

Tadashi Hirai<sup>1</sup>, Flavio Comim<sup>2</sup> and Richard Jolly<sup>3</sup>

## Abstract

**Motivation:** Despite widespread attention and praise from policy-makers, practitioners and individual academics for the Human Development Report, the paradigm of human development has often lacked sustained academic and operational policy-making attention.

**Purpose:** Investigating this undesirable disconnect and discussing the possible reasons behind it, this article reveals two fundamental challenges: to make more specific the rich concepts of human development and to relate them to the dominant concepts of development globally and to motivate and guide the context-specific choices made within national and regional contexts.

**Approach and Methods:** Addressing these challenges will require a more careful exploration of the theoretical and operational implications of the work of Sen and Nussbaum as well as their adoption by the Human Development Report Office at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

**Conclusions:** To achieve this, the article makes some proposals both to UNDP and to academia for the future directions of this approach.

**Policy implications:** The proposals seek to chart pathways out of the current economic stagnation and slowdown.

**Keywords:** Amartya Sen; capability approach; Human Development Report; Martha Nussbaum; Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); United Nations Development Programme (

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Human Development Report (HDR) has gathered widespread international often praise since its inception in 1990—more so than the World Bank's World and substantially more than any other reports produced by the United Nations (UN 2010). The Human Development Index (HDI) has also been much cited although been more critical and qualified, often focused on its methodology, especially its arbitrary system of weights over time (e.g. Chowdhury, 1991; Kanbur, 1991; Kelley,

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<sup>1</sup> Centre of Development Studies, University of Cambridge. Corresponding author. Email: hirai.tadashi@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> IQS School of Management, Ramon Llull University.

<sup>3</sup> Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex.

who criticize it; and Decancq & Lugo, 2013; Foster, McGillivray, & Seth, 2013 who justify it). Even so, since 1990, governments have increasingly used the HDI and in many international sets of country indicators. The HDI has also inspired and provided a methodological framework for the elaboration of other composite indicators (e.g. the Inclusive Wealth Index by UN University's International Human Dimensions Programme on Global Environmental Change and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Global AgeWatch Index by HelpAge International and the Child Development Index by Save the Children).

Interestingly, this policy-influencing success has not been matched by academic interest among those teaching and conducting research on the Human Development (HD) approach. This leads us to suggest that HD suffers from a *lip-service syndrome*, often receiving praise but being less effective in changing the way that scholars from different disciplines think about development or analyse development issues and policy. Even within the UN System, it seems that HD has had only limited influence on the work carried out by other agencies. Whereas HD is praised by policy-makers, practitioners and individual academics in the Human Development and Capability Association (HDCA) and other groups, it does not receive corresponding institutional attention in academia. Given this, this article investigates the existence of a lip-service syndrome and discusses the possible reasons behind it. In addition, it puts forward some proposals for the future direction of HD. A key warning is that without more serious support in academia and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the HD approach risks following the same fate of waning neglect as various other heterodox approaches to development.

Since the crisis of 2008 and the widespread adoption of austerity policies, there has been growing disaffection with the applications of neo-liberal orthodoxy and its stronghold on teaching in many university economics departments. This presents a new opportunity. It is now recognized to be essential to pay greater attention to inequality between and within countries, and to a broader approach to poverty reduction and social concerns. Both challenge the narrow orthodoxy of neo-liberal economics and the financial focus that has dominated much development thinking since the 1980s. HD, disseminated globally, regionally and nationally by means of the HDR, includes many of the elements needed for a new approach—in values, goals, theory and practice—to make development human-centred.

Various UN institutions are, however, insensitive to the current development discourse and often follow only partial and sectoral approaches to development. Their blinkered approach risks treating the HDR as little more than a UNDP annual report, marginalizing the HD approach and failing to see its potential to provide a framework for their own sectoral work and to make a central contribution

to the elaboration of alternatives. This article suggests new ways to show the relevance of HD for charting pathways out of stagnation and slowdown.

## 2. THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE AND ITS REPORTS

The HD concept was launched in 1990 under the auspices of UNDP at the initiative of Mahbub ul Haq and Amartya Sen. It has been since developed with the help of a number of scholars. Among others, Alkire (2002) contributed to the understanding of agency as well as developing a multidimensional feature of the HD approach, leading to her recent work on the Multidimensional Poverty Index based on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Alkire & Foster, 2011). Gasper (2002) elaborated the relevance of the capability approach to HD and further contextualized it within development ethics, including basic needs (BN) and human security (Gasper, 2004); Fukuda-Parr both rescued HD from the HDI and explored the use of HDI for policy-making; and Jolly, Emmerij and Weiss (2009) offered a historical review of the HD approach in the UN and its links with the BN approach of the 1970s. While Clark (2002) analysed the human nature of adaptation and perception to argue about its practical applicability to the HD approach, Clark and Qizilbash (2008) and Qizilbash (2014) investigated the conceptual issues of vagueness and incompleteness in a comparative evaluation accompanying the approach.

