such factors as the number of teachers per student; training quality of teachers; the level of school modernization. The standard of living of people is assessed by per capita income, while the quality of life must be evaluated by GDP growth.

HDRO affirms, "The process of development - human development - should at least create an environment for people, individually and collectively, to develop to their full potentials and to have a reasonable chance of leading productive and creative lives that they value" [7]. The three foundations for human development that UNDP gives are, living a healthy and creative life with knowledgeable, and having access to the resources necessary for a decent standard of living. When basic issues of human development are resolved, they will open opportunities for progress in other aspects of life. Amartya Sen, in his interview, took an example in Japan to talk about this issue. In Japan, right after the Meiji era, the government determined that they lagged behind the West in education. They expanded their general education impressively and then improve universal health coverage. They found that healthy and educated population served very effectively for the goal of economic growth, thereby bringing income to the people and improving living conditions. This lesson was then applied in Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan. *The achievements they have made in all areas do not originate from economic growth but from human development*, both physically and mentally as well as the living standards of the population, which looks to quality of each area. A.Sen said, "human capacity development is also an Asian classic approach to achieve sustainable economic growth." [8]. Ms. Pratibha Mehta - Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Vietnam – said, "Without investing in people and improving education - training, the benefits gained from globalization and global markets or foreign direct investment will remain limited" [9].

## II. ATTENTION SHOULD BE PAID TO VULNERABLE GROUPS IN THE PROCESS OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT.

UNDP aimed to promote human development for everyone and on that journey, there are no one left behind. However, in fact, the uneven development levels between regions, countries and communities within the territory of a country and the barriers to persistent human development left vulnerable groups behind. These are ethnic minorities; migrants and refugees; people with disabilities; women and girls; homosexual, bisexual, transgender and intersexual ... Among these people, "those who have to live in extreme poverty and deprivation belong to the most vulnerable groups" [10].

### People with disabilities

People with disabilities have to face physical and social barriers, which limit their opportunities and ability to participate in community life. Employer's discrimination against people with disabilities also limits their ability to access jobs. Migrants and refugees who are born in

Disadvantaged contexts such as conflicts, environmental disasters, less employment opportunities, seek a safer environment in another country to be more ensured about materials in spite of the risks and obstacles they may have to face. In the 2016 report, the International Labor Organization (ILO) highlighted the high unemployment rate, vulnerability to poverty and lack of good quality job opportunities, which are the main factors that motivate young people to migrate abroad. As of 2015, there were nearly 28 million international migrants between the ages of 15 and 24 globally. This number increased to more than 51 million in people aged 25 to 29, accounting for more than 21% of the 243 million migrants worldwide. In the next decade, this number may increase even further, as a larger group of young people from developing countries cross borders to seek employment and education opportunities. The highest migration trend can be seen in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean (38%), followed by Eastern Europe (37%) and in North America (15%) as the lowest percentage [11]. The problems that migrants often face have pushed them behind in the journey of human development, in which the biggest challenge was employment. They do not have legal or financial resources, which limits access to quality health and education services in host countries. The physical and mental health of migrants is impaired in the low living conditions and their children suffer from difficulties in the process of integrating into the new educational environment. Participation in political life and community is also not allowed when many countries impose restrictions on immigrants.

### Gender equality

Among the 17 Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations, gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls (goal #5) is a key goal to combat discrimination and violence against women worldwide. Women and girls in many countries are directly affected by laws or social rules, which narrow their ability to choose and develop their potentials. Sex-based discrimination can take place just before birth with sex-selective abortions (common in India and Pakistan [12]; followed by limiting girls in school and women not being encouraged to work outside the home, mainly doing family care jobs and not being paid. Although these are jobs in every day human life, they should not be entirely by women, which will limit women's choice and opportunity to participate in more meaningful activities (politics, society, economics ...).

Globally, 750 million women and girls are married before the age of 18 and at least 200 million women and girls in 30 countries have undergone female genital mutilation. In 18 countries, a husband can prevent a wife from working legally; in 39 countries, girls and boys do not have the same inheritance rights; and 49 countries lack laws to protect women from domestic violence. Globally, only 13% of women possess agricultural land. Women in North Africa hold less than one-fifth of the paid work in the non-farming sector [13]. In 2015 HDR, it is emphasized that women face many disadvantages in paid and unpaid work. In 2015, the global labor force participation rate for women was 50%, while this rate was 77% for men. Even when doing the same job, women's income is lower. Globally, women's incomes are 24% lower than men. In Latin America, top manageresses' average income is only 53% of their male counterparts'. In most regions, women often have to work in informally with instable incomes and minimal social protection conditions [14].

