

# UN's development index proves it takes a village <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

Without economic growth, progress of any kind is difficult. But the finding by the United Nations Human Development Index that there is no automatic correlation between a country's income growth and human development is worth heeding. The index, which measures progress in health, education and income, concludes that overall, the world is better off today than it was 40 years ago. The vast majority of people in the 135 countries studied have seen improvement in quality of life - with a few notable reversals in countries in Africa and the former Soviet Union, where life expectancy has decreased due to conflicts, and HIV/AIDS.

Some of the nations that have made the greatest progress in human development include "growth miracles" such as China, Indonesia and South Korea. But also on the "top 10" list are Nepal, Oman and Tunisia. These are not typical top performers; and yet their human development gains are remarkable, and stem largely from a concerted effort to improve health and education. The flow of ideas across borders, and easier access to inexpensive health-saving technologies, have been in the words of the report "transformative" for developing countries. Of course, political vision and good leadership are two very necessary ingredients too. Oman chose to invest its energy earnings in education and public health.

The index, though far from perfect, has revolutionized the way policy makers and economists measure success, going beyond income to include such factors as political freedom in an understanding of how to achieve human progress. This year, Norway placed first, while Canada fell to eighth place. For the first time, the index also measured gender equality, inequality within a country, as well as what it calls multi-dimensional poverty, taking into account other deprivations such as lack of access to clean water.

Human development often goes hand in hand with income growth. But it doesn't have to. And that is good news for poor countries, which can also aim to help their citizens stay in school, live longer and lead more productive lives

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