

Human Development Index in India: A District Profile

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Disaggregated Human Development Index would reveal a more detailed profile of human development as the overall index of a country or a state can conceal the fact that different regions within the country/state have very different levels of human development. The objective of this paper is to present human development profile of the districts of India, obtaining the district level data from Census (1991), Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (1993) and Irudhaya Rajan and Mohanachandran(1998). The empirical evidence of the study reveals that the highest proportion of the lowest HDI ranked districts falls in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan. The variability in the levels of all the critical components of the district HDI, namely, per capita value of output of major crops, literacy and infant mortality rate suggests that much of the inequities in human development at district level come from the regional disparity in the levels of income and literacy, particularly the rural female literacy across the BIMARU states. The improvement in health status in terms of infant mortality rate is also found to hinge upon the attainment of higher female literacy. Thus, the appreciation of district-wise human development suggests that apart from the development opportunities (income), literacy, primarily female literacy appears to hold the key to the attainment of high human development at district level.

I Introduction

The real challenge in the late 1980s is to translate the human development concern from a concept into reality. UNDP's Human Development Reports since 1990 have sought to provide a reasonably credible yardstick to assess the development benefits derived by the people of a region or country. It heralds a clear shift of emphasis from such oft-used, but mechanical measures of economic progress such as gross domestic product/gross national product to more people oriented indices. It is an important step, although a measurement and monitoring device to enlarge human capabilities and to put those capabilities to better use.

It is now well known that UNDP's Human Development Reports (HDRs) and the Human Development Index (HDI) developed in order to measure human development have generated considerable interest and policy debate in regard to human development all over the world. It assembled all available social and human data for each country in comparable form and initiated the publication of annual report on human dimensions of development. The successive reports since 1990 have widened the scope of the HDI and attempted to capture the human deprivation in regard to gender bias, income inequality, lack of human rights and freedom and the like. They also took note of some of the issues raised and made some modifications in the measurement of the indicators of knowledge

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