

Challenges to human Development

8.1 Underdevelopment and Diversity in the Global South

What does it mean to say some countries are less developed than others?

Underdevelopment refers to the fact that most citizens of these countries face significant difficulties in satisfying basic material needs. These areas of the world can be referred to as less developed, LDCs, developing countries, underdeveloped countries or the global south, even though each of these labels has its own shortcomings. Most of the global population resides in these countries.

Generally these countries share certain economic, social and political characteristics. Economically, these countries are not only poor, but suffer from low productivity, inadequate **infrastructure**, large informal sectors and economic activity concentrated in the primary sector. Lack of social development in these countries is characterized by insufficient educational and healthcare resources as well as the systematic exclusion of important ethnic, racial, religious or gender groups from power. Finally, the political characteristics the LDCs relate to insufficient development of democracy and overall lower state capacity to both deliver services and enforce policy.

The history of economic development can give an important perspective on today's situation. The **Agricultural Revolution**, 10,000 years ago allowed for sedentary farming and the consequent production of surplus food gave rise to new specializations and divisions of labor within increasingly sophisticated societies. Still, even by the early 1700s, the overwhelming majority of people were farmers. There was relatively little inequality between societies, with the richest societies' incomes being about three times the income of the poorest societies. The Industrial Revolution in the late eighteenth century increased the productive capacity of certain societies so quickly that large gaps between rich and poor within and between countries grew. By the middle of the twentieth century the income differential between rich and poor societies had increased from 3:1 to 40:1. This description of economic development and underdevelopment, however, does not help to explain why some countries are wealthy and others experience underdevelopment.

To be able to explain underdevelopment, three sets of **theories** must be examined. These theories are the basis of the organization of this text. One set of theories lays

blame for the impoverishment of the LDCs on the West by citing international factors that European nations and the US perpetuated: the slave trade, colonialism, globalization and aid dependence. These are discussed in Part II of the text. A second group of theories cite factors internal to LDCs such as leadership, institutions, laws, policies, culture, ethnic heterogeneity, corruption, etc. These theories are discussed in Part III of the text. A final set of theories focus on natural factors to explain underdevelopment in LDCs. This would include explanations based on geography, physical environment and climate. These explanations are discussed in Part IV of the text.

In reality, no single theory can explain phenomena as broad as underdevelopment in an area as diverse as the Global South. China, India and the Democratic Republic of Congo have different histories, physical resources and political systems. Additionally, while this three-fold classification of theories seems attractive, in reality theories may cut across this system: ethnic conflict may be caused by inadequate institutions, but also colonially-drawn boundaries may have created the problem initially. Indeed a brief case study of the Democratic Republic of the Congo reveals the interplay of internal, colonial and natural forces in contributing to underdevelopment.

8.2 Human Development and Underdevelopment

It is important to not view economic development or increasing GDP as an end in itself. Many scholars contend that **human development** should be the goal of economic development. Poverty is one obstacle to people developing the ability to use their freedoms. Two of the biggest obstacles to human development are those presented by ill health and lack of appropriate education. While good health and good education are also valued for their own sake, they also provide a means for better economic productivity for both the individual and for society. This chapter examines those issues from two comparative perspectives: cross-national comparisons with more developed countries and comparisons of trends within LDCs themselves.

Two health indicators are examined: life expectancy and child mortality. **Life expectancy** is a measure of how long a person can expect to live based on current mortality risks in that society. Life expectancy in the more developed countries is generally over seventy years, while in the less developed world, although a few countries may be notably higher, they can range from the fifties to sixties.

Child mortality measures the proportion of children who die before the age of five while **infant mortality** measures the proportion of children who die before their first birthday. They are expressed as the number of deaths that occur for every 1,000 live births. In the less developed world these rates are often ten times higher than in the more developed countries. It is also noted that there are both regional disparities among areas of the global south (with Latin America having better rates and sub-Saharan Africa having the worst rates) as well as within each nation (where rural areas, often poorer and distant from medical clinics suffer from worse mortality rates than urban areas).