On the other hand, Comim (2008) argued for the operationalization of the approach, and Comim and Amaral (2013) further developed an alternative index to the HDI reflecting people's values on each indicator, while Biggeri, Clark, Ferrannini, and Mauro (2019) discussed the link between HDI and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and further proposed an alternative index to the HDI more reflective of the SDGs.

In terms of the HD literature review, Robeyns (2005) conducted a theoretical analysis, focusing on the similarity and differences between Sen's and Nussbaum's arguments. More recently, Robeyns (2017) offered an extensive evaluation of the approach developed over time, while Stewart, Ranis, and Samman (2018) updated the literature thoroughly and revealed some challenges, including the issues of happiness and social capabilities.

Back in 2003, Mark Malloch-Brown, then UNDP's Administrator, argued in his Preface to Fukuda-Parr and Kumar's classic *Readings in human development* that "Human Development has become a popular phrase today. The term is used extensively by the media, by politicians, by non-government institutions and by governments all over the world. ... [It has become] the cornerstone for the United Nations Development Programme" (2003: v). According to Google's NGRAM viewer, the proliferation of the terms 'human development' and 'human development index' coincided with their introduction in 1990, as shown in the Figure 1 below. (Note that 'human development' had

been widely used earlier and still is in various senses in some scientific disciplines, in the field of psychology in particular).<sup>4</sup>



(Source: Google's NGRAM viewer)

Figure 1: Frequency of usage 'human development' and 'human development index'

In 2010, the Human Development Report Office (HDRO) commemorated the twentieth anniversary of the HDR. In the report, the greater popularity of the HDR and the HDI than that of the World Development Report was proudly displayed by the figures for frequency of Google searches (UNDP, 2010: 14). Outside the UN, the HDI won the admiration of the *New York Times*, with the acclaim that "only one measure has succeeded in challenging the hegemony of growth-centric thinking. This is known as the Human Development Index" (Gertner, 13 May 2010), and recently, the *Guardian* listed the HDI as one of the Top 10 most important measures of development.<sup>5</sup>

Apart from the global HDR, by 2017 the publication of Regional HDRs (RHDRs) and National HDRs (NHDRs) had reached 41 and 737 reports (in 146 countries) respectively. A series of Arab HDRs, for example, played an important role in triggering the democratic movement in the region as symbolized by the "Arab Spring". Indeed, in the past, many initiatives organized by the HDRO in UN Country Offices have attracted various academic groups, particularly geographers and sociologists as well as development economists. In turn, these regional and national efforts have contributed, occasionally as part of UN actions, to producing reports which reflect the local cultural and socio-political conditions in ways that cannot be addressed at a global level. In this regard, Murphy (2006) rightly analysed the way that the HDR has benefited from the decentralized organization of the UNDP with its Country Offices around the world. This has enabled the NHDRs and the RHDRs to create informal links with local non-government organizations (NGOs) and political parties. A good

<sup>4</sup> The authors thank a reviewer for the suggestion to use Google's NGRAM viewer to expand the discussion.

<sup>5</sup> The *Guardian* (<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2016/mar/16/the-top-10-sources-of-data-for-international-development-research> [accessed 25 May 2019]).

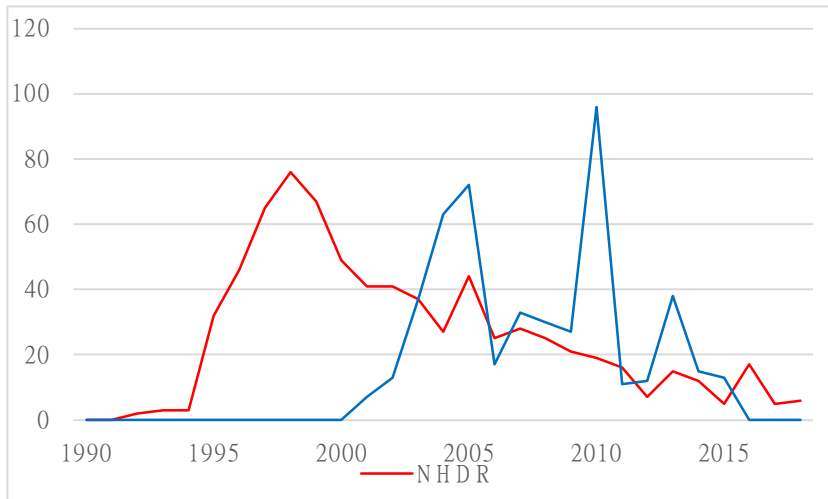
example is Latvia, which has witnessed, through a series of reports, the establishment of sound network with the University of Latvia and the regional higher education institutions, to the degree that the HDRO no longer needs to be involved with follow-up research, though it still retains a mandate for ensuring quality control of NHDR. This can be seen as a shift of operations from UNDP to the country level, in striking contrast with the approach of the Bretton Woods institutions. Not all recent evidence regarding HD is so positive, however. First, the number of NHDR publications has decreased dramatically as Murphy & Browne (2014) pointed out (Figure 2).<sup>6</sup> There was a steep increase in NHDRs during the latter half of the 1990s, up to 77 publications in 1998. In particular, 23 countries issued NHDRs for four successive years from 1995 to 1998, including all 15 countries of the former Soviet Union. After that, however, there has been a gradual downward trend with the exception of 2005, ending up with only six NHDRs in 2018.<sup>7</sup> In large part this was due to UNDP taking the lead in preparing country reports on progress in implementing the MDGs. Although hundreds of MDG country reports were prepared (peaking at 96 publications in 2010),<sup>8</sup> it seems that most focused on the MDGs, with little explicit reference to HD. This can be seen as a missed opportunity, especially as the 2016 HDR, *Human Development for Everyone*, emphasized the close links between HD and strategy for implementing the SDGs.

