

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND EQUITY

Wm. Gary Kline

Department of History and Political Science, Georgia Southwestern State University, USA

Keywords: education, equity, food distribution, gender, health, human development, hunger, income distribution, technology, and wealth distribution.

Contents

1. Introduction
 2. The Distribution of Goods Within and Between Societies
 - 2.1 Wealth and Income
 - 2.2 Food, Health Care, Education, and Technology
 - 2.3 Political Participation and Rights
 3. Gender, Equity, and Human Development
- Glossary
Bibliography
Biographical Sketch

Summary

Human development is a shared enterprise, which goal serves the interests of all Humankind. Thus, for its success it must draw upon the resources and the diverse talents and capabilities of the broadest possible spectrum of humanity. But questions of equity are complex and multifaceted, involving all of the issues addressed in the ensuing essay and many others. It cannot be disentangled from questions of human development. Moreover, it must be reconciled for the multiplicity of groups that comprise the global family: there must be equity *between* nations and *within*, between ethnic groups and religious groups, between races, between classes, between genders, between generations, and, ultimately, between the many species, which share this planet.

The subtle, steady degradation of the environment is a serious issue that raises questions of equity between nations, since some are more responsible than others for the harm, but the burdens will be borne often by the least responsible. For example, global warming precipitated mostly by the economic activities of the major industrial countries may result in the flooding of the Maldives, and of much of Bangladesh, countries which bear almost no responsibility for the phenomenon. There are also questions of equity between generations, between those living, with the power to affect the future, and the generations to come, who have no direct representation and no voice. It is a question, too, of equity as fundamental fairness, between the human race and the other living things that share our planet, again a relatively voiceless constituency. Among the peoples and nations presently living, concludes a recent *Human Development Report* from the United Nations Development Programme, “global inequalities in income and living standards have reached grotesque proportions.” By their very nature, these glaring disparities suffuse all human relationships, distorting both justice and

development. They degrade the level of discourse, driving people to extremes and alienating them from one another, complicating all efforts to promote human development, peace, and justice.

Inequities are not easily reversed, but must be addressed directly. Emphatically, neither human development nor equity can be assumed as a by-product of economic growth or any other facile or automatic process. Both equity and human development depend for their realization on a spirit of justice and of mutual respect, concern, and empathy. They require also commitments to equal rights, with appropriate codes for the protection of all peoples, and to an open and fair structure of participation, at local, national, and global levels. Equity and human development are, thus, inextricably interwoven; one cannot be realized without the other. Indeed, this is the large lesson gleaned from past efforts to promote development: neither valued end can be realized without the extraordinary work and commitment of a united front of dedicated people of good will and reason.

1. Introduction

Peoples all over the world and throughout history have demonstrated a persistent concern for justice. The realization of justice is a universal theme found in philosophy and ethics, religion, world literature and myths, politics, law, and in the thought and daily struggles of peoples everywhere to provide for themselves and their children decent, fulfilling lives. Most would agree that one measure of the progress of a society is the degree to which its laws conform to accepted standards and notions of justice. While one can discern broad agreement regarding many facets of justice, the subject is notoriously complex and people disagree in the details of what constitutes justice in a given situation. Lawmakers may attempt to embody notions of justice in their products, but laws frequently are admixed with elements of self-interest and confused thought, so that a country's legal system will not accord fully with justice. The same may be said of any social system.

This realization leads us further to the concept of *equity*. If every legal and social system is in some degree flawed, then true justice resides not in the letter of the law, but in the spirit. Equity has been defined variously as fairness, impartiality, and the application of principles derived from conscience or natural law; and it flows from the belief that the rules and the ordinary workings of a society may not always eventuate in justice. Especially in contemporary times it connotes, as well, egalitarianism and democratization. That is, a measure of equality is expected in any developed society, such that laws are evenly applied, goods and burdens are not too disproportionately assigned, and the essential underpinnings of mutual respect and social cohesion are established. Equity may be viewed, thus, as a major goal of any decent society and as one of the most deeply rooted aspirations of Humankind as a whole.

