Social Perspective of Human Development

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Abstract

Recently, there exists a change in the focus of studies on the factors which determine human development, and this change suggests that there are other social factors which may contribute or influence the pace of progress. There is insufficient literature linking religiosity, happiness level, the political stability of the society, and the perceived corruption of public office to development. This study claims that human growth indicated by the Human Development Index (HDI) is not just affected by life expectancy, participation in education, and income but also by other social factors like religion, happiness, corruption in the government, political stability of the society. Employing the descriptive correlational method in determining the relationship of religiosity, happiness, corruption, and political stability to human development, we found that happiness has the most significant effect on human development with an F value of 4.76 and p-value of 0.041. We conclude that a happy society is a developed society.

Keywords: Development; economics; happiness; productivity; social science

Introduction

According to Social Science Research Council (2018), human development is about expanding people’s freedom and opportunities, and improving their well-being. One of the most widely used indicators for human development is the Human Development Index initiated by the United Nations Development Program (2016). This program presents a summarized measure of human achievements from three key dimensions which include long and healthy life, knowledge, and a decent standard of living. The indicators used to measure the index include life expectancy index, education index, and gross national index. A geometric mean is derived for each country which serves as the country’s Human Development Index. The values of the index range from highest (1.0) to the lowest zero (0), which stipulates that higher index means that the people in that country have a very high lifespan, the education level is very high, and the GDP per capita is also very high. This study concluded that happiness, which is a key factor in productivity of the population, is an essential tool in attaining human development.

But in recent times, there has been a change in emphasis of studies on factors that can lead to human development. Jacobs and Cleveland (1999) termed the shift in focus as "the enabling conditions, strategies and public policies, which include peace, democracy, social freedom, equal access, laws, institutions, markets, infrastructure, education, and technology." They further asserted that human development is not...
just the result of increased life expectancy, more participation in education, and increase income but also of other social factors.

The discourse of social development emphasized the importance of social interaction—"the recognition that people, and the way they interact in groups and society, and the norms that facilitate such interaction, also shape development processes" (Davis, 2004). It suggests that there are other social factors, which may contribute or influence the pace of development.

Studies related to development have pointed several factors as contributors. For example, Steinberger et al. (2012) linked carbon emission with human development. Their study emphasized that carbon-exporting countries and regions perform worse than the global trend regarding socioeconomic achievement given their level of carbon emissions but the carbon importing countries are incredibly diverse – ranging from the richest to the poorest. Others like Gries and Naude (2011) pointed entrepreneurship as the provider of capabilities to human functioning which contribute towards expanding the set of intellectual skills through being both a resource and a process, which can significantly impact development.

Human development is also closely linked with human resource development (Kuchinke, 2010) because it is closely intertwined with health, functioning, and life quality (McDougall, Wright, and Rosenbaum, 2010). That is why, when people’s health is somewhat neglected - like when there is a widespread migration of physicians, development is affected (Bhargava, Docquier, and Moullan, 2011).

Studies, however, are limited to pointing social factors as contributors to human development. There is insufficient literature that linked religiosity of the people, their happiness level, the political stability of the society they live in, and the perceived corruption of their public office to their development as human beings. This paper claims that these social factors influence the course of human development. This, therefore, tries to determine if these social factors have a significant relationship with human development.

**Conceptual Framework**

The United Nations Development Program defines human development as the process of enlarging people’s choices to include long and healthy life, adequate education and the decent standard of living, as well as political freedom, the guarantee of human rights and a sense of self-respect (United Nations Development Program, 1997). The definition means that there are social factors that affect human development other than life expectancy, education, and income.

The social factors that this study identified include religion, happiness, corruption in the
government, and political stability of the society. These social factors can affect human development because they affect human behavior. For example, since religion can affect the moral development of a person, it may, therefore, affect the person's overall development.

The same effects are also true with happiness, corruption, and political stability because they are factors that affect the people on the personal as well as societal level. Human development can advance or decline depending on how these factors work.

**Methodology**

This study employed the descriptive correlational method in determining the relationship of religiosity, happiness, corruption, and political stability to human development. The data on religiosity, happiness, corruption, political stability and human development for the year 2015 were taken from several databases.

The world happiness index reviewed the state of happiness in the world today, which reflect a new worldwide demand for more attention to happiness as a criterion for government policy (Helliwell, Layard, and Sachs, 2016). Meanwhile, the religiosity index measures global self-perceptions on beliefs based on interviews with more than 50,000 men and women selected from 57 countries across the globe in five continents and assigned religiosity rating for each state covered (WIN-Gallup International, 2012).

The corruption perception index, on the other hand, is a score of the countries' perceived level of corruption in the public sector. The score ranges from 0-100 where 0 is equated to the highest level of perceived corruption, and 100 is equated to the lowest level of perceived corruption (Transparency International, 2016). Meanwhile, the political stability index is a composite measure based on several other indices from multiple sources. The index measured the likelihood of a disorderly transfer of government power, armed conflict, violent demonstrations, social unrest, international tensions, terrorism, as well as ethnic, religious or regional conflicts (The Global Economy.Com, 2016). The higher is the value of the political index, the lesser is the perceived chance of political destabilization.

