

Preface

From MDGs to SDGs

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), launched by the United Nations in 2000, are due to expire in 2015. How to continue this grand programme and further promote human sustainable development has become a major concern for the entire world. Sustainable development is the kind of development that enables everyone to benefit from economic growth and keeps them in harmony with the Earth for an infinite period. Rio+20, or the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, not only launched and advocated the discussions on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), but affirmed green economy as one of the important tools for achieving sustainable development. In this context, to facilitate the development of SDGs and to inspire common progresses, we have conducted this research on Human Green Development Index and tried to measure the efforts made by different countries on improving human well-being and social equity and significantly reducing environmental hazards and ecological scarcity by a set of straight-forward and significant indicators.

The human race has developed step by step through the primitive, agricultural and industrial societies. Human development, whatever stage it has been in, is always related to nature. In the primitive society, human beings relied upon simple tools to wrest a meagre living from nature, thus enabling the human race to multiply and to grow. In agricultural society, they stepped up the exploitation of nature and resources and continued to develop while the eco-environment was still vigorous and capable of resilience. However, in industrial society, as technological progress accelerated, modern industry gradually intensified the transformation, exploitation and destruction of nature; population expansion escalated the conflict between human development and the carrying capacity of the Earth. Sustainable development has thus become an issue confronting the human race today.

In September 2000, at the UN Millennium Summit, the world leaders set out a package of time-bound goals and indicators (MDGs) on the elimination of poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental deterioration and discrimination against

women. They pledged to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability, and develop a global partnership for development. A total of 8 goals and 53 indicators¹ were placed at the core of the global agenda. All the targets are expected to be achieved by 2015—this is a blueprint unfolded jointly by all the countries and major development organizations in the world. “The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have been the most successful global anti-poverty push in history. Significant and substantial progress has been made in meeting many of the targets—including halving the number of people living in extreme poverty and the proportion of people without sustainable access to improved sources of drinking water. The proportion of urban slum dwellers declined significantly. Remarkable gains have been made in the fight against malaria and tuberculosis. There have been visible improvements in all health areas as well as primary education.”²

A Brief Review of Human-Earth Dual-Sustainable Development (DSD)

The UN High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons has been discussing how to set out the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the framework of SDGs on the basis of the progress on MDGs so that they can submit a comprehensive plan aimed at achieving the following goals, i.e. to end poverty, achieve gender equality, provide quality education, ensure healthy lives, secure sustainable energy use, create jobs, sustainable livelihoods, and equitable growth, ensure stable and peaceful societies, improve governance efficiency, and promote continuous development of global cooperation, which encompasses 12 goals and 54 targets (UN High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda 2013). Obviously, in terms of both content and expected results, this is a new agenda for action that strives to go beyond the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Of course, to work out a comprehensive, reasonable and scientific plan and implement it effectively by phase calls for multilateral collaboration, collective wisdom and concerted effort.

We hope to promote, via the concept of “Human Green Development” and its index, the voluntary and conscious participation in this great project. The “Human Green Development Index” tries to provide a simple check-up for the human-Earth dual-sustainable development (DSD). For quite some time, the sustainable

¹ The UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are an action plan universally approved by all the 191 member states. In September 2000, at the UN summit, 189 countries signed the *United Nations Millennium Declaration* and officially made the commitment.

² Quoted from the Foreword to *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2013* by Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-general, published in United Nations, New York. <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/report-2013/mdg-report-2013-english.pdf>

development of the Earth has been unequivocally perceived as subordinate to that of human, from the perspective of the environment and conditions of human development. Today, we need to approach the Earth's sustainability more dialectically and with increased attention; that is, not only is it closely related to human sustainable development, but the Earth in itself has the same right to live and develop as the human race—the Earth needs to be kept “clean” and retain vitality. As a matter of fact, as early as in 1980, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) formulated the World Conservation Strategy, which calls upon the world to study the basic interrelatedness in nature, society, ecology, economy and in the process of the utilisation of natural resources so as to ensure the global sustainable development. The “global sustainable development” brought up here has already encompassed sustainable development in two aspects. It is evident that the socio-economic part is about “human sustainable development”, whereas the natural and ecological part is about “Earth sustainable development”. If we further this concept, we should consciously highlight the two prominent aspects of SDGs: one is that the entire human race must exist “healthily” and develop sustainably; and the other is that resources must be conserved and more efficiently utilised in order to protect the eco-environment and ensure the “health” and sustainable development of the Globe. The proposal of the Human Green Development Index embodies the hope to underline the dual-sustainable development (DSD) of the humanity and Earth and mirror the level of green development with straightforward and consensus-conducive indicators. The countries are encouraged to achieve their fundamental development targets respectively, befitting their own conditions and stage of development.

We summarise *human green development* into “**adequate nutrition and drinking water, heath and sanitation, education and poverty alleviation, bright blue sky, clear clean river, lush green land, and biological coexistence**”, and based on this, 12 indicators are used to depict human green development. These indicators have reflected the importance attached to environmental protection and development and to economic and social progress. It can be safely said that “human green development” involves not only every individual, but the current and future generations; not only the scope of individuals or an area, but the basis of the entire world—the Earth.

Relationship Between Human Green Development Index and Human Development Index

After UNDP put forth the definition of human development for the first time in 1990, it also proposed the Human Development Index (HDI). HDI suggests that human development does not only mean the increase of income and wealth, but is a process of enlarging people's choices. At all levels of development, the three essential ones are for people to lead a long and healthy life, to acquire knowledge and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living. Therefore, HDI is a

composite measure of three dimensions, i.e., life expectancy, educational attainment and standard of living. Though seemingly simple, the Human Development Index is based on the theory of justice that promotes equity and substantive freedom, on welfare economics, and on a profound understanding of “capability”, the concept at the core of human development. The proponents of HDI have traced it back to early philosophers including Aristotle and Kant, to Adam Smith, David Ricardo and Alfred Marshall, and reviewed the contributions of Karl Marx (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 1990, pp. 9–10).

More than 20 years since HDI shows concern for the fair survival and development of human beings, a G, standing for Green, is added to HDI to form HGDI. At a time when climate change and environmental deterioration pose unprecedented threats to mankind, this ingenious index manifests in a more intensive manner the concern of the United Nations for the global crisis confronting the human race as the organization promotes the all-round human development. In other words, if HDI represents the shift from “material centrism” to “human centrism”, HDGI represents another shift from “human centrism” to “earthling centrism”. If HDI highlights the continuous expansion of human needs, HGDI stresses the constraints on human needs are due. In the era when human centrism was advocated, the world population exceeded five billion, still within the carrying capacity of the Earth. It could withstand the “insatiable exploitation” of the human race. Therefore, “human centrism” could still work. But in the “earthling-centred” present, the total population has exceeded seven billion. “...the world economy using today’s technologies is already exceeding several of the Earth’s ‘planetary boundaries’”.³ The relationship between human and Earth is now in a crisis. To handle this relationship well has become a core issue we must lay stress and throw doubts upon, as well as the crux of “human centrism”.

Beijing, China

Xiaoxi Li

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³ Planetary boundaries define the safe operating space for humanity in the Earth system processes along nine dimensions. They include greenhouse gas emissions, nitrogen and phosphorus loading, ozone depletion, chemical pollution, freshwater use, ocean acidification, land use change, atmospheric aerosol loading, and loss of biodiversity. See *An Action Agenda for Sustainable Development* prepared by the Leadership Council of Sustainable Development Solutions Network, p. 2.



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