

Back to the Office Report: Johannesburg Consultations

April 29th and 30th, Hofmeyr House, University of the Witwatersrand

On April 29th and 30th, Jeni Klugman and Francisco Rodriguez travelled to South Africa in order to participate in two back-to-back consultations designed to inform the thinking and shape of the global Human Development Reports. These consultations were organized in collaboration with the University of the Witwatersrand and the UNDP South Africa Office.

The first consultation, held on April 29th, was the twelfth regional consultation on the 2009 Human Development Report *Overcoming barriers: mobility and human development*. The meeting brought together 32 specialists on migration from the South African government, international organizations, academia, the private sector and non-governmental organizations. This consultation served as a way to get early feedback on some of the key messages of the upcoming 2009 HDR as well as to evaluate the receptiveness of an audience which in many respects will be similar to our target audiences in many developing countries. Selected specialists were asked to comment on the draft of the 2009 HDR, although such a draft was not circulated broadly among the participants in the event.

The second consultation, held on April 30th, was the third regional consultation on the 2010 Human Development Report (the first two were held in New Delhi on September 11, 2008 and Rio de Janeiro on November 19, 2008). It involved 22 participants from international organizations, academia, government and non-governmental organizations. Similarly to previous consultations, this one was organized as a semi-structured brainstorming meeting on the different potential approaches to the 2010 report, loosely structured around assessment of progress on human development, measurement of human development, and the impact of the global economic crisis.

Day 1: HDR 2009.

After an introduction by Ms. Elizabeth Fong, UNDP, which highlighted the extensive set of consultations involved in the 2009 Human Development Report and the way in which the key idea of mobility as a component of human freedom could be made an integral part of development strategies in the Southern Africa region, HDRO Director Jeni Klugman presented an overview of the process and structure of the 2009 Human Development Report. She emphasized the substantial effort that was being put into understanding migration between and within developing countries as well as the intrinsic value of mobility, the complexities involved in assessing the instrumental value of movement, and the associated policy implications of HDRO's analysis as conveyed by the core package of proposed reforms.

Aurelia Kazadi Wa-Kabwe-Segatti followed up with comments on the draft of the 2009 HDR. She praised many positive aspects such as the way in which the report can help start to reverse the OECD bias in migration studies and how it shows that ignoring mobility can be counterproductive. She then offered a set of critical comments, in particular regarding the lack of emphasis on the connection between internal and international migration and the lack of attention to the urban dimension. She expressed skepticism about the application of the capabilities approach, pointed to the lack of sufficient attention to regional bodies, and questioned whether the de-politicization of migration that the report seemed to be seeking actually made sense. The following discussion highlighted the need to emphasize urban slums and urban planning and need to distinguish between outcomes from voluntary as opposed to forced migration.

The second session was kicked off with a presentation by Loren Landau on the key contours of the migratory process in South Africa. He started out by emphasizing that in many cases migration may be the lowest cost way to promote regional economic development, and that current policy and practice makes the worst of migration. In South Africa, international migrants generally better educated and entrepreneurial, have twice the employment rate of South Africans, and there is little evidence that they lower native wages. He argued for more and better data, a policy framework that does not go against the regional agenda, and the need for 'mobility mainstreaming' policies for domestic and international movements. In her comments, Lee Ann de la Hunt of the Home Affairs Ministry defended South African migration policies and emphasized the need to weight the benefits of migration against its costs. The ensuing general discussion emphasized the need for clarity as to what these costs and benefits were, what type of legal regimes were appropriate, and the identification of the reforms with the highest payoffs.

The third session featured two presentations. The first one, by Miriam Altman, looked at the economic benefits of migration and highlighted the positive effects both for developing and developed countries. Despite these effects, there is considerable cultural and political resistance, highlighting the need to integrate migrants. In the case of South Africa, where positive selection appears to be very strong, there is a real risk that an underclass of natives is created. In order to avoid this, fundamental reforms at the health and educational level are required. The second presentation, by Ravi Naidoo, discussed in greater detail some of the specificities of the South African case. While agreeing on the benefits of high-skilled migration, he pointed out that there are a lot more questions about the desirability of low-skilled migration, particularly given the fiscal effects. The discussion that ensued centered on the need to have a regional approach and human rights violations in the South African case as well as understanding lack of coordination between different levels of government.

