

# Engendering Human Development

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## Conceptual Background

The human development approach – which has become a powerful element of the current development discourse – is rooted in a vision of development that sees equality and justice as essential values that must be built into processes of economic growth if they are to be sustainable. Gender equality is therefore integral to human development. As has been said by Mahbub-ul Haq, 'Development if not engendered is endangered'. No society can be called developed if one half of humanity remains voiceless, invisible and undervalued. Equally, economic growth – regardless of the approach adopted - has been amply demonstrated to be uneven and unsustainable in the long run if it is sought to be realised in a situation where there are significant gender inequalities.

The human development approach, in terms of social welfare theory, is based on the concept of capabilities that Amartya Sen has so eloquently advocated. Capabilities are defined as a bundle of functionings, which encompass the range of 'doings and beings of people'. Development is defined as the process of enhancing these capabilities for all members of a society. The capabilities approach marks a distinct break from other approaches in that it treats human beings as ends in themselves, rather than instruments for other ends. This approach is therefore highly compatible with the human development framework since it enables us to deal with gender issues in a more holistic manner as men and women are considered valuable in themselves.

The capabilities approach is also useful in gender analysis as it focuses on the non-monetary, non-market dimensions of human activity and well-being. It enables one to focus on strategic gender needs as against only practical gender needs. Besides it gives importance to opportunities rather than mere attainments and hence opens up the discussion to various dimensions that lead to empowerment of men and women. It accords primacy to human beings - commodities and resources being considered only a means to attaining human well-being. While focusing on individual capabilities the paradigm recognizes societal features, social norms and the like.

Robeyns (2003) points out that the capabilities approach is an improvement over standard well-being approaches in welfare economics or political philosophy. The traditional well-being approaches use implicit assumptions about gender relations within the family, which are most often unrealistic in that they deny or ignore intra-household inequalities. In traditional welfare economics, the distinction between individual and family is not sufficiently gender sensitive as often the assumptions made are that of partners pooling their resources or of all members of the household

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sharing benefits equally. Thus, the dimension of intra-household inequality does not get articulated let alone be captured.

The three distinct advantages of the capabilities approach in engendering the development discourse have been identified (Robeyns, 2003).

1. The conceptualization and measurement of gender inequality in terms of functionings and capabilities helps to focus on the lives the individuals live and choose to live rather than on the average household income, which is the standard tool for analysis, particularly in economics.
2. The capabilities approach enables an analyst to go beyond market transactions and unravel the non-market dimensions of lives of men and women, a distinct advantage that is not available in many other paradigms. This is particularly important in gender analysis if the discussion on gender inequality is to move from inequalities in earnings, assets and the like to dimensions such as the care economy, household work, domestic violence, and supportive social networks.
3. The capabilities approach explicitly recognizes human diversity. Very often analysis, even when inequality is measured, is derived from a sense of equality that is judged from the male perspective and therefore insensitive to women's issues.

While the capabilities approach offers a useful alternative paradigm to analyse gender issues, it is underspecified in that all the contours of the paradigm are not fully explored. Several other elements need to be added in order to make it applicable in specific contexts. Two sets of such elements are currently available. One listed out by Nussbaum (1995, 2000) and the other by Robeyns (2003).

Nussbaum highlights the elements of life, bodily health, bodily integrity, senses, imagination and thought, emotions, practical reason, affiliation, other species, play, control over one's environment as the essential ingredients. These are highly abstract concepts not readily translated into policy actions/initiatives on the ground.

Robeyns (2003), on the other hand has a more down-to-earth list that includes life and physical health, mental well-being, bodily integrity and safety, social relations, political empowerment, education and knowledge, domestic work and non-market care, paid work and other projects, shelter and environment, mobility, leisure activities, time-autonomy, respect and religion. One significant aspect to note is that these dimensions have been framed in the context of western societies.

