

# Human Development Report 2011

## **Sustainability and Equity:** A Better Future for All



Published for the  
United Nations  
Development  
Programme  
(UNDP)

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1 UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA

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ISBN: 9780230363311

Palgrave Macmillan  
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS and  
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010

Companies and representatives throughout the world

Palgrave Macmillan in the UK is an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library and the Library of Congress.

Printed in the United States by Consolidated Graphics. Cover is printed on Tembec's 12 pt Kallima coated-one-side paper. Text pages are printed on Cascades Mills' 60# Rolland Opaque Smooth text that is 50% de-inked post-consumer recycled fibre. Both sheets are Forest Stewardship Council Certified, elemental chlorine-free papers and printed with vegetable-based inks and produced by means of environmentally compatible technology.

Editing and production: Communications Development Incorporated, Washington DC  
Design: Gerry Quinn

For a list of any errors or omissions found subsequent to printing please visit our website at <http://hdr.undp.org>

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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.**

# Acknowledgements

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.

An academic advisory panel provided valuable guidance, for which we thank Bina Agarwal, Sabina Alkire, Anthony Atkinson, Tariq Banuri, François Bourguignon, William Easterly, Daniel Esty, Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, Enrico Giovannini, Stephany Griffith-Jones, Brian Hammond, Geoffrey Heal, Cesar Hidalgo, Richard Jolly, Gareth Jones, Martin Khor, Mwangi S. Kimenyi, Adil Najam, Eric Neumayer, Michael Noble, José Antonio Ocampo, Marcio Pochmann, Henry Richardson, Ingrid Robeyns, José Salazar-Xirinachs, Frances Stewart, Pavan Sukhdev, Miguel Székely, Dennis Trewin, Leonardo Villar and Tarik Yousef.

A reconstituted statistical advisory panel, comprising official statisticians and academic experts, provided excellent advice on the methodology and data sources related to the family of human development indices: Anthony Atkinson, Grace Bediako, Haishan Fu, Enrico Giovannini, Peter Harper, Gareth Jones, Irena Krizman, Charles Leyeka Lufumpa, Michael Noble, Eduardo Nunes, Marcio Pochmann, Eric Swanson, Miguel Székely and Dato' Hajan Wan Ramlah Wan Abd. Raof. More generally, the United Nations Statistical Commission provided useful feedback from member states.

An extensive series of consultations involved some 500 researchers, civil society advocates, development practitioners and policy-makers from around the globe. Twenty-six events were held between February 2010 and September 2011—in Amman, Bamako, Bangkok, Beijing, Berkeley, Bonn, Copenhagen, Dubai, Geneva, Kigali, Ljubljana, London, Nairobi, New Delhi, New York, Paris, Quito, San José—with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) country and regional offices. Support from partnering institutions, listed at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2011/consultations>, is also gratefully acknowledged.

Background research, commissioned on a range of thematic issues, is available online in our Human Development Research Papers series and listed in *References*. Special thanks to Sabina Alkire and the Oxford Human Development and Poverty Initiative for their continued collaboration and efforts to improve our measure of multidimensional poverty.

The statistics used in this Report rely on various databases. We are particularly grateful to the Carbon Dioxide Information Analysis Center of the US Department of Energy, Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy, Robert Barro and Jong-Wha Lee, Food and Agricultural Organization, Gallup World Poll, Global Footprint Network, ICF Macro, International Monetary Fund, International Energy Agency, International Labour Organization, International Union for Conservation of Nature, Inter-Parliamentary Union, Luxembourg Income Study, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics, United Nations Children's Fund, World Bank and World Health Organization.

Claudio Montenegro conducted the analysis on the World Bank's International Income Distribution Database, Suman Seth on the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions and Kenneth Harttgen on the ICF Macro Demographic and Health Surveys.