A final wrap-up session was led by initial comments from Jeni Klugman who emphasized the need to move from a policy context in which migration was treated as something to be feared and controlled to one in which it was recognized as a normal part of development. She also highlighted issues of social cohesion, the political economy of reforms, policy coherence and the need to consider regional arrangements and conventions. The final discussion touched on the follow-up to the report in order to ensure its policy relevance and how to get donors and governments interested in the discussion.

Day 2: 2010 HDR

The second day started with an introduction by Elizabeth Wong which highlighted the propitiousness of the 2010 anniversary for a fresh look at the human development approach, the need for a critical review of what has been achieved in improvements in human development, and the contribution of the South African NHDRs. HDRO Director Jeni Klugman made a presentation of the key ideas for the 2010 report, emphasizing that we are still looking at diverse ideas and trying to brainstorm on the main concepts. She outlined the broad principles and values of people centered development, independence, and fostering of informed public debate which had inspired the reports since 1990. She also pointed out that since the initial HDR significant improvements in measurement and new challenges to human development have arisen. The broad starting point of the 2010 report is that human development is an unfinished agenda.

Johannes Fedderke presented an overview of progress and setbacks to human development in Southern Africa. He emphasized that the region is quite heterogeneous, and that while there are signs of improvements, some core challenges remain. The region as a whole has grown, with the exception of Zimbabwe and the DRC. In particular, there are key questions regarding the sustainability of these improvements. The countries of the region have low investment rates and there has been a huge decline in infrastructure investment. Expenditure on human capital is considerable, particularly as a fraction of GDP, but it appears that there is significant deterioration in the quality of education. The ensuing discussion centered on the capacity that these aggregate statistics had to capture a more disaggregated picture, and in particular whether they were hiding the effect of high/increasing inequality. The need to consider issues of aggregation more generally was raised, including whether it made sense to look at sub-national and inequality-adjusted HDIs.

The next session dealt with understanding the effect of global crises on human development in Southern Africa as well as on developing countries. Francisco Rodríguez, Head of HDRO Research, discussed the global economic crisis and how it could impact our thinking about development. It is still too early to tell whether the crisis will be as deep as the Great Depression or not, but some historical comparisons appear to suggest that up until now it is quite similar. Large recessions are not uncommon in the developing world – it is just uncommon to see them on a global scale. There is significant debate about the appropriate policy response and long-term implications, such as whether the crisis will engender structural change in the world economy and whether developing countries emerge in a position of relative strength or weakness. Jackie Cilliers, from the Institute for Security Studies, discussed in detail the value added from the concept of human security for understanding the current situation of the Southern Africa region. In particular, the HS approach raises deep questions about the joint responsibilities of developing and developed countries in the provision of global human security. Africa is the world's worst conflict-affected region and progress requires respect for a rules-based system in which both developing and developed countries respect the rules. The ensuing discussion centered on the role of the state, the importance of a gender-based dimension and the relevance of primary commodities for understanding economic performance and conflict-proneness of sub-Saharan Africa.

The last session was a more informal discussion of key measurement issues that could be revisited in the 2010 report. The discussion centered on the possible value added of introducing changes to the HDI, and in particular of adding one or more additional dimensions. On the one hand, the simplicity of the HDI is one of its great virtues; on the other hand, significant improvements in measurement have occurred over the past 20 years. Issues were raised with the dangers of aggregating too much into one indicator and losing some of the most valuable information about structural and social transformations. The need to look at public accountability instead of just at formal measures of elections was brought up. The discussion concluded with an outline of the process forward, and the need to set up working groups on all of these dimensions.