Justice qua equity, however, is central not merely for psychological reasons, i.e., not simply because people crave justice. But it is indeed bound inextricably with human development, though again in highly complex ways. The notion of human development, or a developed existence, has likewise been debated for many centuries. There is a broad consensus about the elements of human development, though, which has emerged in the contemporary period. For example, it is generally accepted that human

development entails the opportunity to lead relatively long, healthy, and productive lives. Implicit in this are other conditions conducive to such lives. People should have adequate food for healthy diets. They should have access to decent housing, to health care, and to education facilities necessary for developing and sustaining their productive and creative potentials.

They need opportunities for meaningful work, interspersed with leisure time. Development would permit people to have and raise families in healthy and nourishing communities. They need environments that are reasonably secure for themselves and their families, insofar as security can be realized through human efforts. Such can be promoted, for example, through the extension of and firm commitment to political and human rights and freedoms in a society, and to mutual respect and the dignity of the individual. An environment conducive to human development, intent upon securing freedoms, would offer people a growing range of choices or options, within socially responsible parameters.

This emphasis on human development should be distinguished from the human capital approach, which views human development as a means to other ends, often the more intensive exploitation of natural resources in the generation of greater wealth. On the contrary, human development is assumed here to be in itself an end. The distinction is not merely academic, however, since any approach that subordinates people to higher ends is vulnerable to arguments demonstrating how human exploitation might increase the sought after goal, such as the creation of more wealth. Rather, means that degrade human dignity and welfare must be judged as patently inconsistent with real human development. Nor can the concept of human development be reasonably or safely detached from the kernel of religious and philosophical thought of virtually every people around the globe – East and West, North and South: that the highest stage of human development assumes the spiritual, moral, or intellectual elevation of the individual, culminating in virtue or wisdom.

Measures of such qualities, however, are woefully inadequate and illusive; material measures are much easier to apply to the situation. Thus, human development is too frequently conflated with these more accessible measures of material development, often Gross National Product (GNP) or Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Because human development is not faithfully reflected in the quantitative measures, which are near at hand, they must be deemed indicators rather than true measures of development. A life of abundance does not guarantee that an individual will develop in the sense of the term as defined above. Nevertheless, the quantitative measures are illuminating and useful indicators of the direction of Humankind. They are essential tools in the formulation and evaluation of policies, and in the crystallization of the objectives of development policies. Dissatisfaction with the gross economic measures of development led to the development of alternative measures with more emphasis on social and political factors affecting the human condition.

Since 1990 the United Nations has used a broader set of measures of human development, labeled the Human Development Index (HDI), which includes the following components: life expectancy; adult literacy and gross enrollment in first, second, and third levels of schooling; and real GDP per capita, adjusted for the cost of

living in each country (according to purchasing power parity, or PPP\$). While this remains only a rough indicator of human development, it has served to draw serious attention to a broader range of measures, which the United Nations Development Programme includes in its annual *Human Development Report*. A subtler picture of the struggle for development emerges when the wide range of economic, social, and political measures covered in this report are examined carefully. Indicators like the Gini ratio, so named for its originator, Italian economist Corrado Gini, which attempts to measure disparities, can also be useful in supplementing our understanding of human development issues.

It is clear that human development presupposes a certain level of material development, which makes life possible at all and conditions the opportunities for cultivating human talents, capacities, and potentials. That is, full human development would seem to be precluded, absent certain basic requirements like food, water, shelter, and relative peace and personal security. The flourishing of the human spirit now entails more than the basic needs, but also access to a range of resources including education, health care, and jobs and income. Upon examining such quantitative indicators as are available to us, a picture of human progress toward development emerges that is equivocal.

