

EMBARGOED TILL 02 NOVEMBER 2011; 4.30 PM (IST)

# PRESS RELEASE

United Nations Development Programme

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## *2011 Global Human Development Report: Inequalities and environmental challenges threaten progress in Asia, Pacific*

New Delhi, 2 November 2011 —Pollution, deforestation and rising sea levels threaten development in Asia and the Pacific, while South Asia must overcome acute poverty and internal inequalities to maintain current rates of progress, warns the 2011 Global Human Development Report, released here today by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The 2011 Report—'Sustainability and Equity: A Better Future for All'—argues that environmental sustainability can be most effectively achieved by simultaneously addressing health, education, income and gender disparities within and among countries.

Releasing the Report in New Delhi today, Jairam Ramesh, Minister of Rural Development, Government of India said, "We need to understand the strong linkages between lifestyles of the rich and livelihoods of the poor both within and between countries. This Report makes an important contribution in highlighting the fact that environmental deterioration negatively and disproportionately impacts the poor. In reality, environmental issues are not elite pastimes, but are fundamental to securing livelihoods and improving the human development status of the poor." Mr Ramesh went on to add, "As a member of the UN Secretary General's High Level Panel on Global Sustainability this Report will inform our discussions and provide valuable inputs for the final report that the Panel will submit next January".

Environmental challenges fueled largely by rapid industrial development and deforestation sharpen inequalities within many countries and across Asia and the Pacific, according to the Report.

The region as a whole is by far the largest contributor to the global increase in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in recent decades, even though East Asia's per capita emissions are still low and South Asia's per capita emissions are even lower. While India is one of the larger emitters of GHG, its per capita ecological footprint is among the smallest in the world.

The Report's authors warn that deteriorating environmental conditions and increasingly extreme weather conditions could undermine economic progress in many countries in the region.

Despite human development progress of recent years, income distribution has worsened, grave gender imbalances still persist, and accelerating environmental destruction puts a "double burden of deprivation" on the poorest households and communities, the Report says. The poor are the most vulnerable to environmental challenges.

This is borne out by the fact that by 2050, the average HDI could drop by 12 percent in South Asia due to the effects of global warming on agricultural production, access to clean water, and pollution.

Under an even more adverse “environmental disaster” scenario—with vast deforestation and land degradation, dramatic declines in biodiversity and accelerated extreme weather events—the global HDI would fall 15 percent below the baseline projection for 2050.

According to Caitlin Wiesen, Country Director, UNDP India, “India has made significant progress on human development and the country’s HDI value has increased 59 percent between 1980 and 2011. However this trajectory of human development gains may be threatened by environmental risks and inequality.”

The 2011 Global Human Development Index (HDI) that ranks countries on their progress on the three key dimensions of human development – education, health and income -- includes 187 nations and territories, the most comprehensive coverage since UNDP began publishing the Human Development Report in 1990.

Between 1980 and 2011, India’s HDI value increased from 0.344 to 0.547, an increase of 59.0 percent or average annual increase of about 1.5 percent. India is ranked 134 out of 187 countries and UN-recognized territories.

In the 2011 Report’s Gender Inequality Index (GII), South Asian women are shown to lag significantly behind men in education, parliamentary representation and labour force participation. India is ranked 129 out of 146 nations in the GI.

As in 2010, this year’s Report also includes the inequality adjusted HDI (IHDI), which takes into account inequality in all three dimensions of the HDI. When adjusted for inequality, India’s HDI falls to 0.392, that is, a loss of 28.3 percent due to inequality. This is slightly lower than the average for South Asia (28.4 percent).

To assess acute poverty levels, the Report’s Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) examines factors such as health services, access to clean water and cooking fuels, plus basic household goods and home construction standards, which together offer a fuller portrait of poverty than income measurements alone. In South Asia, 97 percent of the multidimensionally poor lack access to clean drinking water, toilets, or modern cooking fuels—and 18 percent lack all three.

India has the world’s largest number of multidimensionally poor, according to the Report – 612 million, more than half its population.

The 2011 Report strongly endorses the UN Secretary-General’s recent call to provide electricity service to the 1.5 billion people now off the power grid, mainly in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. This could be achieved for about one-eighth of current global spending on fossil fuel subsidies, estimated at US\$312 billion in 2009.

Asian and Pacific nations are the most vulnerable to projected sea-level rises, with more than 100 million people at risk, says the Report, noting that average sea levels have risen 20 centimetres since 1870.

South Asia has among the world’s highest levels of urban air pollution, with cities in Bangladesh and Pakistan suffering from especially acute air contamination, the Report shows.

However, there has been progress to improve forest cover and protect biodiversity. India is one of seven developing countries (Bhutan, China, Costa Rica, Chile, El Salvador and Viet Nam) which have recently transitioned from deforesting to reforesting. The country, for example, has increased its reforestation rate from 0.2 percent a year between 1990 and 2000 to 0.5 percent a

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year between 2000 and 2010, while Bhutan has pledged to ensure that at least 60 percent of the country remains forested in perpetuity.

The Report adds its voice to those urging consideration of an international currency transaction tax to help fund the fight against global warming and extreme poverty. Roughly US\$105 billion is needed annually just to finance adaptation to climate change, especially in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

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For more information on the 2011 Global Human Development Report, including complete media materials on its indices and specific regional issues, please visit: <http://hdr.undp.org>.

**ABOUT THIS REPORT:** The annual Human Development Report is an editorially independent publication of the United Nations Development Programme, with editions in ten languages. Complete texts of the 2011 Report and all previous Reports since 1990 are available for free downloading as PDFs and e-Books on the Report website: <http://hdr.undp.org/>

For the complete Report:

[http://www.undp.org.in/sites/default/files/reports\\_publication/GHDR\\_2011\\_EN\\_Complete.pdf](http://www.undp.org.in/sites/default/files/reports_publication/GHDR_2011_EN_Complete.pdf)

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[http://www.undp.org.in/sites/default/files/reports\\_publication/GHDR-2011-Hindi-summary.pdf](http://www.undp.org.in/sites/default/files/reports_publication/GHDR-2011-Hindi-summary.pdf)

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