

## About Human Development

**6.1 About Human development** is defined as the process of enlarging people's freedoms and opportunities and improving their well-being. Human development is about the real freedom ordinary people have to decide who to be, what to do, and how to live.

The human development concept was developed by economist Mahbub ul Haq. At the World Bank in the 1970s, and later as minister of finance in his own country, Pakistan, Dr. Haq argued that existing measures of human progress failed to account for the true purpose of development—to improve people's lives. In particular, he believed that the commonly used measure of Gross Domestic Product failed to adequately measure well-being. Working with Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen and other gifted economists, in 1990 Dr. Haq published the first Human Development Report, which was commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme.

Central to the human development approach is the concept of capabilities. Capabilities—what people can do and what they can become—are the equipment one has to pursue a life of value. Basic capabilities valued by virtually everyone include: good health, access to knowledge, and a decent material standard of living. Other capabilities central to a fulfilling life could include the ability to participate in the decisions that affect one's life, to have control over one's living environment, to enjoy freedom from violence, to have societal respect, and to relax and have fun.

Our capabilities are expanded (or constrained) by our own efforts and by the institutions and conditions of our society. People with extensive, well-developed capabilities have the tools they need to make their vision of “a good life” a reality. Those poor in capabilities are less able to chart their own course and to seize opportunities. Without basic capabilities, human potential remains unfulfilled.

The capability approach is a normative framework used for analyzing well-being, often employed to understand development problems. Although certain aspects of the approach can be linked to Aristotle and Adam Smith, it is philosopher-economist Amartya Sen and more recently, University of Chicago professor of law and ethics Martha Nussbaum, who are responsible for its development and proliferation.

The core premise of the capability approach is that well-being should be defined by people's real and actual opportunities to undertake the pursuits that they desire (often referred to as 'capabilities to function') – and through these freedoms, be whom they would like to be. One illustration of the difference between capabilities to function and formal freedoms is found in the area of educational opportunity. All US citizens have the formal freedom to earn a college degree. However when comparing students from low-income neighborhoods with more affluent students, low-income students' real freedoms to attend college can be constrained by, among other things, low quality local high schools and financial considerations. Formal freedoms, in this and many cases, are necessary but not sufficient to provide true capabilities to function. The capability approach to well-being, which prioritizes the ability to actualize opportunity into 'beings and doings', contrasts with other theories of well-being which focus on subjective measures, such as happiness, or on material means, such as income.

### **The Human Development Index**

The state of the nation is often expressed through GDP (Gross Domestic Product), daily stock market results, consumer spending levels, and national debt figures. But these numbers provide only a partial view of how people are faring.

The Human Development Index was developed as an alternative to simple money metrics. It is an easy-to-understand numerical measure made up of what most people believe are the very basic ingredients of human well-being: health, education, and income. The first Human Development Index was presented in 1990. It has been an annual feature of every Human Development Report since, ranking virtually every country in the world from number one (currently Iceland) to number 177 (currently Sierra Leone).

This composite index has become one of the most widely used indices of well-being around the world and has succeeded in broadening the measurement and discussion of well-being beyond the important, but nevertheless narrow, confines of income. In a number of countries, the Human Development Index is now an official government statistic; its annual publication inaugurates serious political discussion and renewed efforts, nationally and regionally, to improve lives.

### **The American Human Development Index**

*The Measure of America* presents a modified American Human Development Index. The American HD Index measures the same three basic dimensions as the standard HD Index, but it uses different indicators to better reflect the U.S. context

and to maximize use of available data. For example, while the standard index measures access to knowledge using the average number of years that students spend in school, we have chosen instead to use educational attainment, a more demanding indicator.

While data are plentiful on the extremes of affluence and deprivation in the United States, the American Human Development Index provides a single measure of well-being for all Americans, disaggregated by state and congressional district, as well as by gender, race, and ethnicity. All data used in the index come from official U.S. government sources—the American Community Survey of the U.S. Census Bureau and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The data included in the American Human Development Index will help us understand variations among regions and groups. It is a snapshot of America today. Moreover, the index will serve as a baseline for monitoring future progress.