Another health indicator is **malnutrition**, where the body does not receive enough nutrients. Some malnourished people actually consume large quantities of food, but the food may lack certain nutrients essential for human development. Malnutrition, even when it does not lead to death, can have significant impacts upon cognitive functioning, physical development of the body and may leave individuals susceptible to diseases and infections.

The LDCs also have high **infectious disease** rates. Infectious diseases, which can be transmitted from one person to another (either directly or through a vector), include malaria, tuberculosis, cholera, influenza and AIDS. Some of these diseases are directly related to the lack of safe water and sanitation. Few people in the global south have access to clean, treated water; the vast majority of people in the global south defecate outdoors or into pits or public sewers that release untreated sewage into the environment, further endangering fresh water supplies. Compounding the disease situation in LDCs is the fact that many tropical LDCs face tropical disease risks that are unknown or minimal in most developed countries. Malaria is an example of such a disease.

Compared to more developed countries, LDCs spend less on less on their public health care sectors. They also often have few trained and certified professionals and clinics, especially in the rural areas. Because education and communication are often also weak in LDCs, it is difficult to inform citizens of health risks or good health practices. Immunization rates are frequently much lower than in the more developed world, often because parents do not understand the need for having healthy children treated.

Despite the fact that the health situation in LDCs compares poorly with that in the more developed world, when compared to the past, the picture is quite positive. Life Expectancy, child mortality rates and infant mortality rates have all significantly improved in almost all LDCs since 1960. Part of the reason for this

improvement is that the cost of improving health care has declined: scientific and technological improvements related to water and sanitation has become dramatically cheaper. Awareness-raising campaigns have also become cheaper and more effective.

Education is significant not only because of the job market skills it brings but because it creates informed and empowered citizens. Educational indicators can measure quantity and quality of education. Enrollment ratios can measure which percentage of the school age population attends school at the primary and secondary levels. LDCs tend to have significantly lower secondary enrollment ratios than high income countries. Some LDC regions such as East Asia, the Middle East and Latin America have high primary enrollment ratios but sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia lag considerable behind in this area. Quantity of education can also be measured by mean years of schooling.

Literacy rates are one basic way of measuring achievement. While literacy is a minimal expectation for education, when one measures the adult literacy, in some regions less than two-thirds of the population are minimally literate, meaning 900 million people worldwide are illiterate. Another measure of educational quality is the pupil-teacher ratio. Generally, students in smaller classes tend to get better instruction. In the more developed countries this ratio is about 12:1 or 14:1; in less developed countries it can be in the 40:1 area or worse.

There are a variety of explanations for why educational outcomes are poor in LDCs. The most obvious is poor funding of education. Funding for education in wealthier countries is sometimes twenty times as much as what poor countries spend on education. This means fewer schools, teachers and materials for students. Further, many instructors do not get adequate training for their position and tend to employ less effective methods of instruction like rote teaching. A third factor is that parental decisions often affect children's education in negative ways. Sometimes decisions are made based on financial necessity such as the inability to pay school fees or the need for children to earn money or work to support the family.

Much like the situation related to health, when one analyzes current educational trends in LDCs, the picture is more positive. Enrollment ratios mean years of schooling and various quality measures have experienced significant improvement between 1970 and 2010. One reason is improved funding from LDC governments as well as efforts by governments to better inform parents and to provide incentives for parents to keep their children in school.

India is used a case study that reinforces the point that while LDCs still lag behind wealthier countries in health and education, significant improvements have been achieved.

8.3 Culture and Identity

Culture is commonly defined as the shared set of norms, beliefs and recurring practices of people in a society.

An important component of culture is also group identity. **Social identity** is an individual's self- understanding related to their membership in a group that is larger than the family. Social identity includes race, ethnicity, nationality and religion. Different theories exist related to social identity. The first is **primordialism** which views identity as something one gain at birth or childhood that does not change throughout one's lifetime. The second theory is **constructivism** which states that identity is often changeable because it is socially created. For example traditionally **race** was viewed as primordial but now scholars view race in constructivist terms—not because someone can change their skin color but because it is society that attributes meaning to skin color rather than the color of our eyes or hair.

