

Assignment 3

Stiglitz and the UNDP: Differing Perspectives

In *Globalization and its Discontents*, Stiglitz brings to life some issues tackled by the UNDP. His discussions on the World Bank and IMF's roles in Ethiopia versus Botswana, as well as in the East Asian crisis highlight and humanize points not necessarily shown by the UN statistics. Conversely, his biases gloss over important numerical indicators clearly demonstrated by the UN, through its HDI animations. Comparing the two sources can foster a healthy debate, though one needs more than economic and infant mortality numbers to determine the overall health of a nation.

The HDI animation shows that while the five East Asian and two African nations had reasonably similar child mortality rates and GDP per capita in the 1960s, today the African nations lag, especially Ethiopia. Botswana, a country ravaged by AIDS, mirrored Indonesia's improvements until that crisis took hold in the late 1980s. Interestingly, while Botswana's GDP per capita went from \$511 to \$8,230 over the 43 years, Ethiopia went from \$510 to only \$672. Both countries had higher GDP per capita in 2002 than in the following year. The two enjoy lower child mortality rates now, though at 17% (Ethiopia) and 11% (Botswana), neither match the East Asians. Botswana had a commendable 5.8% rate in 1990, since eroded by the AIDS epidemic. Korea stands as the Asian success story, making the greatest strides in both metrics since 1960. These statistics show that the five East Asian countries have improved their GDP per capita markedly over the past 43 years, while Botswana would have mirrored them without the AIDS crisis, and that Ethiopia trails all six greatly.

Stiglitz proves accurate on most accounts, with his perceptions matching the HDI data. Ethiopia, however, does not exhibit the gains his enthusiasm indicates. It seems that his admiration for Prime Minister Meles Zenawi overshadows the country's development. Alternatively, the HDI numbers show broad trends based solely on GDP per capita and child mortality. They also do not account for things like "a seventeen-year guerrilla war against the bloody Marxist regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam" (Stiglitz 26). In his exuberance about Botswana, Stiglitz understates the impact of AIDS, merely saying "Although the country is now suffering from the ravages of AIDS, it averaged a growth rate of more than 7.5 percent from 1961 to 1997" (Stiglitz 36). The country's success grows even more impressive when considering that the life expectancy now

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stands at 36 and 37 years for men and women, respectively

(http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/country_profiles/1068674.stm). Regarding the Asian crisis, Stiglitz's opinions seem consistent with the HDI figures, showing devastating economic results after 1997 with China, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, and Thailand all back on track at present. The author makes astute points on both the African and Asian nations, though understandably his biases at times cloud his reasoning.

While the HDI and Stiglitz focus on a handful of measures to assess a country's success, one can employ many more. Google's Gapminder tool (<http://www.google.tools.com/gapminder>) lets users compare many different measures against time or one another. Some important indicators include fertility rate, contraceptive use (which not surprisingly have a linear relationship), and physicians per 1,000 people. Other ways to measure a country's development include education (especially for women), foreign aid, access to clean water, and freedom of the press. The HDI integrates important factors better than any other index, though the simplified animations do not do it justice. Bhutan considers its wellness in an innovative way, using the Gross National Happiness index which incorporates "preserving its (Bhutan's) traditions and environment"

(http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/country_profiles/1166513.stm). Letting nations judge their own health goes along with Stiglitz's belief that the countries themselves, not the IMF or World Bank, know what they need.

The UN HDI and Joseph Stiglitz do a laudable job of measuring and attacking poverty. Through the UN's comprehensive statistics and the author's personal experience, one can see more clearly the issues at hand in the developing world. To fully grasp the situation, one must seek out more than these two sources, utilizing functions like GapMinder, the free media, and sources within a country. Ultimately to solve the problem of poverty, the world's citizens and its powerful organizations must accumulate as much knowledge as they can, and then apply it in a culturally appropriate manner.