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<sup>6</sup> HDRO (<http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports> [accessed 30 August 2019]).

<sup>7</sup> The decrease in the number of publications could be interpreted as the result of a shift of operations from UNDP to respective countries. This, however, seems unlikely given that few cases have been heard of and reported like the case of Latvia. It would help if UNDP promoted attention to more successful cases.

<sup>8</sup> 1. UNDP <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/mdg/mdg-reports.html> [accessed 26 August 2019].



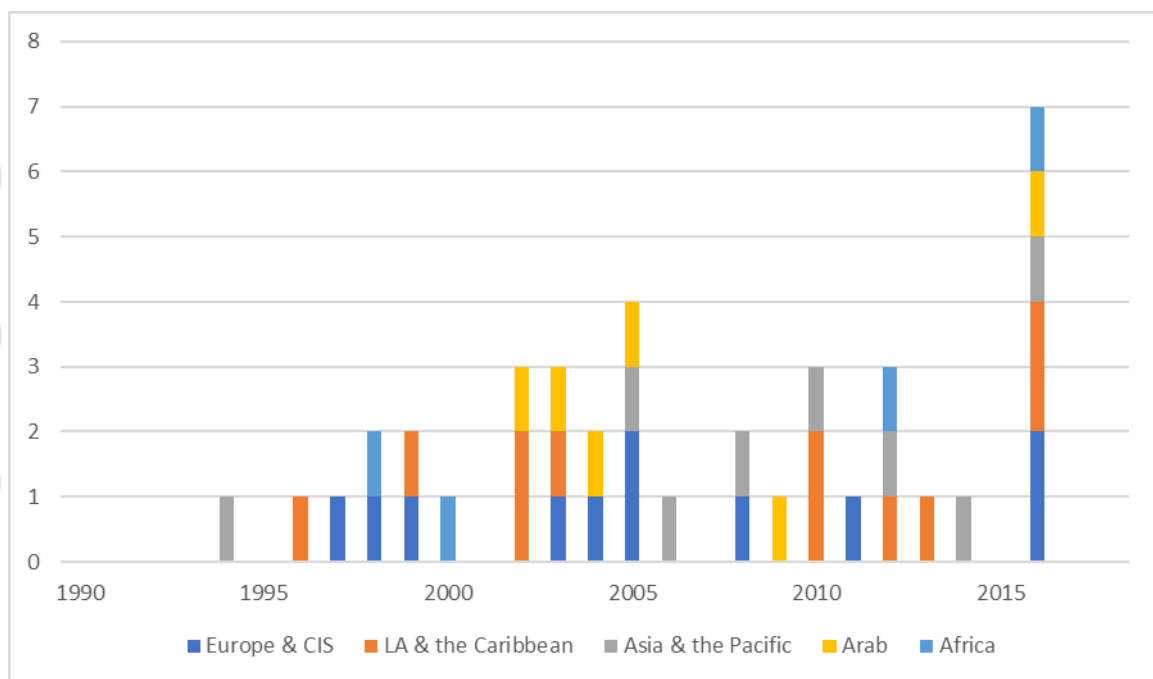
(Source: Authors' elaborations based on the data available on the UNDP website)

[Figure 2: Number of National HDR publications and MDG Country Reports]

In terms of the RHDR, the trajectory is different, peaking at seven publications in 2016 (Figure 3).<sup>9</sup>

The most numerous regional reports have been for Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), with 11 publications each since 1990. These are followed by Asia and the Pacific with eight publications, the Arab States with six and Africa with four. The Arab States produced consecutive publications for from 2002 to 2005, which indeed contributed to the successful democratic movement in the region. Apart from the recent upsurge, however, the overall trends in regional reports have been declining (i.e. 12 between 2001 and 2005 compared to six between 2011 and 2015).

<sup>9</sup> Source: HDRO <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports> [accessed 24 August 2019].



