



Human Development Report 1997

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The *Human Development Report*, now in its eighth annual edition, continues its tradition of updating the unique Human Development Indicators comparing human development in most countries of the world, and the data tables on all aspects of human development. The 1997 edition focuses on the goal of eradicating extreme poverty in the early 21st century and views this goal as completely attainable, regarding it as a moral imperative to which almost all countries committed themselves at the World summit for Social Development in 1995.

The foundation for the 20th century's accelerated progress in reducing poverty began with the start of the Industrial Revolution in Europe and North America. The second great period of poverty reduction started in the 1950s in the developing countries with the end of colonialism, and in the past 50 years poverty has fallen more than in the previous 50 centuries. Despite these major achievements however, about a quarter of the developing worlds people still live in absolute poverty and 40% of South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa are trapped in absolute poverty. Some industrial countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States have seen a rise in poverty in recent decades.

The momentum that has occurred thus far against poverty must continue rather than backslide. The *Human Development Report* reviews this challenge from its unique perspective providing an overview of global poverty trends and assessing the scale of today's poverty problems worldwide. The *Report* also examines six priorities for tackling poverty at the country level and sets a global agenda for supportive action.

Given the positive trends of the 20th century, the *Report* argues that eradicating absolute poverty in the first two decades of the 21st century is a completely feasible and affordable goal. To achieve this goal, the international community needs to focus on the poorest and least developed countries, and each country needs to reinforce the positive trends with accelerated action, helping to reverse the menacing setbacks.

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