### Ethnic minorities

The problem of low opportunity for human development of ethnic minorities exists in both developing and developing countries. In many countries and ethnic minorities reside in locations of complex terrain, extreme climate, difficult traffic conditions and income almost dependent on nature with low quality of health care and education as well as low level of participation in local authority. In Vietnam, there are gaps between the ability of ethnic minorities and Kinh and Hoa people. In 2012, 50.9% of the ethnic minority population lived in multi-dimensional poverty, compared to only 16.5% of the Kinh - Hoa population. In 2008, the poverty rate was 51% for ethnic minorities and 54% for non-Vietnamese speakers, compared to only 26% for Kinh - Hoa population. About 84.6% of Kinh - Hoa children aged 12 to 23 months were fully vaccinated in 2014, compared to 69.4% of ethnic minority children. The deprivation suffered by ethnic minorities is also evident in countries with very high levels of human development. The life expectancy of African Americans is shorter than other ethnic and racial groups in the United States. Similarly, in education and wages, there are also big differences between these two groups relating to discrimination in the job market [15].

In general, in the human development of most countries there will always be some groups of people facing disadvantages. This situation increases the problem of vulnerability and being left behind in the

development journey. So, “We are too focused on national average indicators which often cover big differences in human life”, Selim Jahan said. “In order to continue to grow, we need to study more closely, not only about the achievements but also the vulnerable and left behind groups and the reason of the situation” [16].

### III. SOME IMPLICATIONS REGARDING POLICIES TO OVERCOME FUNDAMENTAL BARRIERS TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Over the past two decades, concerns for sustainable human development have always been emphasized in the UNDP Human Development Reports. The 1994 report highlighted the basic principle of sustainable human development: The goal of development is to create an environment in which everyone can improve their capacity and create more opportunities for both current and future generations. In the 1995 HDR, UNDP identified four components of sustainable development including strengthening capacity and health (improving physical and mental capacity through education, improving qualifications and skills. Only with capability, can people make the most of those opportunities. UNDP considers it the most important factor to ensure sustainable development of human development; *fair sharing of resources* (creating fairness in access to opportunities for everyone, especially disadvantaged groups in the society); *current development does not have a negative impact on future generations* (in terms of natural, social and cultural environment and natural resources etc.); *opportunities to participate in development* (everyone has the opportunity to participate in economic, political and social activities and their participation has a positive impact on the transformation of those activities. ). In the 2011 HDR, UNDP introduced the concept of "Developing people in a sustainable way is the expansion of existing human freedoms today, at the same time making a reasonable effort to avoid serious compromise of future generations' freedom" [17]. UNDP Director General Helen Clark said that “fairness, dignity, happiness and sustainability are very important in our lives, but we have not yet found them present in GDP.” Therefore, the indicator of sustainable human development needs to be defined and measured more closely in the general social development process” [18]. UNDP experts pointed out the two most fundamental factors affecting sustainable human development, namely *environmental issues, climate change and social inequality*.

The human-centered HDI-based sustainability measure also included the idea of limited planet, indicating that the level of climate change in particular has caused serious long-term risks for human development and the most serious risks are in poor countries and communities. In another speech, Helen Clark also emphasized this. If the way that both rich and poor countries develop is to destroy ecosystems on which the life on this planet depends, the poorest and most vulnerable depending their lives on nature will suffer [19]. Environmental pressures also make it more difficult to reduce poverty and inequality in the development process. “Devastating weather events often accompany other natural disasters, pulling down development progress” [20]. UNDP affirmed: “The degradation of the environment constricts the capacity of children in many different ways, far beyond income and livelihoods and includes impacts on health, education and other aspects of life” [21]. Accordingly, UNDP has proposed a number of policies for governments to overcome environmental degradation, creating a basis for sustainable development.

In developing countries with the least amount of emissions are most likely to suffer from consequences of climate change. Therefore, the activeness of governments in responding to climate change is extremely important for people's livelihoods. Allocating financial resources to this area is an urgent issue, serving economic sectors directly affected by natural disasters. Changing people's livelihood is an important first step to avoid unnecessary migration of people living in vulnerable climate areas. Smart agricultural science and technology helps farmers increase productivity and resilience to the effects of climate change and reduce emissions to the environment. UNDP has repeatedly mentioned the role of renewable energy in production and living, to limit the use of fossil fuels and environmental pollution. Community protection policies (such as general forest) are smart choices to help the poor stabilize their lives and incomes.