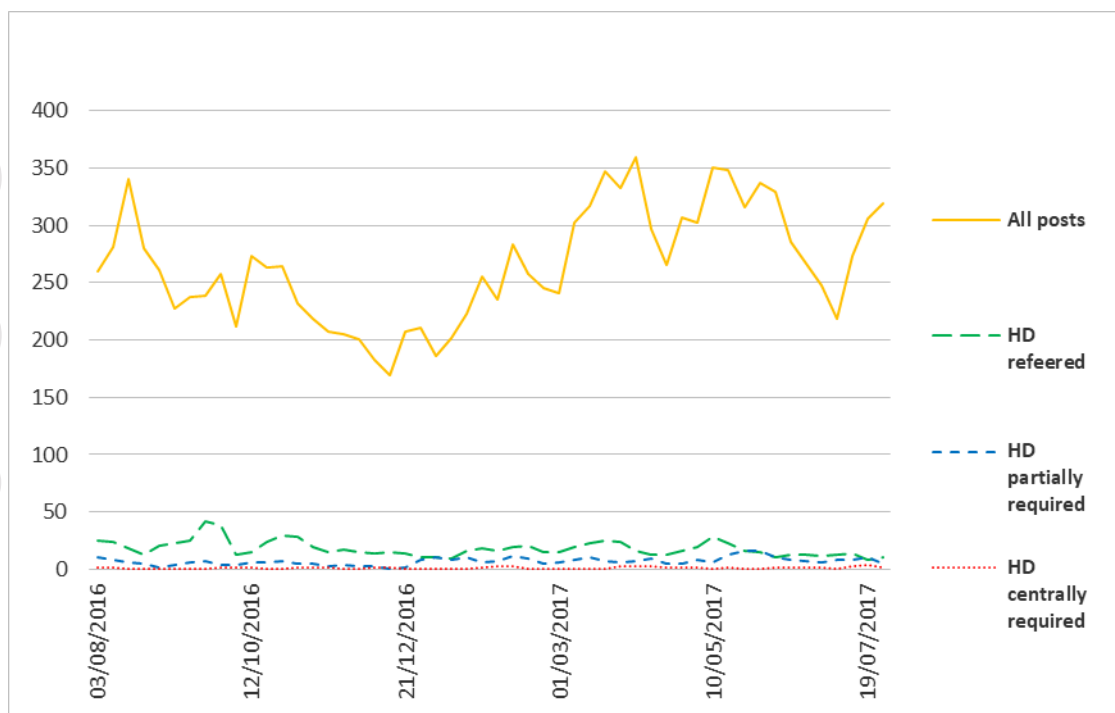
(Source: Authors' elaborations based on the data available on the UNDP website)

[Figure 3: Number of Publications of RHDR with Regional Distribution]

### 3. THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE: METHODOLOGY AND NEW EVIDENCE

In addition to this evolution in the number of NHDRs and RHDRs, other information can be used to assess the influence of the HD perspective on practical affairs. Here we look at two alternative measures that reflect this influence. The first is objective—an assessment of UNDP's job offers and academic impacts. The second is (mostly) subjective—a measure based on how academics and policy-makers understand the features and challenges in applying the human development and the capability approach.

We checked the job opportunities advertised on the UNDP website every week since August 2016 for one year. This revealed that very few UNDP posts required HD expertise (Figure 4). An average of 265 posts were advertised each week, ranging from 169 to 359 throughout this period. HD expertise was explicitly required as the main function only in about one post a week on average and partially as one among several duties/responsibilities, competencies or required skills/experience in seven posts on average. Otherwise, the term HD was simply mentioned in barely 18 posts on average, when current development conditions were described. This may be too stringent a test to judge whether the HD perspective is or will ever become an important focus of UNDP's operations as claimed by Murphy & Browne (2014), but it does seem to indicate a lack of practical focus on HD in the management of UNDP operations.



(Source: Authors' elaborations based on the data available on the UNDP website)

[Figure 4: Job opportunities on HD in UNDP]

Although the HDCA is a separate organization with no formal links with UNDP, it has provided much of the intellectual debate underlining HD. But here too, its membership seems to have reached a plateau. The HDCA had 740 members in 2019, somewhat below its 825 members in 2008 (Jolly et al., 2009) and in contrast to the initial surge to 547 members in 2005.<sup>10</sup> Although maintaining a membership of 700 to 800 can be seen as healthy, its scale needs to be expanded further if HD is truly to become an alternative to the prevailing orthodoxy. For comparison, the American Economic Association, one of the major groups for neo-liberal economics, attracts more than 20,000 members.<sup>11</sup>

The above evidence, though partial and incomplete, raises questions about the extent to which HD has established itself as an alternative paradigm for development theory and practice, with the growing and deepening attention and application that many would hope for. The three indicators— (1) publications of NHDR and RHDR, (2) HD job opportunities in UNDP and (3) membership of the

<sup>10</sup> Kathy Rosenblum, the administrator of HDCA, 23 August 2019. For reference, the Development Studies Association (DSA) has over 600 members mostly from the UK (DSA website, accessed 10 September 2019) while the European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes (EADI) has 248 members: 125 institutions, 60 individuals, 117 students and 3 associates, mostly from Europe (2018 EADI Annual Report).

<sup>11</sup> The American Economic Association <http://www.aeaweb.org/about-aea> [accessed 30 August 2019].



HDCA—provide preliminary evidence of a certain levelling off in HD’s influence in policy-making and academia. This reinforces the view about *lip-service praise* of the HD perspective—widespread praise but only limited use in policy-making situations and weak academic engagement.