## **Why Health, Education, and Income?**

Most people would agree that a long and healthy life, access to knowledge, and a decent material standard of living are the basic building blocks of well-being and opportunity. They are also the building blocks of the American Human Development Index as well as the U.N. Human Development Index upon which it is modeled. These three core capabilities are universally valued around the world, and measurable, intuitively sensible, and reliable indicators exist to represent them—two critical considerations in the construction of a composite index.

### **A Long And Healthy Life**

The most valuable capability people possess is to be alive. Advancing human development requires, first and foremost, expanding the real opportunities people have to avoid premature death by disease or injury, to enjoy protection from arbitrary denial of life, to live in a healthy environment, to maintain a healthy lifestyle, to receive quality medical care, and to attain the highest possible standard of physical and mental health.

In the American HD Index, life expectancy at birth stands as a proxy for the capability to live a long and healthy life. Life expectancy at birth is the average number of years a baby born today is expected to live if current mortality patterns continue throughout his or her lifetime. The most commonly used gauge of

population health the world over, life expectancy at birth represents one-third of the overall American HD Index.

The American Human Development Project calculates life expectancy for the 50 states, the 435 congressional districts, women and men, and major racial and ethnic groups from mortality data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, and population data from the CDC WONDER database.

### **Access To Knowledge**

Access to knowledge is a critical determinant of long-term well-being and is essential to individual freedom, self-determination, and self-sufficiency. Education is critical to people's real freedom to decide what to do and who to be. Education builds confidence, confers status and dignity, and broadens the horizons of the possible—as well as allowing for the acquisition of skills and credentials. Globalization and technological change have made it extraordinarily difficult for poorly educated Americans to achieve the economic self-sufficiency, peace of mind, and self-respect enabled by a secure livelihood.

Access to knowledge is measured using two indicators: school enrollment for the population age 3 and older, and educational degree attainment for the population 25 years and older. A one-third weight is applied to the enrollment indicator and a two-thirds weight is applied to the degree attainment indicator. Both indicators are from the American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau.

### **A Decent Standard Of Living**

Income is essential to meeting basic needs like food and shelter—and to moving beyond these necessities to a life of genuine choice and freedom. Income enables valuable options and alternatives, and its absence can limit life chances and restrict access to many opportunities. Income is a means to a host of critical ends, including a decent education; a safe, clean living environment; security in illness and old age; and a say in the decisions that affect one's life. Money isn't everything, but it's something quite important.

A decent standard of living is measured using median personal earnings of all full- and part-time workers 16 years and older from the American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau.

## **6.2 Reasons to Study Human Development**

### **1. Studying development helps you better understand yourself**

We were all kids once, so learning more about how children develop and grow can provide additional insight in the person you have become. Studying development can also help you learn more about your future. By understanding the aging process, you'll be better prepared when you face issues associated with growing older.

### **2. It also helps you learn more about your children**

Whether you are a parent now or planning to become one in the future, studying human development can teach you a great deal about your children. In addition to learning things that can help make you a better parent, you can gain greater insight into how your children behave, think, learn and feel.

### **3. You'll better understand how to interact with kids**

If you plan on having children or working with them at some point, studying human development can greatly improve your ability to interact with kids. Once you better understand the stages of development and what makes kids tick, you will feel more comfortable talking, playing and working with them.

### **4. And you'll gain a greater appreciation of development throughout life**

When we think of human development, it's easy to think of it as a process that is largely complete once we hit early adulthood. It is important to realize, however, that development is an ongoing process that continues all throughout life. As you enter adulthood, navigate middle age and face the on-set of old age, having a greater understanding of how people continue to grow and change as they get older can help you appreciate and manage all the stages of your life.

### **5. It allows us to understand what's normal, and what's not**

Another important reason to study development is that you can gain a greater understanding of what is normal. While every person is a little bit different, human development tends to follow a remarkably predictable pattern. Once you have studied development, you'll know what's typical at certain ages and stages.

Perhaps most importantly, studying human development makes it easier to spot possible signs of trouble. From problems with physical or cognitive development in early childhood to emotional struggles later in life, being able to identify potential problems is important. The earlier developmental problems are detected, the sooner intervention can begin. No matter what the situation, early detection and treatment can lead to better outcomes.