A UNDP Readers Group, representing all the regional and policy bureaus, and other colleagues, too numerous to list, provided valuable advice throughout the preparation of the Report. Particular thanks are due to Jennifer Laughlin, Charles MacPherson and colleagues at the Bureau of Development Policy. The HD Network, which comprises some 1,500 UNDP staff, academics and nongovernmental organizations, generated a range of useful ideas and feedback through online discussions. Martha Mai of the UN Office for Project Services provided administrative support.

Several hard working interns made important contributions over the course of the year: Raphaëlle Aubert, Uttara Balakrishnan, Luis Fernando Cervantes, Nicole Glanemann, Faith Kim, Meng Lu, Francesca Rappocciolo, Andrés Méndez Ruiz, Fredrik M. Sjöberg and Seol Yoo.

A team at Communications Development Incorporated, led by Bruce Ross-Larson, with Meta de Coquereaumont, Rob Elson, Jack Harlow, Christopher Trott and Elaine Wilson, edited, proofread and laid out the Report. Gerry Quinn designed the Report and created the figures.

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*

# Contents

Foreword	iv	Other adverse repercussions	57
Acknowledgements	vi	Disequalizing effects of extreme events	59
<b>OVERVIEW</b>	<b>1</b>	Disempowerment and environmental degradation	61
		Gender equality	61
		Power inequalities	64
<b>CHAPTER 1</b>		<b>CHAPTER 4</b>	
<b>Why sustainability and equity?</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>Positive synergies—winning strategies for the environment, equity and human development</b>	<b>67</b>
Are there limits to human development?	14	Scaling up to address environmental deprivations and build resilience	67
Competing paradigms	15	Energy	67
The critical role of uncertainty	16	Water access, water security and sanitation	71
Sustainability, equity and human development	17	<b>Averting degradation</b>	<b>73</b>
What we mean by sustainability	17	Expanding reproductive choice	73
What we mean by equity	18	Supporting community management of natural resources	75
Why centre on equitable sustainability?	19	Conserving biodiversity while promoting equity	76
Our focus of inquiry	20	<b>Addressing climate change—risks and realities</b>	<b>77</b>
		Equitable and adaptive disaster responses	77
		Innovative social protection	78
<b>CHAPTER 2</b>		<b>CHAPTER 5</b>	
<b>Patterns and trends in human development, equity and environmental indicators</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>Rising to the policy challenges</b>	<b>81</b>
Progress and prospects	23	Business-as-usual is neither equitable nor sustainable	81
Progress in human development	23	Rethinking our development model—levers for change	83
Equity trends	28	Integrating equity concerns into green economy policies	83
Prospects—and environmental threats	30	Empowering people to bring about change	86
Threats to sustaining progress	31	<b>Financing investment and the reform agenda</b>	<b>90</b>
Climate change	32	Where does the world stand?	90
Chronic environmental threats	37	What development assistance can do	90
Success in promoting sustainable and equitable human development	41	<b>Innovations at the global level</b>	<b>94</b>
		Innovative new sources to meet the financing gap	94
		Ensuring equity and voice in governing and in access to finance	96
		Enabling universal access to energy	98
<b>CHAPTER 3</b>		Notes	99
<b>Tracing the effects—understanding the relations</b>	<b>45</b>	References	105
A poverty lens	45		
Deprivations facing the poor	46		
Understanding the relations	47		
Environmental threats to people's well-being	50		
Harming health	51		
Impeding education	54		
Endangering livelihoods	54		



## STATISTICAL ANNEX

Readers guide	123
Key to HDI countries and ranks, 2011	126

### Statistical tables

1	Human Development Index and its components	127
2	Human Development Index trends, 1980–2011	131
3	Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index	135
4	Gender Inequality Index and related indicators	139
5	Multidimensional Poverty Index	143
6	Environmental sustainability	146
7	Human development effects of environmental threats	150
8	Perceptions about well-being and the environment	154
9	Education and health	158
10	Population and economy	162
	<b>Technical notes</b>	<b>167</b>
	<b>Regions</b>	<b>174</b>
	<b>Statistical references</b>	<b>175</b>