In order to complement this information, we carried out a survey focusing on the application of the Capability Approach (CA) and its link with human development applications. The survey, consisting of open and closed questions, was undertaken among three different sets of HD practitioners. The first group was of participants at the 2016 HDCA meeting in Tokyo, which included scholars and executive members of the HDCA.<sup>12</sup> The second group was of policy-makers who answered an online version of the survey in 2017. The third group was of staff members of UN institutions and related NGOs that answered the survey in 2018. Although these samples do not provide a representative view of any of these groups, they do offer insights into the views of HD&CA (Human Development and Capability Approach) experts on a range of issues relevant to the practical use of HD.<sup>13</sup>

A large majority of the HDCA respondents (83%) believe that there are important and meaningful differences between Sen’s and Nussbaum’s approaches, although this point has been little acknowledged or explored by the HDRs. The Human Development perspective offered by the HDRO is, therefore, at best only a partial reflection of the academic understanding of HD, with an oversimplification of the complex dimensions of the HD paradigm and a bias towards Sen’s version. This has meant that when asked “how robust is the Human Development perspective without the theoretical support of the Capability Approach?” almost 70% replied that it is not very robust. This point deserves further scrutiny. In short, the HDR has merged CA and HD without trying to clarify, analyse or bridge the gap between them.

Another important conclusion from the questionnaire is that most researchers and policy-makers engage with HD and CA out of personal interest, not because they have a job or institution requiring them to do so. Almost two-thirds (62%) of the academics said that they taught “human development topics” but less than a fifth (18%) of those stated that knowledge of HD was a requirement for their appointment. When asked “how important was their knowledge of the CA to find a job”, those surveyed answered on a scale of 1 to 10 with an average of 3.4, very low indeed. This seems to reflect the larger picture that there are few academic posts on the CA on offer in most countries, with almost a third (30%) of the respondents suggesting that there were probably no such posts and nearly two-thirds (60%) suggesting very few. This underlines Mahbub ul Haq’s unfulfilled ambition that there should be 25 professorships on Human Development created in major universities round the world.

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<sup>12</sup> HDCA is the biggest academic association on HD, currently with around 700 members from 74 countries.

<sup>13</sup> Overall 171 persons responded from 42 countries, of whom 36% were associate or full-time professors, 12% lecturers, 11% post-doc researchers, 22% PhD students and 20% practitioners. The great majority (76%) held full-time positions, 43% were women, 57% men and their average age was 42 years.

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Important theoretical gaps within the CA community will remain as long as there is little clear consolidation of a body of theory that can be used by practitioners. This is one consequence of the limited and very heterogeneous range of teaching materials available on HD & CA. Nearly half (44%) of the survey respondents said that they were not satisfied with the quality and quantity of the material available. Roughly half of the academics in the sample stated that they used HDRs for teaching. In summary, there is an overall concern with the limited application of the approach, the lack of attention to NHDRs and the lack of integration between HD and CA.

#### 4. SOURCES OF OBJECTION AND OPPOSITION

Institutionally, the global HDRs have often been treated by other parts of the UN as UNDP's 'baby', greeting its annual release more with slight feelings of jealousy rather than its being an international report which gives a boost to human concerns common to all the UN and to all its institutions. Indeed, the HDR has the potential, as explained later, to provide a comprehensive frame in which the concerns of all the UN operational agencies could be set.

The concept of HD has sometimes been questioned in terms of its usefulness and reliability for policy-making (e.g. criticism about the inconsistency between individual and collective judgements by Sugden (2006)). The main issue here is about the difficulty in applying its complex and rich concepts—the enlargement of human choices and the strengthening of human capabilities—in consistent practice. It was acknowledged in the first global HDR that the HDI does not cover all elements of HD, a message reinforced by a later HDRO Director, Sakiko Fukuda-Parr (2003). In addition, the HDRO still struggles with spelling out the links between HD and more dominant concepts of development in the wider UN system, such as human security and human rights.<sup>14</sup> The concept of human security was formally addressed in the 1994 HDR followed by the issue of vulnerability, thoroughly examined in the 2014 HDR, and the links between human rights and HD in the 2000 HDR. Moreover, the idea of the MDGs, based strongly on the concept of human security and human rights as well as HD, was emphasized within UNDP under Mark Malloch-Brown. Further and full consideration of the relation between them has not been addressed recently by the HDRO, however, with the important exception of the introduction of the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) whose indicators had specific links to the MDGs. These trends are possibly due to intra-UN competition and/or the views of some powerful governments.

HD has much in common with the BN perspective, at least in practice (Stewart, 2006). Indeed, many scholars whose ideas contributed to the BN school have subsequently worked on the HD approach (e.g. Jolly, 1976; Griffin, 1977; Streeten, 1981 1984; Streeten, Haq, Stewart et al., 1981; Stewart,

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<sup>14</sup> In this regard, the UN recently celebrated the 30th anniversary of the Declaration on the Right to Development, which emphasized the need for development to be human-centred.

1985). All of them have contributed to the global HDR: Haq as the founding Project Director, Special Adviser or Principal Coordinator of the 1990–1996 HDR; Jolly as the Principal Coordinator of the 1996–2000 HDR; and Griffin, Stewart and Streeten as consultants in the early phases of the HDR and Stewart continuing throughout. These individuals show the intellectual and historical connections between BN and HD.