In some respects, the indicators give reasons for optimism. Over the past several decades, infant mortality and maternal mortality rates have been brought down; the *percentage* of people suffering from hunger and malnutrition has likewise been reduced. Food production per capita grew by almost one-quarter during the 1990s. Infant mortality fell by 18 per thousand and the percentage of one year olds who have been immunized went from 70 to 89. Access to education has been broadened worldwide, reflected is a 12 percent gain in the adult literacy rate – to 76 percent – during the same period. In 84 countries, including 49 in the developing world, life expectancy has risen above 70 years. Just ten years ago, only 55 countries had life expectancies of 70 or above. The economic activity rate for women rose by more than six percent during the last decade of the twentieth century. Clearly, significant accomplishments can be seen in many areas of development.

On the other hand, the absolute number of people in poverty and malnourished has remained about the same or has grown in some places. Some 800 to 900 million people are still seriously malnourished. About the same number of people are yet illiterate. The gap between the wealthy and the poor, among countries and within, has become almost a chasm and continues to grow. The richest one-fifth of the Earth's people consumes 16 times as much food as the poorest one-fifth of humanity. About a billion and a half people are expected to die before age 60. Nearly a billion people lack access to basic health care and an estimated 2.6 billion people do not have basic sanitation. The world is plagued by a set of new and familiar health problems and by social ills such as civil strife and crime. The number of people infected with human immunodeficiency virus or acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) more than doubled in the 1990s, to about 33 million. In some areas of the world, particularly countries formerly part of the Soviet Union and some countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, health indicators have deteriorated in recent years, actually resulting in declining life expectancies. Victims of wars populate the swollen numbers of refugees, now estimated at over 21 million, not

including the 30 million classified as “internally displaced persons.” So while progress is evident in many respects, the distance yet to travel is daunting and substantial.

Population trends	Total population (millions)			Total fertility rate		Annual population growth rate (%)		Dependency ratio (%)	
	1975	2001	2015	1970 - 1975	2000 - 2005	1975-2001	2001-2015	1997	2015
World	4 068	6 148	7 197	4.5	2.7	1.6	1.1	59.6	50.6
Least developed countries	354	684	942	6.6	5.1	2.5	2.3	84.8	70.8
All developing countries	2 961	4 864	5 868	5.4	2.9	1.9	1.4	62.5	50.7
High income countries	782	936	998	2.2	1.7	0.7	0.5	49.7	52.7
Arab states	143	290	390	6.7	3.8	2.7	2.1	74.3	57.4
Central & Eastern Europe & CIS	367	410	398	2.5	1.4	0.5	- 0.2	51.2	44.7
Latin America & Caribbean	318	523	623	5.1	2.5	1.9	1.3	61.5	50.2
South Asia	842	1 455	1 805	5.6	3.3	2.1	1.6	68.1	49.8
East Asia & the Pacific	1 311	1 900	2 125	5.0	2.0	1.4	0.8	60.0	45.8
Sub-Saharan Africa	306	626	843	6.8	5.4	2.8	2.1	91.4	77.6

Source: *Human Development Report 2003*

Table 1: Population Trends

2. The Distribution of Goods Within and Between Societies

Questions of equity have become increasingly central to continued human development and progress, though. Equity, as indicated above, is essentially a question of distributive justice. What is “fair” or “just” is, in some degree, a subjective evaluation. But a combination of common sense, logic, reflection, and empathy often directs Humankind to a shared sensibility. Moreover, it is here posited that any distribution of benefits and

burdens that significantly undermines human development and well being in general must be deemed inequitable. This follows from the assumption that human development is an end in itself, rather than a means to other goals, and any social, political, economic, or other arrangements that hamper such development are consequently contraindicated. The data that serve as gauges of equity and human development, and which are increasingly abundant, accessible, and suggestive, therefore should be more carefully scrutinized.