Lastly, the Human development index (HDI), based on United Nations Development Program (2016) is the geometric mean of a normalized index of average achievement in critical dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and have a decent standard of living. The health dimension is assessed by life expectancy at birth; the education dimension is measured by mean of years of schooling for adults aged 25 years and more and expected years of education for children of school entering age; and decent standard of living is measured by Gross National Income Index. The rating ranges from 0 to 1 with 0 as the lowest human development, and one as the highest. The HDI is the geometric mean of normalized indices from each of these three dimensions (United Nations Development Program, 2013).

In the analysis of the data, descriptive statistics were conducted first to show the countries' human development indices about the religiosity, happiness, corruption, and political stability. Meanwhile, to determine the individual and overall effects of the four social factors to human development index, the general linear model of regression was performed. Conclusions and implications were then drawn from the results of the data analysis.

**Results and Discussion**

The table below shows the distribution of human development based on religiosity, happiness, political stability, and corruption perception in 21 countries. The data highlight that there are no particular observable trends in the behavior of religiosity, happiness, political stability, and corruption perception.
as they relate to human development index, except for the happiness index in which a direct relationship pattern can be detected with human development index.

As the happiness index increases, so as the human development index. But the same cannot be observed for religiosity, political stability and corruption perception.

The general linear model explains 73.96% (R-squared value, Table 2) of the variability of the data. The model means that 73.96% of the variability of HDI is described by the model when the independent variables include religiosity index, happiness index, political stability, and corruption perception. However, only happiness has a statistically significant effect on HDI with an F-value of 4.76 and a p-value of 0.041. This information means that as the level of happiness of the citizenry increases, so does the level of HDI.

HDI is a measure of three dimensions (long and healthy life, knowledge, and the decent standard of living), which is calculated through life expectancy index, education index, and gross national income index (United Nations Development Program, 2016). The derived model implies that when people are happy, they are more productive. Hence, the overall human development is high.

The finding that level of happiness is significantly correlated with human development is essential since happiness is seen as the outcome of development. Although this paper does not claim causality between happiness and human development, the finding emphasized the need to consider happiness as a factor towards human development. Graham (2008) stated that “people’s expectations for health standards influence their reported health and associated happiness.” However, Graham’s study found that causality between happiness and health in both directions, most likely occurs because personality traits or other unobservable variables are linked to better health and higher happiness levels (Graham, 2008). Nevertheless, higher levels of happiness are associated with better health outcomes (Graham, 2008). Argyle (1997) also found that happiness and positive moods influence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Human Development Index</th>
<th>Religiosity</th>
<th>Happiness</th>
<th>Political Stability</th>
<th>Corruption Perception</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>0.465264</td>
<td>83.00</td>
<td>3.360</td>
<td>-2.46</td>
<td>11.000</td>
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<td>Cameroon</td>
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<td>82.00</td>
<td>4.513</td>
<td>-0.94</td>
<td>27.000</td>
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<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>0.514024</td>
<td>93.00</td>
<td>4.875</td>
<td>-2.11</td>
<td>26.000</td>
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<td>Kenya</td>
<td>0.548409</td>
<td>88.00</td>
<td>4.356</td>
<td>-1.27</td>
<td>25.000</td>
</tr>
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<td>India</td>
<td>0.608693</td>
<td>81.00</td>
<td>4.404</td>
<td>-0.96</td>
<td>38.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>0.665879</td>
<td>64.00</td>
<td>4.459</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>44.000</td>
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<td>Moldova</td>
<td>0.693303</td>
<td>83.00</td>
<td>5.897</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>33.000</td>
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<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>0.721191</td>
<td>75.00</td>
<td>5.045</td>
<td>-0.93</td>
<td>38.000</td>
</tr>
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<td>China</td>
<td>0.727495</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>5.245</td>
<td>-0.46</td>
<td>37.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenia</td>
<td>0.732983</td>
<td>92.00</td>
<td>4.360</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td>35.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>0.734203</td>
<td>86.00</td>
<td>5.743</td>
<td>-0.52</td>
<td>36.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
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<td>71.00</td>
<td>4.324</td>
<td>-1.93</td>
<td>27.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azerbaijan</td>
<td>0.751139</td>
<td>44.00</td>
<td>5.291</td>
<td>-0.50</td>
<td>29.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>0.754119</td>
<td>84.00</td>
<td>4.252</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
<td>52.000</td>
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<td>Turkey</td>
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<td>5.389</td>
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<td>Lebanon</td>
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<td>Russia</td>
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<td>5.856</td>
<td>-0.84</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
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<td>5.813</td>
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<td>61.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
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<td>81.00</td>
<td>5.835</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>62.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>0.909952</td>
<td>38.00</td>
<td>5.458</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>75.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
health, and vice versa.

On the other hand, Oswald, Proto, and Sgroi (2015) found evidence that happiness raises productivity through an experiment where happiness levels increased leading to a 12% greater productivity in a paid piece-rate Niederle-Vesterlund task.

### Conclusion

We conclude that happiness, which is a key factor in productivity of the population, is an essential tool in attaining human development. When the people are happy, they will become productive. The productivity level of the economy is one of the important social factors of human development.

### References Cited


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