Treating HD and BN separately risks failing to learn the political lessons of implementing basic needs. Basic needs had gathered widespread donor support over the 1970s but was then sharply abandoned by the World Bank and by most donors in the early 1980s, with the rise of debt and the adoption of structural adjustment policies. In fact, a continuation of BN policies might have avoided much of the rise in poverty in the 1980s that accompanied structural adjustment. But the reasons for Western support for BN in the 1970s need to be analysed more critically, to note how at that time it neglected both the human rights and participatory dimensions of BN policies as set out by the International Labour Organization (ILO). One must also analyse the reasons why strong Western support for BN generated such great suspicion of these policies in many developing countries. One possible interpretation of these trends would be a combination of the simplification of the concept in the process of its implementation (resulting in dropping active elements in human rights and participation) and its skew in favour of Western nations particularly after being taken over by the World Bank from the ILO (resulting in opposition by non-Western nations) (Hirai, 2017).

Today, there are important links between HD and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), even if with some simplifications of HD. But the fact that the SDGs are now universally endorsed might avoid some of the political problems which beset basic needs. Moreover, setting HD and the SDGs in the context of individual countries or regions would provide more opportunity for nuance and priority-setting. In this regard, Gomez, Gasper, and Mine (2016) discussed the vital role played by the NHDRs and RHDRs in the context of human security, but rightly criticized their poor connection with the global HDRs.

A first step to applying HD more clearly at global, regional and national levels would be to take seriously the differences and complexities between Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach and Sen's Capability Approach (Comim, 2016). This is particularly important given the different ways in which these approaches have been operationalized by HD scholars and practitioners. Sen's version is embedded in Social Choice Theory (Sen, 2017) in which the true judgments of what people value and "have reason to value" must be determined through participatory approaches and channels.

Nussbaum's version is shaped by her Aristotelian perspectives, focusing on constitutional reforms

and the shared norms needed as a bare minimum to lead a flourishing life (Nussbaum, 2011).<sup>15</sup> Applied in the context of HD, Sen's version loosely corresponds more to the ideas generated in the NHDRs and the RHDRs by respecting local (i.e. national and regional) goals, which are not necessarily consistent with global goals. This happens because global HDRs cannot easily implement participatory approaches to define valuable capabilities. In contrast, Nussbaum's version corresponds more to the visions and advocacy set out in the global HDRs by holding universal goals to be achieved for all human beings regardless of where they live, as symbolized by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and by the SDGs.<sup>16</sup>

Rightly or wrongly, Sen's conceptualization seems to have been the predominant influence in all the HDRs, global, regional and national. Very few HDRs have referred to Nussbaum's version. The global HDRs have rightly referred to Sen in terms of the concepts such as functionings and capabilities but wrongly in terms of the procedure where a constitutional frame is required in the inter-governmental stage rather than a participatory approach through public discussion. Operationalizing HD at a global scale raises difficulties caused by inconsistent references to the CA, implying Sen's participatory perspective rather than Nussbaum's constitutional perspective.

This is an undesirable contradiction, now reinforced by the slow demise of the NHDRs and the RHDRs in which Sen's version (which a majority of the UNDP staff follow) could be rightly applied and developed. More serious still, even Sen's version might have been forgotten or downplayed throughout in many HDRs, which has resulted in depriving HD of its fundamental conceptual grounding (Comim, 2016; Clark, Biggeri, M. & Frediani, 2019). The neglect of participatory approaches in Sen's version could be another possible reason for the reduction in publication of the NHDRs and the RHDRs. To make them context-specific is one thing; to make them participatory is quite another. Indeed, most NHDRs and RHDRs have had consultations with national and regional experts, which is important for context-specificity, but have not fully employed participatory methods, getting citizens involved through public discussion. Among the few exceptions is the 2009/2010 Brazilian HDR, which selected the dimensions most relevant to Brazil through a large-scale consultation with half a million of its citizens.

How does all this relate to the SDGs adopted in 2015 by all 193 member governments of the UN? At first sight, the 17 SDGs might seem to exemplify specifying top-down normative objectives in the

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<sup>15</sup> To clarify, Sen stresses the significance of generating bottom-up perspectives through public discussion but also endorses the importance of global norms to avoid the risks of adaptive preferences; Nussbaum, while advocating the essence of top-down perspectives by constitution, endorses the importance of national and local values to make them sustainable by proper motivations. The authors thus believe that both Sen's and Nussbaum's approaches preserve liberal roots.

<sup>16</sup> Note here that the universal descriptions/principles differ from the general ones. Unlike the general, the universal can accommodate concrete and particular descriptions/principles, essential for ethical and moral deliberations. For details, see Nussbaum (1990).

tradition of Nussbaum. In fact, they are more in the tradition of Sen. These global goals emerged after a three-year process of intense participation, admittedly at the international level but involving many national NGOs, experts, UN specialized agencies as well as all governments. Second, each of the goals is expressed in general and broad-ranging terms, requiring further work at the local, national and regional levels to define how they should be specified and applied in each particular context and, then, how priorities should be set for their implementation. In adopting the SDGs, it was specifically stated that this further process should be participatory to localizing them (Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), 2016; Sachs, Schmidt-Traub, Kroll, Durand-Delacre, & Teksoz, 2017; Espey, Dahmm, & Manderino, 2018; O'Shea, 2018). Indeed, the participation required to achieve this could be described as communities or countries or other groups being required to define the specifics of each of the 17 goals which they “have reason to value”. The HD approach has much to offer, given that the requirement of participation and localization of the SDGs has yet to be fulfilled in many parts of the world.