-
-
-

TO ACCESS ALL THE 25 PAGES OF THIS CHAPTER,
Visit: <http://www.eolss.net/Eolss-sampleAllChapter.aspx>

Bibliography

Fields, G. (2001). *Distribution and Development: A New Look at the Developing World*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation. [The author studies the linkages and effects of economic growth on issues of income distribution and mobility, poverty, and the quality of life, and he offers case examples from Asia and Latin America]

Food and Agriculture Organization. (2002). *The State of Food Insecurity in the World*. Rome: FAO (available at <http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/y7352e/y7352e00.htm>). [The FAO issues annual reports with analysis and an abundance of statistics on the state of world agriculture, food production, nutrition, land use, rural labor, and other important indicators of distribution]

Galbraith, J.K. and Berner, M., eds. (2001). *Inequality and Industrial Change: A Global View*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [This book offers a thoughtful collection of essays focused on the complex ways in which industrialization, development, and inequality are related]

Hewitt, T., Johnson, H., and Wield, D. (1993). *Industrialization and Development*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [This work considers various trends and theories of development and the effects on gender relations, the environment, technology, and culture, among other dimensions]

Kent, G. (1984). *The Political Economy of Hunger: The Silent Holocaust*. New York: Praeger Publishers. [Malnutrition and hunger are powerful expressions of world inequities, and the author of this book offers an insightful analysis of how global forces contribute to exacerbate these serious problems]

Kiely, R. (1998). *Industrialization and Development: A Comparative Analysis*. London: UCL Press, Ltd. [The author examines competing notions of industrialization and offers case studies from particular countries to draw conclusions]

Lipton, M. (1977). *Why Poor People Stay Poor: A Study of Urban Bias in World Development*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. [This is a classic look at a continuing problem, urban bias in most development strategies from which stems much of the inequality we see in the world]

Maddison, A. (2001). *The World Economy: A Millennial Perspective*. Paris: OECD Development Centre. [This work is a useful compendium of information to help the reader get an overview of long-range, world economic development and growth, and to see patterns and linkages between economies]

Milanovic, B. (1999). *True World Income Distribution, 1988 and 1993: First Calculation Based on Household Surveys Alone*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank. [As the name of the work clearly suggests, this study provides a realistic and alarming appraisal of the growth of world inequality based on extensive household surveys]

Seligson, Mitchell A. & Passe-Smith, John T., eds. (1998). *Development and Underdevelopment: The Political Economy of Global Inequality*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers. [A collection of essays by noted scholars, the book spans a wide range of issues related to equity and inequality, from theories of development to culture and environment]

Sen, A. (1992). *Inequality Re-examined*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. [Indian-born economist and Nobel laureate Sen, who has spent many years examining global poverty and inequality, offers important insights into the issues]

United Nations Development Programme. (2003). *Human Development Report 2003*. New York: Oxford University Press. [This annual report makes available to researchers and others numerous indicators and a wealth of information, helping to make possible the evaluation of global change and development over time]

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund. (2004). *The State of the World's Children 2004*. New York: Oxford University Press. (available at http://www.unicef.org/publications/index_4810.html) [UNICEF is a reliable source of information pertaining especially to the status of children and, by extension, of the state of inequality among the world's peoples]

United Nations Statistics Division. <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/default.htm> [Through its statistics Division the UN makes an extensive database generally available, which includes essential statistics on population, trade, industry, energy, gender, many social indicators, and much more, from virtually every country and territory in the world]

United Nations University – UNDP World Institute for Development Economics Research. (available at <http://www.wider.unu.edu/wiid/wiid.htm>) [This on-line database, by its own description, “collects and stores information on income inequality for developed, developing, and transition countries in an easily retrievable, exportable, and analyzable format”]

World Bank. (2003). *The World Bank Annual Report 2003*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank. [The World Bank produces several annual reports with information on global trade and finance, aid, consumption, and many key indicators of development]

World Health Organization. (2004). *The World Health Report 2004*. Geneva: WHO. [The WHO offers probably the definitive source of statistics and information on global health and therefore provides key indicators of quality of life and extent of inequality]

Biographical Sketch

Wm. Gary Kline is Professor of Political Science at Georgia Southwestern State University in Americus, Georgia. His research and publications have focused on issues of hunger and food production, biodiversity, and development history and theory, in general. Professor Kline is a longtime member of the Association of Third World Studies (ATWS) and serves as its elected treasurer. He has received both the ATWS Presidential Award and its Mario Zamora Award for his essay, “Reflections on the Immaterial Conditions of Development.”