Inequality is the biggest barrier to sustainable human development. Inequality in income, assets such as land or inequality in access to public services such as education, health, credit, and social protection exist not only in countries but also in regions. And “few countries can avoid the increase in inequality, which has become a real threat to human development and progress of nations” [22]. Inequality affects all other development goals through hindering growth, slowing the pace of poverty reduction, and contributing to increased violence and social and political instability. “Our age is witnessing the paradox in a world of abundance, extreme poverty and inequality” [23] in addition to terrorism, human trafficking, diseases such as H7N9, Ebola, ... Of all the inequality issues, it can be said that economic inequality and gender inequality are two basic causes that hinder the human development. When facing environmental disasters or negative impacts of the economy, the poor and vulnerable groups always suffer the most and their recovery is very slow as well. In fact, to overcome inequality in human development is extremely difficult within each country as well as globally. UNDP suggests a universal policy approach to reach out to abandoned people in the human development process. The suggestion emphasizes the theory of approach and practical implementation so that vulnerable groups have the opportunity to benefit from the policy. Among UNDP's national policy options, there are a number of notable points:



*Firstly*, building a growth strategy based on employment [24] – this brings about a direct change in people's income - the most important means of achieving human development. The main factors raised in this policy include the necessity of government giving support and removing barriers to small and medium enterprises in the process of market access and access to credit, design of a legal framework to protect workers in the informal sector; supporting public investment in the formation of industrial clusters to facilitate enterprises to access capital and technology, improving resource use efficiency and creating new jobs, focusing on economic areas where the poor live and work, especially in rural areas (investment in infrastructure to reduce transport costs, increase mobility for workers at work and access health care services and improve qualifications, change production models towards modernity and focus on market factors.

*Secondly*, governments need to have policies to protect vulnerable workers because of science and technology development

The strong development of science and technology is bringing great changes to production. There is one factor that directly affects the decline in human resource demand, which is the replacement of robot workers and the risk of rapidly increasing automation. This leads to a large number of unskilled or low-skilled workers losing their livelihoods. "The European Union is expected to add 16 million new jobs in the 2010-2020 period, but the number of jobs for those with little or no formal education is expected to decrease by about 12 million" [25]. The governments can forecast about the jobs which may no longer exist and new jobs which may emerge to help workers learn new skills for good adaptation. This also requires the dynamics of the national education system, especially higher education, which requires a shift in the training human resources for new industries to meet the labor requirements of the green economy. At the same time, skills and mobility of workers should be trained in the changing economy.

*Thirdly*, general policy will not be accessible to everyone, so more measures that are specific are needed for vulnerable groups and for those benefit less from the general policies [26]. Based on the ability of the collective to help marginalized groups which are put forward by UNDP based on promoting the role of the community in the development of vulnerable individuals. The formation of social organizations representing these groups of people is necessary to enhance the development of individuals. If the organization representing the people with disabilities is formed, it will help this group with new skills and measures for moving forwards and having higher employment opportunities. An open society, accepting refugees, formed an organization that helped them integrate into the host country's cultural environment, find jobs and institutions that help their children learn and help them with legal procedures to have access to basic social services. For example, through organization and collective action since 2002, garbage men in Buenos Aires converted a risky activity based on poor technology into a system of urban recycling cooperation based on appropriate work conditions, advanced technology and reduced child labor rates [27].

*Fourthly*, strengthening opportunities for women associated with strict legal and regulatory frameworks to gradually overcome gender inequality in human development.

Regarding gender equality, the World Bank said that it is important for development for two reasons: "First, gender equality itself is meaningful because living one's own life without suffering from unreasonable deprivation is a fundamental human right and there must be equality between men and women. Secondly, gender equality is meaningful in terms of means because the higher gender equality, the more economic efficiency and more important development goals are achieved" [28]. There are currently more than 100 countries (World Bank released the data of 136 countries in 2012), which stipulates and protects the rights of men and women in the Constitution and laws. Achievements in women's liberation are enormous in recent decades. The degree of freedom women have is manifested in their rights to education, health care, social and political life, employment and respect. However, gender inequality is still very profound in many countries and territories. The proportion of women who died during childbirth in Africa's Lower Sahara region and some areas in South Asia is still as high as that of Northern Europe in the 19th century. Urban children born in rich families in Nigeria have average schooling time of 10 years for both boys and girls the rural girls in Hausa only attend school for average time of 6 months. The women mortality rate compared to men in low and middle-income countries is always higher than in high-income countries [29]. Enhancing opportunities for women requires regulatory law or there are key and specific policies in each country. At the same time, there should be strict sanctions in the organization and implementation of women empowerment. For example, when women's rights are not enforced - for example they are not allowed to go to school, forced to get married early, not receiving health care during pregnancy and postpartum, there must be someone to be responsible in the society. When the regulation is not followed, there should be an accountable agency so that all the people including vulnerable groups can access universal policies in human development.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Nearly three decades have passed since UNDP's first HDR was made. UNDP's view on human development has been favored by countries in the world and has served as a basis for national human

development strategies. Looking back on the world, people live longer, get more education and better income. However, barriers to human development persist including both the old ones and the emerging ones. The world is very unstable and human security is still threatened. Through recent HDR, it can be seen that these issues have been updated and fully reflected. At the same time, UNDP also provides suggestions for governments around the world to develop policies to help people achieve and maintain human development in a long-term and sustainable manner.

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