In summary, the HDRO has faced two intertwined difficulties: connecting the necessarily simplified concept of HD with the dominant and more wide-ranging issues of development on the global stage; and motivating and guiding the context-specific choices made nationally and regionally, especially where there is no NHDR or RHDR. To overcome these challenges, there is a need more substantive reference to and analysis of Nussbaum's version at a global scale in the UNDP in pursuit of the SDGs, while Sen's version needs to be explored and adapted continuously in national and regional contexts in the UNDP. (Sen's perspectives would help to revive interest in the NHDRs and the RHDRs where public discussion can be made in such a way as to be sensitive to each context.) Both actions are indispensable for maintaining attention to the rich concept of HD and its applications.

If the HD perspective often suffers from a lip-service syndrome, it might well be that part of this problem—at least among the academic community—is explained by a combination of the institutional and theoretical elements regarding the understanding of Sen's and Nussbaum's work as well as their use by the HDRO. Both Sen's and Nussbaum's approaches operate at a very high level of abstraction and philosophical sophistication leading to the “hallowing” of CA in HD. This has probably inhibited HDRO from dedicating time to pursue them. This trend is also likely to have been reinforced by the complications of linking HD with inter- and intra-governmental politics. Given the sequence of statistical innovations (e.g. HDI, MPI, Gender Inequality Index, Inequality-adjusted HDI), it may have seemed easier for those outside to wait for novelty and different buzzwords to settle, until a new modus operandi emerged.

## 5. PROPOSALS TO BRING HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INTO THE MAINSTREAM OF ANALYSIS AND POLICY-MAKING

As indicated, HD has major potential for improving contemporary economic policy-making nationally and internationally. Some proposals are made here for action by both UNDP and academia in order to make the HD approach stronger and more influential.

For UNDP, it is essential to address the following:

- To develop a long-term plan for reviving the NHDRs and RHDRs linked to the SDGs
- To undertake joint HD reports with other UN specialized agencies

The NHDRs and RHDRs are not simply documents but tools for engagement that enable conversations and consensus-building between UNDP and local stakeholders on public policy strategies for the SDGs, set within a larger context of national economic strategy. Establishing national and regional forums is strategically important, and the NHDRs and RHDRs can provide the focus for discussion in such meetings. HD can be used as a frame in pursuing the SDGs, avoiding the risk of seeing macroeconomic strategy as no more than generating financial support to each individual SDG. If the SDGs are understood outside a broader framework of HD, they become merely a list of disconnected policies. By reclaiming the role of HD as an organizing framework, both the SDGs and HD can benefit from mutual synergies. Indeed, increasing attention to the SDGs linked to NHDRs and RHDRs would complement the top-down perspectives of the global HDRs by including more bottom-up analysis of experience in specific countries and regions. This would depend on strengthening networks and collaboration with local academics (sociologists and geographers in particular), bringing in more attention to local cultures and ways of living. Given the high volume of earlier NHDRs and RHDRs, now is certainly the time to regain the earlier enthusiasms. This could also build on the regional, national and sub-national reports already prepared independently of UNDP (e.g. regional reports by the Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Centre in South Asia, national and sub-national reports by the Measure of America in the US and sub-national reports by the Institute for Human Development in India).

Another initiative would be to connect HD with key development reports and concepts used in other parts of the UN. UNDP's broader mandate and HD's broader perspectives can provide the frame for setting the specific concerns of the UN funds and specialized agencies within an integrating frame.

These UN bodies often restrict themselves to their fields of action. An HD–SDG report would help by setting their concerns within a wider framework of human development. For instance, the HDR could actively refer to the reports published by other UN agencies (e.g. the World Education Report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Health Statistics Report by the World Health Organization (WHO), the State of the World's Children by the

United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the World Development Report by the World Bank), rather than maintaining a distance from them. An alternative would be for UNDP to work together with other UN agencies in undertaking joint reports, in order to get them involved in using the HD analysis, especially at national and regional levels. This would prevent HD from becoming exclusive to UNDP and the HDRO and thus help dissipate feelings of jealousy in other UN agencies. More importantly, it would help broaden the links between HD and the SDGs and other priority elements of development discourse, such as the concerns for children, older people and more contextual and general issues such as human security and human rights. Establishing stronger links between the HDRO and HDCA would help in this process. As explained above, much of the capability literature pays lip service to capabilities but in fact engages more with other approaches, often abstractly. By focusing on concrete human development issues in relation to the SDGs and other priority issues, the academic community could help focus national and international action on the real-life causes of implementing them. At the same time, UNDP and the HDRO could benefit from the support of the academic community to its efforts.

