

## Book Review

UTSAV KUMAR SINGH, *Regional Dimensions of Human Development in India and South Africa: Through Sustainable Development Goals*, Springer Nature: India (2024), pp.200

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Despite impressive economic growth in both India and South Africa, South Africa often outperforms India in key social indicators. Why do some regions or countries thrive while others struggle? Why does economic growth alone fail to eradicate poverty? Are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) effective in addressing regional disparities? The book *Regional Dimensions of Human Development in India and South Africa: Through Sustainable Development Goals* seeks to address these pertinent questions.

Dr. Utsav Kumar Singh's work offers a robust comparative study of human development in two emerging economies, India and South Africa. This scholarly text examines the challenges and opportunities for human development through the framework of the United Nations' SDGs. Singh explores the puzzle of why India, despite its rapid economic growth, lags behind South Africa in several critical human development indicators. The book's strength lies in its empirical rigor, in-depth discussion of policy frameworks, and application of theoretical models, such as Amartya Sen's capability approach. Singh's analysis compels readers to look beyond GDP metrics and consider factors such as human welfare, institutional integrity, and historical contexts in development.

### **Human Development in the Paradigm of Sustainable Development Goals**

The book begins by laying a strong conceptual foundation, discussing various development approaches, from economic growth-centric models to human development frameworks. Singh traces the evolution of global development discourse, emphasising the transition from Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to SDGs. The author highlights the indivisible nature of the SDGs, asserting that progress in one goal is inherently linked to advancements in others. The introductory chapter skilfully integrates Sen's concept of "development as freedom," providing a nuanced perspective on how India and South Africa prioritize (or neglect) human well-being.

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### **Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals**

Singh's critical assessment of India's progress toward achieving the SDGs is particularly enlightening. Despite India's impressive economic growth, the benefits have not been equitably distributed. For instance, India's low ranking in the Global Hunger Index (GHI) and its persistent challenges in poverty alleviation reveal significant shortcomings. Empirical data on issues such as high maternal mortality rates, inadequate sanitation, and disparities in education underscore the challenges of implementing uniform policies in India's diverse federal structure.

In contrast, the book examines South Africa's progress and challenges concerning the SDGs. Post-apartheid South Africa has navigated a complex socio-economic landscape and often outperforms India in areas such as health, education, and poverty reduction. Singh attributes this to targeted welfare programs like the National Development Plan (NDP) and the Expanded Public Works Program (EPWP), which directly address unemployment and social inequalities. However, South Africa's development trajectory is not without its limitations, including persistent unemployment, inequality, and the lingering impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Singh's analysis emphasises how policy decisions often delineate the line between thriving and struggling nations.

### **Impact of UN's Sustainable Development Goals on Human Development in India and South Africa**

Dr. Singh employs regression analysis to evaluate the relationship between economic growth and poverty alleviation, illustrating that human development extends beyond mere economic metrics. While South Africa's economic growth has been relatively sluggish compared to India's, it has achieved a higher ranking on the Human Development Index (HDI). Singh explores why growth-centric models fail to capture broader dimensions of development, particularly in access to healthcare, education, and decent living standards. This statistical evaluation forms the core of the book's contribution to the comparative human development literature. By examining regional disparities within Indian states and South African provinces, Singh highlights how these inequalities impede overall progress toward the SDGs.

The book also offers forward-looking strategies to address these challenges. Singh underscores the importance of asymmetric approaches to tackling uneven development. He argues that a one-size-fits-all model for achieving the SDGs is impractical given the socio-economic diversity of India and South Africa. Singh's recommendations for policy frameworks prioritize investments in education, health, and gender equality to foster both social and economic capital. He concludes by advocating for long-term strategies that can transform the youthful populations of both nations into productive human capital.

### Insights and Critical Reflections

One of the unique features of the book is Singh's engagement with Amartya Sen's framework of "development as freedom." Throughout the text, Singh calls for integrating capabilities – freedoms to lead lives individuals value – into the policy agendas of India and South Africa. The comparative framework employed allows readers to appreciate the nuances of policy design and implementation in nations with shared colonial histories but divergent post-independence trajectories.

The empirical rigour of Singh's analysis is another noteworthy aspect. By grounding theoretical discussions in robust data – including regression analyses and human development indicators – the book strengthens its central thesis: economic growth alone cannot guarantee human development without complementary investments in social infrastructure. Singh's policy recommendations focus on region-specific interventions to address issues such as gender inequality, unemployment, and inadequate access to essential services like healthcare and education.

*Regional Dimensions of Human Development in India and South Africa* makes a significant contribution to the fields of development studies, policy analysis, and comparative politics. Singh's analysis is especially timely as the global community approaches the 2030 deadline for achieving the SDGs. By comparing two nations at different economic and developmental stages, the book offers valuable lessons for policymakers, scholars, and development practitioners. Singh's call for nuanced, regionally sensitive approaches to development provides a refreshing counterpoint to the often simplistic, one-size-fits-all solutions in global development discourse.

This book is an essential read for anyone seeking to understand the complexities of human development in emerging economies. It offers a comprehensive perspective on the intersection of economic growth, social policy, and human well-being.