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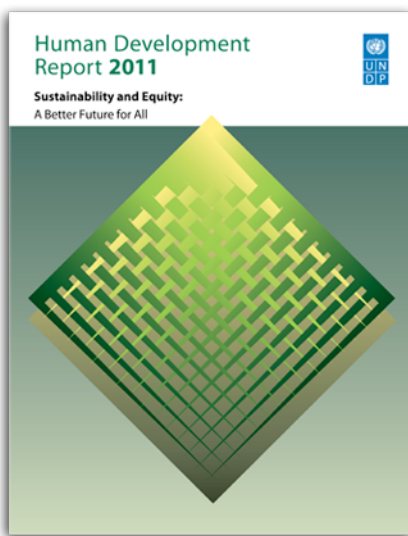
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Fighting climate change and inequalities key to progress in Africa, says Human Development Report

Copenhagen, 2 November 2011—Steady advances in human development in sub-Saharan Africa could stall and even reverse unless bold steps are taken to reduce environmental risks and inequalities in the region and around the world, says the 2011 Human Development Report, released today by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).



The Report, *Sustainability and Equity: a Better Future for All*, shows that following current trends, inequality and deteriorating environmental conditions will together pose obstacles to progress in Africa and across the globe.

By 2050, projecting recent positive regional human development trends forward, sub-Saharan Africa's average Human Development Index (HDI) rating—the Report's composite measure of income, health and education—would rise by an estimated 44 percent.

This would be the biggest increase in any region of the world—and one which would propel much of the continent into what are now classified as medium or high levels of human development achievement.

But the Report warns that increasingly probable “environmental challenges” such as more severe water and air pollution and climate change effects could reduce this regional HDI growth by 12 percent by mid-century. And a more severe ‘environmental disaster’ scenario outlined in the Report shows human development progress halting or even declining by 2050.

“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,” UNDP Administrator Helen Clark says in the foreword.

In sub-Saharan Africa—the region with the gravest inequalities as measured in the HDI—the poor, and especially women, will continue to be the most affected by such risks. They rely on natural resources for their livelihoods, have to cope with environmental hazards—such as air and water pollution and poor sanitation - and are more likely to be affected by extreme weather events.

According to the Report, changes in environmental conditions may restrict access to vital sources of energy. Currently, more than 90 percent of Africa's poor population lacks access to modern cooking fuel, more than 85 percent have limited or no access to improved sanitation and more than 60 percent have no access to electricity.

Climate change could also impact agricultural production in a region that is already food insecure. For instance, projections factoring in the impact of environmental change suggest that maize and wheat production in Southern Africa will fall sharply through 2030.

As the world community prepares for the landmark June 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the Report argues that sustainability must be approached as a matter of basic social justice, for current and future generations alike.

The report argues that at the global level, more resources should be devoted to tackling global environmental threats while boosting the representation of disadvantaged countries and groups in accessing finance.

For instance, the Report makes the case for a UN-backed initiative that would provide off-the-grid electricity services for 1.5 billion people—45 percent of them in Africa—tapping the vast potential of solar, wind and other renewable energy sources. The Report adds that this could be achieved with investments of about one-eighth of that currently spent on subsidies for fossil fuels.

The Report also calls on countries to increase funding for low-carbon development and climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives. The document advocates adoption of an international currency tax, which could raise US\$40 billion yearly or more with a levy of just 0.005 percent on commercial foreign exchange trading.

At the national level, measures must be taken to empower and reflect the needs of those most affected by climate and environmental degradation. The authors argue that broader public participation in local and national decision-making, with an emphasis on giving women a voice, would significantly contribute to reducing inequality and environmental risks.

Sub-Saharan Africa has taken encouraging steps to promote local and national participation in decision-making. For example, it does better than most regions on the proportion of women in parliaments, with a regional average of 19.8 percent, exceeding the global average of 17.7 percent.

Human Development Index

The Report shows that sub-Saharan Africa has had the highest average HDI improvement over the past decade of any region in the world. Between 1970 and 2010, countries in the lowest 25 percent of countries ranked—the majority of them African—improved their overall HDI achievement by 82 percent, twice the global average.

There have been many important gains at the national level, the Report shows: Extreme poverty has declined in both Kenya (#143) and Nigeria (#156), and these advances are attributable in part to improvements in water, sanitation, health and other living standards.

Kenya has successfully combined creative financing methods and public subsidies to provide piped water to poor households. Mauritius is the highest HDI achiever in sub-Saharan Africa (#77) followed by Gabon (#106), Botswana (#118), Namibia (#120) and South Africa (#123).

Nonetheless, sub-Saharan Africa is home to the 10 countries with the lowest HDI levels of the 187 nations and territories included in the 2011 index.

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ABOUT THIS REPORT: The annual Human Development Report is an editorially independent publication of the United Nations Development Programme. For free downloads of the 2011 Human Development Report in ten languages, plus additional reference materials on its indices and specific regional implications, please visit: <http://hdr.undp.org>.

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