For Asian economies in general and South Asian economies in particular, it is necessary to devise a list of elements that need to be included keeping in mind the fact that patriarchy manifests itself very differently in the western and eastern societies. While it is not our intention here to attempt to list such components, it would be essential to draw attention to one crucial element –that of social capital. The

existence of social capital, or the nurturing of social capital has contributed in no mean measure to the empowerment of women in many South Asian countries<sup>2</sup>.

## **Human Development Reporting**

Having articulated the advantages of the capabilities approach, one turns to the more operational ways in which the engendering of the development paradigm has been attempted by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the strong advocate of the human development approach. In its annual publication, the Human Development Report (HDR), UNDP has sought to bring to the forefront of policy dialogue some critical gender based issues. In addition, Regional Human Development Reports, such as Human Development in South Asia, 2000, HIV/AIDS and Development in South Asia 2003, also address this vital issue with specific relevance to the respective regions.

The HDRs have also sought to popularize the use of various indices. The 1995 HDR was devoted entirely to gender equality. In this Report, two composite indices were introduced, namely the Gender-Related Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). Composite indices, while not being complete measures of the phenomenon they try to represent, nonetheless provide a convenient tool to highlight some dimensions of the phenomenon they represent.

## **Stylized Facts**

I would like to touch briefly upon three propositions or 'stylized facts' that emerge from the review in the Human Development Reports of the vast literature on economic growth, human development and gender development. The setting for the discussion would be the Asia-Pacific region, and in particular South Asia where 45% of people live below 1 US\$ a day. (UNDP, 2003)

### *Stylized Fact 1*

There is **no automatic link between economic growth and human development**. This is true in the Asia-Pacific region as well. Observing data for 2001, we find that Nepal, has the lowest GDP per capita (PPP US\$ 1,310) in South Asia, but has a higher HDI rank than the GDP per capita rank (Table 1, column 3). A much higher contrast between the two ranks is recorded for Sri Lanka where the HDI rank is much higher (13) than that of GDP per capita. India, in contrast, has a much higher rank in GDP per capita (PPP US\$) than in HDI rank (-12).

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<sup>2</sup> The successful South Asia Poverty Alleviation Programme that was supported by the UNDP owes its success to the process of social mobilization that it followed.

<b>Table 1 – Human Development in South Asia</b>					
Country	GDP Per Capita	Human Development Index (HDI)	GDP Per Capita (PPP US\$) rank minus HDI rank* (3)	Gender-Related Development Index (GDI)	HDI rank minus GDI rank**
	(1)	(2)		(4)	(5)
	(PPP US\$)	Value		Value	
	(2001)	(2001)	(2001)	(2001)	(2001)
Bangladesh	1,610	0.502	7	0.495	0
Bhutan	1,833	0.511	5	na	na
India	2,840	0.590	-12	0.574	0
Maldives	4,798	0.751	7	na	na
Nepal	1,310	0.499	8	0.479	-3
Pakistan	1,890	0.499	-7	0.469	-3
Sri Lanka	3,180	0.730	13	0.726	0

Source: UNDP (2003) Human Development Report 2003, Oxford University Press, New York

Notes: (\*) A positive figure indicates that the HDI rank is higher than the GDP per capita (PPP US\$) rank. (\*\*) The ranks of this column are recalculated for the 144 countries for which the GDI has been calculated. A positive figure means that the GDI rank is higher than the HDI rank.

### *Stylized Fact 2*

**High human development does not necessarily translate into an equal share of benefits for men and women.** A useful comparison is between the overall HDI rank of any country and its GDI rank (Table 1, column 5). It is interesting to note that in South Asia no country ranked higher in GDI than in HDI. The performance of India and Sri Lanka was equal in HDI and GDI, while Nepal performed better in HDI than in GDI.

In South East Asia and East Asia quite a few countries recorded a higher GDI rank than their respective HDI ranks. Philippines has the higher GDI rank with respect to its HDI rank (+6), despite having ranked only fifth within South East Asia and East Asia with regard to GDI. The other countries that have done better in GDI than in HDI are Thailand (+2), China (+1), Indonesia (+1), Mongolia (+1).