Ethnicity is a group identity rooted in shared history, values and practices. Frequently language is a key marker for ethnicity. **Nationality** combines a group identity with a political or legal claim like a claim to self-determination. **Religion** is a set of beliefs, moral codes, rituals, symbols and organizations relating to spirituality.

How do these social identities influence development? One set of theories, the **culturalist school**, believes that the content of these shared values and beliefs is an important influence on economic development. One is example is the research of the sociologist Max Weber in the early 1900s. Weber's influential work explained differences in economic development between countries as related to the different values found in the predominant religions in each society. For example Protestant countries like Britain and Germany were believed to have stronger economic systems because their religion was said to promote work and savings. Catholic countries, such as Spain, Italy and Latin America were said to be less developed because their religion valued conformity and tradition rather than innovation.

Another culturalist argument can be seen in **modernization theory**. This theory believed that less developed traditional societies were characterized by ascriptive social status, limited social contacts beyond the family, hierarchical power

structures with arbitrary decision-making processes. Modern societies were the opposite: they had meritocratic social structure, webs of social contacts, participatory political structures where rule of law prevails. To move from traditional to modern, societies need to change their values and beliefs. To put it more bluntly, traditional societies were underdeveloped because they had the wrong culture.

A third culturalist approach is related to the notion of social capital. **Social capital** is the level of trust and cooperation members of a society feel toward each other. The more trust that exists, according to the theory, the more efficiently an economy can operate because people are more able to do complex transactions such as loans, business partnerships and other exchanges with a wide group of individuals. In low trust societies, economic transactions are more costly because extra effort must be made to check the trustworthiness of others and to ensure security.

A fourth approach, a more modern variant on Weber's theory, focuses upon the cultural values of delayed gratification and thriftiness. Cultural values that encourage savings enable the accumulation of financial capital to establish and expand businesses. Societies that look down upon individual extravagance are more likely to experience economic growth.

Other culturalist approaches specifically criticize Islam, Latin America or African religions on several bases. The criticisms relate to values that make people reluctant to change, or passive and accepting of the *status quo*.

Social scientists have many criticisms of these culturalist approaches. One criticism is that the kind of culture a society develops may not be a cause of economic development but a result of it. In societies where there is less economic prosperity, poor people may become fatalistic. Likewise, if there are many poor people, society is likely to have little in savings.

Another response to culturalist arguments is that people in LDCs cannot be said to lack a "work ethic" when their daily routines are actually analyzed. Many people work longer days with more physical labor than is required in the West.

Finally, any culturalist argument leaves too many cases unexplained. There are too many situations where two countries share similar cultures but have different experiences related to economic development to accept these culture-based arguments as presented.

Culture may affect economic development in another way. Instead of focusing on the content of specific cultures, some analysts focus upon the fact that some states must deal with high levels of cultural diversity. Many LDCs have high levels of **cultural diversity** and there seems to exist a statistical association between high diversity and economic underdevelopment. Analysts propose several reasons for this.

When there is high cultural diversity it may be difficult (or at least more expensive) for governments to provide necessary public goods such as roads, clinics and schools. Different social groups are likely to have different priorities for which goods should be provided where. In addition, diversity may lower public trust, leading to all the problems of insufficient social capital. Governance in more diverse societies may also be poorer. Politicians, if they are supported by certain social groups, are likely to promote policies that reward their own supporters at the expense of opponents. Indeed politicians may find it advantageous to foment social distrust to mobilize their own ethnic base in elections.

Additionally, in diverse societies pernicious stereotypes may be common. This can have negative psychological effects that can become internalized and can impact national productivity.

The cultural diversity explanations also have attracted criticism. Again, cultural diversity may be a consequence of underdevelopment rather than a cause of it. Identities may tend to become more fixed and more significant in a poor society than in a prosperous one. Also, the establishment of an effective national system of education that can encourage national unity may be more expensive than what a poor country can provide.

Iraq is presented as a case study to explore some of these themes. Specifically, Islam's impact upon women, the fact that Iraq is a low trust society, and ethnic divisions within in Iraq are some of the factors examined. At the same time, Iraq's creation during British colonialism, which gave the country its current demography, is analyzed.