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**HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2016 - Regional Press Release for Sub-Saharan Africa**

## **Many left behind by human development progress in sub-Saharan Africa, UNDP Report finds**

*Women, girls, youth, the unemployed, people living in rural areas and those in conflict-affected areas are being left behind in myriad ways.*

*Sub-Saharan Africa is losing around a third of human development outcomes - higher than any other developing region – to inequalities in health, education and economic opportunities.*

**Stockholm, 21 March 2017** – Despite outpacing global human development growth rates over 15 years, sub-Saharan Africa remains burdened by the world’s most uneven distribution of development gains, with women, girls, people living in rural areas, migrants, refugees and those in conflict-affected areas systemically left behind. Gender inequality remains a serious challenge to human development in the region.

These are among the findings of the [Human Development Report 2016, entitled ‘Human Development for Everyone’](#), released today by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The report finds that although average human development improved significantly across all regions from 1990 to 2015, one in three people worldwide continue to live in low levels of human development as measured by the Human Development Index (HDI). The HDI is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: having a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable, and enjoying a decent standard of living.

Despite improvements in sub-Saharan Africa over the past two decades, almost 60 percent of people still experience deprivations in these three areas. Around a third of children under the age of five are malnourished and affected by stunting. Over 35 percent of adults are illiterate. Some 70 percent of working adults earn less than \$3.10 per day.

*“The world has come a long way in rolling back extreme poverty, in improving access to education, health and sanitation, and in expanding possibilities for women and girls,”* said UNDP Administrator Helen Clark, speaking at the launch of the Report in Sweden’s capital Stockholm today, alongside Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven and the report’s lead author and Director of UNDP’s Human Development Report Office, Selim Jahan.

*“But those gains are a prelude to the next, possibly tougher challenge, to ensure the benefits of global progress reach everyone,”* Helen Clark said.

### **Understanding patterns of exclusion in the region**

The report notes that some groups are more disadvantaged than others in almost every country. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, women and girls, rural dwellers, people living in areas afflicted by conflict, and ethnic minorities have fewer opportunities than others.

Women in sub-Saharan Africa tend to live longer than men but receive less schooling and lower incomes. The report indicates that the HDI for women is 0.488 (classified as low human development) while that of men is 0.557 (medium human development). On average, the region loses an estimated US\$95 billion annually to women's lower participation in the paid labour force - and in 2014, that figure soared as high as \$105 billion.

Women also suffer disproportionately in crises: during the Ebola outbreak, for example, women faced higher risk of infection due to their role in caring for the sick.

*“Closing the human development gap for women and girls, excluded groups and people living in fragile situations is the challenge of our time,”* said UNDP Africa Director Abdoulaye Mar Dieye. *“We need policies that reach those left out and we need to invest more in empowering them economically and politically while building their resilience.”*

In addition to women and girls, the report notes that rural populations also suffer deprivations both overt and hidden. In sub-Saharan Africa, 74 percent of those living in rural areas live in multi-dimensional poverty - reflecting acute deprivation in health, education and standards of living - versus 31 percent of those living in urban areas, where the poor tend to be isolated in slums with lower access to services.

But there are positive examples from the region of how things can improve. For example, the global under-five mortality rate was more than halved between 1990 and 2015, with the steepest decline in sub-Saharan Africa, which also extended life expectancy by six years. In 2010, Senegal targeted 191 rural villages for improved access to electricity, increasing access in those areas from 17,000 people in 2010 to 90,000 in 2012.

*“We place too much attention on national averages, which often mask enormous variations in people's lives,”* stated Selim Jahan. *“In order to advance, we need to examine more closely not just what has been achieved, but also who has been excluded and why.”*

Conflict remains a challenge for the region, although over the past 15 years the number of countries in conflict has dropped. For example, the Central African Republic and South Sudan have experienced HDI declines over the past five years due to crises.

### **It is time to face up to deep-rooted barriers to development**

The report argues that obstacles to human progress can compound over generations and make it harder to catch up. For example, lack of access to high-quality education, including in early childhood, risks perpetuating poverty later in life and for subsequent generations. Children from poor households and girls attending school in rural areas are especially disadvantaged and less likely than others to be learning critical skills like reading, writing and mathematics. Policy interventions are critical to enhancing learning outcomes, and also for future employment prospects and civic participation.

Further, the report points out that even as many basic deprivations are being addressed in the region, new challenges can emerge. Key development metrics can overstate progress when they focus on the quantity, rather than the quality, of development. For example, while more children are attending school and the education gap is closing, pupil-teacher ratios exceeded 40 to 1 in 23 countries in sub-Saharan Africa in 2011. And dropout rates are still very high, at 42 percent.

Sub-Saharan Africa leads the world in mobile banking, with 12 percent of adults having mobile bank accounts compared to 2 percent globally. Yet only 25 percent of the population is online. Lack of

access to the Internet is increasingly a barrier to education, livelihoods and political participation, and many in the region risk falling further behind unless digital access is expanded.

*“By eliminating deep, persistent, discriminatory social norms and laws, and addressing unequal access to political participation, which have hindered progress for so many, poverty can be eradicated and a peaceful, just, and sustainable development can be achieved for all,”* Helen Clark said.

The report calls for far greater attention to empowering the most marginalized in society and recognizes the importance of giving them greater voice in decision-making processes. Key data, disaggregated for characteristics such as place, gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity, is vital to identifying who is being left behind.

### **Policies that prioritize inclusiveness are key to closing gaps**

The report recommends a four-pronged national policy approach to ensure that human development reaches everyone.

First, it advocates reorienting universal human development policies to reach to those left out. Universal access to quality healthcare, education and other services are critical for extending human development to everyone. Ghana has made such efforts, including in early childhood education.

Next, it calls for removing barriers to particular groups with special needs, who may be disadvantaged by discriminatory laws and social norms. For example, gender gaps can be closed with policies that balance care work between women and men in the home and that use quotas to expand political representation among women, following the example of Rwanda.

Third, strategies can be put in place to make human development more resilient, such as for marginalized groups who are most at risk to public health crises like Ebola and climate-related natural disasters.

Finally, the rights of minorities can be guaranteed with anti-discrimination legislation, a fair judicial system and improved access to legal assistance through, for example, legal aid services.

With the inter-governmental commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that includes the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, global attention has focused on leaving no one behind. Countries in sub-Saharan Africa can leverage this to build cooperation in the region and beyond to tackle persistent deprivations and inequalities. Regional and global cooperation will be especially important for reducing the vulnerabilities of marginalized groups to climate change, conflict and economic volatility.

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