In the academic world, three issues need to be tackled in order to make HD more visible in universities and research institutions:

- To establish a number of academic posts for HD in leading universities in every region to explore its link with CA
- To develop and use teaching material for HD
- To develop sources of funding for conferences, teaching positions, research projects and post-graduates specializing in HD

Mahbub ul Haq had the vision of creating chairs in HD in 25 universities in different regions of the world. Unfortunately, this never came about. But his vision ought to be realized, so that those appointed can play a mobilizing and coordinating role, conveying general understanding of HD at macro/aggregate level but also its nuance and detail at micro/decomposed level. Funding is critical and new sources are required. At the country level, one possibility would be for national governments to establish an academic post in one of the national universities with some supportive finance for the promotion of HD. UNDP could encourage this with advocacy and country-level negotiation. Ideas matter. Towards this end, UNDP, using its NHDRs and the RHDRs, can demonstrate the importance of the HD and SDG analysis in their process of development by stressing the contrasts with the mainstream economic approaches led by the Bretton Woods institutions. Another possibility would be to allocate some part of the UNDP budget to support the posts in the universities and research institutions with which it has often collaborated (e.g. Oxford

and Cambridge in the UK, Columbia, the New School in the US). The current academic staff who have worked together with the HDRO could help as mobilizers for this purpose.

In addition, teaching material for HD could and should be used systematically. Some materials are already useful for theoretical understanding (e.g. Sen, 1999; Fukuda-Parr & Shiva-Kumar, 2003; Deneulin & Shahani, 2009; Nussbaum, 2011).<sup>17</sup> Numerous HDRs, RHDRs and NHDRs are already available and categorized in terms of geography and theme. But they are seldom used for teaching purposes. Econometrics could also be covered in teaching materials to bring more rigorous quantitative analysis in HD analysis. Some substantive contributions have been made in a few research and non-government institutions (e.g. the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative and the Center for the Economics of Human Development at Chicago on the one hand; and, until recently, HelpAge International on the other). These efforts need to be accelerated by the curricula and courses anchoring HD.

Finally, UNDP could organize regional conferences on methodological aspects of HD linked to the current global crises. This would help stimulate discussion with a broader range of outsiders for improving and disseminating HD analysis. The HDCA's annual conferences around the world are useful and important. It is perhaps time for the organization to embrace some new initiatives, especially linked to HD and the SDGs. A few annual conferences could be held regionally, with HDRO regional teams and UNDP regional offices serving as overall facilitators with national HDRO teams. The UN and UNDP national offices could play a supportive role if their country is selected as a conference venue, bringing in other specialized UN agencies. In return, they would have an excellent platform to construct networks and collaboration with local academics and practitioners for the creation of the NHDR or even the RHDR. This would help motivate local academics to conduct research in relation to HD and the SDGs. Following the scheme of the HDCA and the global HDR, such conferences would best be organized within a longer-term timetable to investigate global, regional and national issues through the lens of HD and the SDGs.

It might also be wise to go back to one of the original missions of the HD, comparing HD with the neo-liberal economic orthodoxy. The HD paradigm is multidisciplinary and pragmatic, emphasizing ends and decentralized approaches. In contrast, the neo-liberal paradigm is economic and dogmatic, emphasizing means and aspiring to general equilibrium (Jolly, 2003). These distinctions derive from the different objectives of each paradigm. While the former targets human progress, the latter is focused on economic advance, assuming human progress will follow. This does not mean that HD is anti-growth; rather, it regards economic growth as one means to attain HD, important but not

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<sup>17</sup> The third edition of Readings in human development by Fukuda-Parr & Shiva-Kumar (2003) changed the title to Handbook of human development. This implies the editors' message/hope for the book to be used for educational purposes.



equivalent to human development. Unlike the neo-liberal paradigm, the HD paradigm stresses the need to pay attention to the quality of economic progress from the vantage point of people. In this regard, Haq (1995) identifies four essential pillars in HD: equity, sustainability, productivity and empowerment. The bottom line is: “To benefit the masses, growth’s opportunities must be equitably distributed. And they must be sustainable from one generation to the next” (Haq, 1995: 117). Although it would be a contradiction to try to combine HD with neo-liberal orthodoxy, it would be wise for the time being to start dealing with these core components together with the institutional efforts by UNDP and academia highlighted above.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Though the current global crisis of stagnation and slowdown has led to some search for alternative approaches, these have often focused on less ideological approaches to current economic and financial orthodoxies to offset the current crises of austerity rather than on those with more explicit human objectives, broader critiques of current patterns of economic development and more multi-disciplinary methodologies. It is high time to promote HD and to make it an effective alternative to the neo-liberal orthodoxy. For over 25 years, the HDRO has demonstrated how the HD paradigm can serve as a stimulating frame of analysis of capabilities and choices to provide a coherent and consistent approach to a wide variety of current human and priority problems and policy-making issues, both at the global and national level.

The big opportunity is for UNDP and the UN to show how HD and the SDGs can help create ways out of the current global crisis for all countries, replacing the narrow economic and financial approaches which have led to it. HD and the SDGs can be made central to global, regional and national approaches of recovery. Implementing the proposals this article has made for further development and application of the HD paradigm and SDGs would be bold but could be the beginning of a fundamental transformation.

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