### *Stylized Fact 3*

**Giving greater attention to gender equality also promotes higher economic growth and accelerates human development attainments.** Income growth and

economic development are good for gender equality in the long run; growth alone cannot deliver the desired results. Societies progress more rapidly if they also adopt specific measures to narrow gender gaps. (UNDP, 1995)

Some illustrations from a World Bank study (2002) highlight this point.

In Africa, research indicated that improving rural women's access to productive resources including education, land, and fertilizer could increase agricultural productivity by as much as one-fifth. Cross-country studies suggest that if the Middle East and North Africa, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa had been as successful as East Asia in narrowing the gender gap in education during 1960-1990, GNP per capita in those regions would have grown by 0.5 and 0.9 percentage points higher per year, substantial increases over actual growth rates. Over the past 25 years girls' primary school enrolment rates doubled in the Middle East, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa. In the past half century, women's life expectancy has increased by 15-20 years in developing countries, to the point that in the 1990s, for the first time, women in South Asia began living longer than men.

Countries with smaller gaps between women and men in areas such as education, employment, and property rights

- ❖ have lower child malnutrition and mortality
- ❖ more transparent business and government
- ❖ faster economic growth - which in turn helps to further narrow the gender gap.

As education is the key to breaking the circle of ignorance and exploitation and empowering women, and has various benefits (e.g. income earning opportunities, reduction of child and maternal mortality, improvement in women's status in the society) we could consider what have been the educational achievements of men and women.

In Bangladesh, for example, between 1990 and 2001 there has been a significant increase in female literacy as compared to that of male literacy. In fact, in 1990 the female adult literacy (24.4 per cent) was practically half of the male literacy rate (47.8 per cent), while in 2001 the female-male gap is lower than earlier (female literacy rate is 30.8 per cent and male literacy rate is 49.9 per cent). The surge in literacy rates contributed to rise in the HDI value from 0.189 in 1990 to 0.502 in 2001.

The Regional HDR on HIV/AIDS and Development in South Asia, points to the intimate link between the persistence of human poverty and gender inequality to HIV/AIDS in the region. Poverty hits women harder than men and gender inequity is one of the main underlying reasons. The Report flags the strong relationship between low GDI and HIV/AIDS in the region. The gendered face of HIV/AIDS, with women constituting 36% of the HIV infections in the region, is integrally related to gender inequality both in terms of biological vulnerability as also low social and economic position of women against men.

India's National HDR (Planning Commission, 2001) documents that positive impact of women's empowerment.

- ❖ In Manipur, women's empowerment has resulted in lowest infant mortality rate in the country (28 per 1000 live births in 1991) even lower than in Kerala (42 per 1000 live births in 1991).
- ❖ In Himachal Pradesh, self-empowerment of women has resulted in
  - School participation rates for girls as high as for boys
  - Near complete coverage of the population in terms of safe drinking water, electricity and telecommunications
  - Reasonably responsive administration with comparatively low level of corruption has helped in identifying development priorities and implementing programmes fairly efficiently
  - Community and public health and medical services are better organized and have high credibility

## Strategies

Going beyond the measures, a few strategies are outlined that can be followed to ensure that human development attainments are equitable.

The foremost of these measures is to ensure equality of rights between women and men and remove legal, economic, political or cultural barriers that prevent the exercise of equal rights through comprehensive policy reforms and strong affirmative action. This would require that the institutional machinery to ensure implementation and monitoring of gender empowerment policies is established and strengthened.

Ensuring women's access to land, the primary productive resource for most poor women, is a critical policy requirement. Protecting the traditional rights of access of communities to common property resources is an urgent priority. Adequate working conditions and support to workers' organizations will provide the necessary conditions for the empowerment of women but need to be supplemented by more basic measures to address structural factors and changing mindsets. An important aspect with regard to the norms and networks that enable collective action, *social capital*<sup>3</sup>, there is evidence of their importance for poverty alleviation and sustainable human and economic development.

