

Breaking the Gridlock: Reimagining Cooperation in a Polarized World



By :- Sabrina Solomon

Today's Q&A focuses on addressing global development challenges and the importance of multilateral cooperation. The human development report launched here by Mr. Pa Lamin Beyat, UNDP representative for Eritrea, also provides specific insights into countries' progress and rankings.

- *What are the main findings of the new report? And why are they important?*

After an unprecedented two-year decline, the 2023 global Human Development Index (HDI) average estimate has reached a record level. However, the sentiment among the populations worldwide is not celebratory because we're witnessing increasing polarization, populism, nativism, exclusion, and conflict. The new human development report analyzes this paradox. It questions the slow progress towards the 2030 agenda for sustainable development and the Paris Agreement, the elusiveness of peace in many regions, and the stagnation in digital governance despite rapid advancements in artificial intelligence. It suggests ways to navigate this state without resorting to violence or isolationism. The specific findings include uneven progress, gridlock and polarization, democracy paradox, erosion of agency, and urgent need for cooperation.

- *How is this year's report different from last year's?*

The 2023-2024 HDR builds on the findings of the last report, in which we identified an emerging “uncertainty complex” with three volatile and interacting layers of uncertainty: the inequalities and dangerous planetary changes of the Anthropocene, the pursuit of sweeping societal transformations, including digital technologies, and widespread, and intensifying polarization. The 2023-2024 HDR builds on the findings of the 2021- 2022 HDR, particularly regarding the global HDI's decline for two consecutive years for the first time.

- *What is the difference between the 2022 and 2023 HDI estimates?*

In addition to the regular HDI from 2022, this year's report includes, for the first time, current-year (2023) estimates based on the 2022 HDI. The 2023 estimates present a global HDI average and regional averages only. The 2023 estimates for individual countries have yet to be publicly available.

- *Thirty years on, is the HDI still relevant?*

The HDI was created to emphasize that people and their capabilities should be the ultimate criteria for assessing a country's development, not economic growth alone. This is more relevant than ever, particularly as we push against planetary boundaries in the Anthropocene.

HDI goes beyond just income (GDP) to consider health (life expectancy) and education. This gives a more complete picture of a country's development. HDI is also a benchmark for progress. It allows tracking a country's improvement over time and comparing it to others at similar income levels. In addition, HDI can highlight areas where a country needs to focus development efforts, like education or healthcare.

A limitation of the HDI is that it focuses on averages. HDI reflects national averages, which can mask disparities. In addition, HDI doesn't account for how development benefits are distributed within a country. The inequality-adjusted HDI (IHDI) addresses this to some extent.

- ***What are the critical indicators for human development, and where does Eritrea lie in this context?***

The Human Development Index (HDI), published by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), is the leading indicator of human development. The HDI is a composite measure that looks at the three critical areas of health expectancy, which is measured by life expectancy at birth, education, which is a combination of the means years of schooling for adults and the expected years for children, and gross national income (GNI) per capita. The average HDI score lies between 0 and 1, with a higher score indicating greater human development. Eritrea's 2021 HDI score is 0.492.

- ***Why should we be concerned with growing inequality? Hasn't the world always been unequal?***

The new HDR warns about the rising inequality between groups of countries after three decades of declining trends. This phenomenon co-occurs as we experience severe climate disruptions, conflicts, and economic slowdowns. Rising inequality may exacerbate the situation if no collective action is taken on these mounting cries that affect us all. Yes, societies have always had some degree of inequality. However, the level and rate of inequality today are causing concerns for several reasons. Like reduced social mobility, when the gap between the rich and the poor is vast, it becomes more complicated for people born into poverty to climb the economic ladder, reinforcing hierarchies and limiting opportunities. Strained social fabric: High inequality can breed resentment and social unrest because some people are left behind, and there is an erosion of trust. Economic stagnation: studies suggest that extreme inequality hinders economic growth because the middle class drives consumption and innovation. Health and well-being: inequality is linked to poorer health outcomes for those at the bottom.

- ***What do you mean by a “globally interdependent world”?***

More and more people live in globally connected societies. The report finds that interdependence across countries is being reconfigured, but it remains high and is increasing in some respects. While international trade in goods and capital flows has stabilized or even decreased, no region today is entirely self-sufficient. All

regions of the world rely on other regions for imports of at least 25% of the goods and services they need, referred to as a “globally interdependent world” by the 2023-2024 HDR. The interdependency, although it can be positive, has some challenges.

According to the HDR, the world needs to manage these interdependencies effectively through international cooperation and global governance, especially in response to rising conflicts and climate change.

- ***What is the “democracy paradox”?***

The paradox is that while most people worldwide endorse democracy, more than half undermine democratic processes by bypassing its fundamental rules. The report argues that this paradox challenges international cooperation, especially on pressing issues like climate change, poverty, inequality, and digitalization—the report calls for rebuilding trust in institutions to achieve collective progress.

- ***What is polarization, and why is it bad? Are people always disagreeing on politics and tastes?***

Polarization is different from disagreement in politics and tastes. Polarization is an extreme widening of the gap between groups holding different viewpoints by becoming entrenched in their beliefs and unwilling to listen to the other. The gridlock created makes it difficult to solve problems requiring cooperation, like climate change, technological regulations, equitable progress, economic instability, etc. Rather than a mere difference in opinion, it is more like an “us vs. them” attitude.

- ***What are misperceptions, why do they matter, and how can they be corrected?***

Misperceptions are incorrect or biased beliefs about others and their view of the world. This is important because others influence people when making decisions or forming opinions. Regarding collective actions, our beliefs about what other people think about specific issues are crucial. Misperception can lead to poor decision-making at individual and societal levels. For instance, misperceptions

about health can lead people to avoid critical medical treatments. The corrective measures to take include getting information from reliable sources, including well-respected news organizations, academic journals, and government websites, not accepting information at face value (being critical), talking to people with different perspectives and promoting awareness through education, and fostering open dialogue to challenge entrenched beliefs.

- ***What are Global Public Goods (GPGs)? What is new about GPG in this report?***

Public goods are resources available to all (they are “non-excludable”) and can be enjoyed by anyone without diminishing the benefits they deliver to others (“non-viral”). GPGs are important for an interconnected world and require international cooperation to address global challenges. The scope of public goods can be local, national, or global, such as mitigating climate change.

The 2023-2024 HDR renews the concept of GPGs and emphasizes the need for international collaboration to address shared challenges and ensure a more equitable future. Using the GPG lens to look at common challenges such as global security, misinformation, climate, finance, digital, and nature can be seen from the perspective of multilateralism. The report highlights the need for new financial mechanisms to supplement traditional development and humanitarian aid and calls for increased focus on digital GPGs to provide equitable access to technological advancement opportunities.

- ***Where is the money going to come from to finance global public goods?***

Global public goods will require additional financing as a complement, rather than substitute or competitor, to traditional development assistance. Financing can come in many forms and may involve new instruments. For instance, automatic triggers can be embedded in loan agreements, especially state-contingent debt instruments, to help poorer countries cope with crises they had little part in generating, such as is the case with climate change. This would create more predictable conditions in navigating an uncertain world that could mobilize and attract private finance into those countries. The 2023-2024 HDR also emphasizes international cooperation as a critical factor in financing GPGs. This could

involve partnerships between the government, multilateral organizations, and private sectors. It suggests innovative financing mechanisms for funding GPGs, including novel tracks in international cooperation that complement traditional development aid.

- *Thank you for your time, Pa Lamin Beyat!*
- *Eritrea Profile,*
- *Mar 23, 2024*
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