### BOXES

1.1	Environmental risk management—gambling with the planet	16
1.2	Measures of sustainability—a conceptual overview	18
2.1	Overcoming the democratic deficit—empowerment and the Arab Spring	24
2.2	What can we learn from trends in aggregate measures of sustainability?	25
2.3	Consumption and human development	27
2.4	Sustainability, crises and inequality	30
2.5	Are people aware of climate change and its causes?	33
2.6	Impacts of climate change on small island developing states	36
2.7	Biodiversity—the accelerating loss of our ecosystems	38
2.8	Land grabbing—a growing phenomenon?	39
2.9	Hazardous waste and the Basel Convention	41
2.10	Positive synergies in Sweden and Costa Rica	42
3.1	Trends in multidimensional poverty	50
3.2	Air pollution and its health consequences in China	52

3.3	Indigenous peoples, land rights and livelihoods	55
3.4	Women's participation in community forest management	65
4.1	From subsidy to self-respect—the revolution of Community-led Total Sanitation	73
4.2	Culture, norms and environmental protection	76
5.1	Distributional impacts of policies to cut pollution	84
5.2	Innovative financing schemes for water and sanitation	93
5.3	The currency transaction tax: newfound feasibility	95

### FIGURES

1.1	An illustration of policy synergies and trade-offs between equity and sustainability	20
2.1	The association with carbon dioxide emissions per capita is positive and strong for income, positive for the HDI and nonexistent for health and education	26
2.2	Countries with higher growth also experience faster increase in carbon dioxide emissions per capita	26
2.3	Patterns of risk change: environmental transitions and human development	27
2.4	High HIV/AIDS prevalence rates in Southern Africa stall improvements in health inequality	29
2.5	Scenarios projecting impacts of environmental risks on human development through 2050	31
2.6	Scenarios projecting slowdown and reversals of convergence in human development due to environmental risks through 2050	31
2.7	Average world temperatures have risen since 1900	32
2.8	Sources of greenhouse gas growth	34
2.9	Rising temperatures and reduced rainfall	35
2.10	Some regions deforest, others reforest and afforest	38
3.1	Multidimensional Poverty Index—a focus on the most deprived	46
3.2	Environmental deprivations in the MPI	46
3.3	Environmental deprivations are greatest for access to modern cooking fuel	47
3.4	The share of the population with environmental deprivations rises with the MPI but with much variation around the trend	48
3.5	Deaths attributable to environmental risks are associated with high MPI levels	51
3.6	Gender equality and contraceptive prevalence are closely linked	62

3.7	Unmet contraceptive need is higher among the multidimensionally poor	63	2.3	Disaster-related casualties and costs, median annual values by HDI group, 1971–1990 and 1991–2010	37
4.1	Large regional differences in the share of multidimensionally poor people lacking electricity	68	2.4	Good performers on the environment, equity and human development, most recent year available	42
5.1	Integrating equity into policy design	84	3.1	Ten countries with the lowest share of environmental deprivations among the multidimensionally poor, most recent year available for 2000–2010	48
5.2	Official development assistance falls far short of needs	91	3.2	Average time per week spent fetching wood and water, rural areas of selected Sub-Saharan African countries	58
5.3	Key elements in transforming climate financing efforts	97	3.3	Attitudes towards the environment, by gender, low and very high HDI countries, 2010	64

## MAP

2.1	Temperature changes are greatest in polar regions and higher latitudes	34
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## TABLES

2.1	Growth in carbon dioxide emissions and its drivers, 1970–2007	32
2.2	Projected impacts of a half-metre rise in sea level by 2050	36

4.1	Key equity aspects of a menu of instruments to reduce carbon dioxide emissions	70
4.2	Social protection for adaptation and disaster risk reduction: benefits and challenges	78