

Human Development Report 2011

Sustainability and Equity: A Better Future for All



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Foreword

In June 2012 world leaders will gather in Rio de Janeiro to seek a new consensus on global actions to safeguard the future of the planet and the right of future generations everywhere to live healthy and fulfilling lives. This is the great development challenge of the 21st century.

The 2011 *Human Development Report* offers important new contributions to the global dialogue on this challenge, showing how sustainability is inextricably linked to basic questions of equity—that is, of fairness and social justice and of greater access to a better quality of life. Sustainability is not exclusively or even primarily an environmental issue, as this Report so persuasively argues. It is fundamentally about how we choose to live our lives, with an awareness that everything we do has consequences for the 7 billion of us here today, as well as for the billions more who will follow, for centuries to come.

Understanding the links between environmental sustainability and equity is critical if we are to expand human freedoms for current and future generations. The remarkable progress in human development over recent decades, which the global *Human Development Reports* have documented, cannot continue without bold global steps to reduce both environmental risks and inequality. This Report identifies pathways for people, local communities, countries and the international community to promote environmental sustainability and equity in mutually reinforcing ways.

In the 176 countries and territories where the United Nations Development Programme is working every day, many disadvantaged people carry a double burden of deprivation. They are more vulnerable to the wider effects of environmental degradation, because of more severe stresses and fewer coping tools. They must also deal with threats to their immediate environment from indoor air pollution, dirty water and unimproved sanitation. Forecasts suggest that continuing failure to reduce the grave environmental risks and deepening social inequalities threatens to slow decades of sustained progress by the world's poor majority—and even to reverse the global convergence in human development.

Major disparities in power shape these patterns. New analysis shows how power imbalances and gender inequalities at the national level are linked to reduced access to clean water and improved sanitation, land degradation and deaths due to indoor and outdoor air pollution, amplifying the effects associated with income disparities. Gender inequalities also interact with environmental outcomes and make them worse. At the global level governance arrangements often weaken the voices of developing countries and exclude marginalized groups.

Yet there are alternatives to inequality and unsustainability. Growth driven by fossil fuel consumption is not a prerequisite for a better life in broader human development terms. Investments that improve equity—in access, for example, to renewable energy, water and sanitation, and reproductive healthcare—could advance both sustainability and human development. Stronger accountability and democratic processes, in part through support for an active civil society and media, can also improve outcomes. Successful approaches rely on community management, inclusive institutions that pay particular attention to disadvantaged groups, and cross-cutting approaches that coordinate budgets and mechanisms across government agencies and development partners.

Beyond the Millennium Development Goals, the world needs a post-2015 development framework that reflects equity and sustainability; Rio+20 stands out as a key opportunity to

reach a shared understanding of how to move forward. This Report shows that approaches that integrate equity into policies and programmes and that empower people to bring about change in the legal and political arenas hold enormous promise. Growing country experiences around the world have demonstrated the potential of these approaches to generate and capture positive synergies.

The financing needed for development—including for environmental and social protection—will have to be many times greater than current official development assistance. Today’s spending on low-carbon energy sources, for example, is only 1.6 percent of even the lowest estimate of need, while spending on climate change adaptation and mitigation is around 11 percent of estimated need. Hope rests on new climate finance. While market mechanisms and private funding will be vital, they must be supported and leveraged by proactive public investment. Closing the financing gap requires innovative thinking, which this Report provides.

Beyond raising new sources of funds to address pressing environmental threats equitably, the Report advocates reforms that promote equity and voice. Financing flows need to be channelled towards the critical challenges of unsustainability and inequity—and not exacerbate existing disparities.

Providing opportunities and choices for all is the central goal of human development. We have a collective responsibility towards the least privileged among us today and in the future around the world—and a moral imperative to ensure that the present is not the enemy of the future. This Report can help us see the way forward.



Helen Clark
Administrator
United Nations Development Programme

The analysis and policy recommendations of this Report do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations Development Programme or its Executive Board. The Report is an independent publication commissioned by UNDP. The research and writing of the Report was a collaborative effort by the Human Development Report team and a group of eminent advisors led by Jeni Klugman, Director of the Human Development Report Office.

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This is my third and final year of directing the global *Human Development Report*, which, as ever, has been an enormous collaborative effort. The hard work and dedication of the Human Development Report Office team anchor the work, supported by a much broader family of researchers, advocates and officials whose commitment and vision are equally critical to our success.

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We thank all of those involved directly or indirectly in contributing to our efforts, while acknowledging sole responsibility for errors of commission and omission.

Directing the global *Human Development Report* has been a great experience for me, both personally and professionally over the past three years. The human development approach continues to demonstrate its value as a lens for critical and constructive thinking about some of the most fundamental challenges facing us today, and I am confident that the independent global reports, commissioned by UNDP, will remain as central as ever in key global debates. I wish my successor, Khalid Malik, the best of luck in taking this endeavour forward into the next decade.



Jeni Klugman
Director and lead author
Human Development Report 2011

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