



HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2002

Deepening democracy in
a fragmented world



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Foreword

This *Human Development Report* is first and foremost about the idea that politics is as important to successful development as economics. Sustained poverty reduction requires equitable growth—but it also requires that poor people have political power. And the best way to achieve that in a manner consistent with human development objectives is by building strong and deep forms of democratic governance at all levels of society.

That assertion remains controversial. Many detractors suggest that, particularly in developing countries, democracy tends to be too messy, uncontrolled and prone to manipulation and abuse to provide the stability and continuity needed for sustained social and economic reform. But as the Report makes clear, such arguments are wrong on two grounds.

First, while there is clearly scope for legitimate and lively debate on what policies and practices are best for securing economic growth, democracies are on balance no worse than other forms of government in boosting economic performance. And democracies are notably better in meeting the most pressing social needs of citizens, particularly at moments of crisis or displacement that most affect poor people. Second—and just as important—democratic participation is a critical end of human development, not just a means of achieving it.

Nevertheless, whether we are talking about global governance systems confronting the myriad challenges of an increasingly interconnected world, national governments struggling to meet the needs of their citizens or the corporate and private forces in national and global life thrown up by the economic, social and technological changes of recent decades, it is clear that effective democratic governance is not yet a reality.

As the Report also shows, at current trends a significant portion of the world's states are unlikely to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, including the overarching target of halving extreme poverty by 2015. Many countries are poorer than 10, 20 and in some cases 30 years ago. Just as troubling, the flush of euphoria that saw the number of countries embracing many of the hallmarks of democracy—particularly multiparty elections—soar to 140 over the past 15 years is starting to turn into frustration and despair.

While there are some welcome and notable exceptions, in many of these countries governments have failed to provide the jobs, services and personal security their citizens so badly need and want. A growing number of this new wave of democratic governments—and even some longer-established ones—have slipped back into increasingly undemocratic practices, with leaders altering constitutions, bullying weak legislatures and judiciaries, and openly manipulating elections, often with a devastating effect on human development.

Further, in countries where majority rule through the ballot-box is established, it is often at the expense of minority rights: too often the absence of a democratic culture means that those who lose elections are either persecuted by the winners or refuse to accept legitimate electoral outcomes. Democracies require not just legitimate governments but legitimate oppositions too.

In some of these countries—and in many others that have yet to take even timid steps towards democracy—the result is an increasingly alienated and angry population, especially young people. That hostility is triggering a backlash against both existing regimes and the impersonal forces of globalization. In the most extreme cases radical or fundamentalist groups are embracing

violent solutions to their grievances, as tragically illustrated by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and their global repercussions.

When combined with growing transnational threats, from HIV/AIDS to climate change, and exacerbated by a global economic system that on most measures remains firmly tilted in favour of industrial countries, the result is a growing crisis in governance in many parts of the world. From the streets of Seattle, Washington, and Genoa, Italy, to the factories and fields of large parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America, citizens everywhere have been losing faith in the ability and commitment of their political leaders to tackle these pressing challenges.

How should we respond?

It has become common in recent years to hear policy-makers and development experts describe good governance as the “missing link” to successful growth and economic reform in developing countries. But attention has focused almost exclusively on economic processes and administrative efficiency.

The central message of this Report is that effective governance is central to human development, and lasting solutions need to go beyond such narrow issues and be firmly grounded in democratic politics in the broadest sense. In other words, not democracy as practiced by any particular country or group of countries—but rather a set of principles and core values that allow poor people to gain power through participation while protecting them from arbitrary, unaccountable actions in their lives by governments, multinational corporations and other forces.

That means ensuring that institutions and power are structured and distributed in a way

that gives real voice and space to poor people and creates mechanisms through which the powerful—whether political leaders, corporations or other influential actors—can be held accountable for their actions.

At the national level such a deepening of democracy requires a focus on strengthening the democratic state institutions that form the necessary foundation for achieving any broader objectives. And at the global level it highlights the urgency of forging a much more democratic space in which international institutions and transnational coalitions operate with the highest degree of transparency and give developing countries both a seat at the table and a meaningful say in decisions that affect them.

More practically, for the work of agencies like UNDP, it also highlights the importance of devoting resources and expertise to the difficult question of how to give these ideas practical form by identifying and helping countries implement policies and practices—in areas ranging from strengthening parliaments to building accountable police forces to decentralizing power to the local level—that will best achieve these overarching objectives.

Like all *Human Development Reports*, this is an unapologetically independent analysis aimed at advancing the debate on human development. As such it is not a formal statement of UNDP or UN policy. Nevertheless, I believe that its central message is very relevant for the broader work of UNDP and its partners. The Millennium Development Goals are still achievable. But we will only succeed in meeting them if national and global leaders have the vision and courage to first confront these critical issues of democratic governance.



Mark Malloch Brown
Administrator, UNDP

The analysis and policy recommendations of this Report do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations Development Programme, its Executive Board or its Member States. The Report is an independent publication commissioned by UNDP. It is the fruit of a collaborative effort by a team of eminent consultants and advisers and the *Human Development Report* team. Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, Director of the Human Development Report Office, led the effort, with extensive advice and collaboration from Nancy Birdsall, Special Adviser to the Administrator.

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Sakiko Fukuda-Parr
Director

Human Development Report 2002

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