Another important plank of the strategy has to be building the capabilities of women and regard them as agents and beneficiaries of change. This is particularly important during a period of globalisation. While recognising that the process of globalisation,

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<sup>3</sup> The broadest and most encompassing view of social capital includes the social and political environment that shapes social structure and enables norms to develop.

especially as it relates to information technology, could expand opportunities for women, the negative effects need to be countered by upgrading women's productivity and employability, and providing alternative employment avenues.

A critical aspect of this gendered approach would involve recognition of the role of the 'care' economy and women's roles in unpaid work at the household and community levels. Given the intensification of women's work as well as the changes in men's roles, there is a strong case for investing greater public resources in supporting women's unpaid work (Menon-Sen & Prabhu, 2001). Investments to enable access to affordable food (for example through public distribution systems), setting up childcare facilities and ensuring the availability of water, fuel and fodder at the local level cannot only enable women to access paid work, but can have multiplier effects in terms of enabling children, particularly girls, to go to school. Equitable and sustainable policies require a better understanding of the links between women's household survival strategies, livelihoods and larger scale economic, social, environmental and political processes.

Empowerment of women is "a critical factor in the eradication of poverty" as emphasised in the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995. But existing policies often fail to address these realities. Simplistic and narrow conceptualizations of women's empowerment and gender equality restricts policy focus to micro-level issues related to women's income-generation, access to credit, education and training, rather than on the structural causes of women's poverty and gender inequality such as discriminatory laws, gender blind public expenditure and macroeconomic policies that do not take social realities into account.

<b>Annex 1: Economic Growth and Human Development In the Asia Pacific Region</b>							
Region/Country	GDP Per Capita	Human Development Index (HDI)		Gender-Related Development Index (GDI)		Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)	
	(PPP US\$)	Value	Rank (Out of 175 countries)	Value	Rank (Out of 144 countries)	Value	Rank (Out of 70 countries)
	(2001)	(2001)	(2001)	(2001)	(2001)	(2001)	(2001)
World	7,376	0.722	na	na	na	na	na
Developing countries	3,850	0.655	na	na	na	na	na
South Asia	2,730	0.582	na	na	na	na	na
East Asia and the Pacific	4,233	0.722	na	na	na	na	na
<b>South Asia</b>							
Bangladesh	1,610	0.502	139	0.495	112	0.218	69
Bhutan	1,833	0.511	136	na	na	na	na
India	2,840	0.590	127	0.574	103	na	na
Maldives	4,798	0.751	86	na	na	na	na
Nepal	1,310	0.499	143	0.479	119	na	na
Pakistan	1,890	0.499	144	0.469	120	0.414	58
Sri Lanka	3,180	0.730	99	0.726	80	0.272	67
<b>South East Asia and East Asia</b>							
Brunei	19,210	0.872	31	0.867	31	na	na
Cambodia	1,860	0.556	130	0.551	105	na	na
China	4,020	0.721	104	0.718	83	na	na
Indonesia	2,940	0.682	112	0.677	91	na	na
Iran	6,000	0.719	106	0.702	86	na	na
Lao People's Dem. Rep.	1,620	0.525	135	0.518	109	na	na
Malaysia	8,750	0.790	58	0.784	53	0.503	45
Mongolia	1,740	0.661	117	0.659	95	na	na
Myanmar	1,027	0.549	131	na	na	na	na
Philippines	3,840	0.751	85	0.748	66	0.539	35
Republic of Korea	15,090	0.879	30	0.873	30	0.363	63
Singapore	22,680	0.884	28	0.880	28	0.594	26
Thailand	6,400	0.768	74	0.766	61	0.457	55
Vietnam	2,070	0.688	109	0.687	89	na	na
<b>Pacific</b>							
Fiji	4,850	0.754	81	0.743	67	na	na
Papua New Guinea	2,570	0.548	132	0.544	106	na	na
Samoa (Western)	6,180	0.775	70	na	na	na	na
Solomon Islands	1,910	0.632	123	na	na	na	na
Vanuatu	3,190	0.568	128	na	na	na	na

Source: UNDP (2003) *Human Development Report 2003*, Oxford University Press, New York.



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