



## **Human Development in an Era of Geopolitical Turbulence A Critical Reflection**

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Human development has always been interpreted as the upsurge of freedom, possibilities, and capacities of people to live dignified and meaningful life. However, in the current international environment characterized by the continuous wars, strategic tensions, and geopolitical disintegration, this vision also seems to be becoming more vulnerable. Conflict is no longer an isolated phenomenon that takes place on given borders across the world. It has ripple effects in financial markets, disturbs trade routes, destabilized food systems, and undermined social institutions. In this kind of climate, it would be necessary to stop and question whether authentic human growth will thrive under a consistent atmosphere of crisis.

The monetary implications of the on-going wars go way beyond the battle field. The advanced and developing economies are under the pressure of rising energy costs, interrupted supply chains, and inflation. The governments tend to react by increasing the defense spending, shifting the fiscal resources to the security agenda. However, when the military budgets are increasing, what becomes of the state investment in education, healthcare and social protection? These trade-offs are not mere hypothetical figures to many poor debts burdened countries with weak institutions. They become overcrowded schools, hospitals that are not well funded and welfare systems that are crippled. The progress made during decades may collapse in just a few years out of continuous geopolitical confrontation.

Even businesses are under deep uncertainty. Business individuals and companies do not just work in markets that are guided by market signals, but also political risks. The existence of trade sanctions, currency fluctuations, regulatory uncertainty, and logistical failures are unfavorable to the strongest of businesses. Small and medium enterprises have little or no flexibility in the location of their business, since large multinationals can change their location or open branches in various countries. As the businesses shrink or collapse, people lose jobs and their households reduce their earnings.



The aftershocks are instantaneous. Is it really possible to achieve entrepreneurship where there is instability, and not opportunity? Innovation would not thrive well when survival is the key issue.

The poor are the most affected by the burden of these disruptions. The poor families use higher proportion of their income on basic commodities including food and energy. When prices soar as a result of the disruption that is caused by conflicts, they do not have much resilience to absorb the shock. Savings are drained, children can be taken out of school to boost earning of the family, and healthcare will be restricted. It is very overwhelming that the individuals who play the least role in terms of geopolitical rivalries are usually the most hurt. Does the global system have a structure that sufficiently safeguards the vulnerable populations or does it continue to marginalize them in the moments of crisis?

In conflict stricken areas, women and children are still especially vulnerable. Women are often left more insecure and exposed to more unpaid care duties coupled with lesser opportunities to access employment and health services. Girls have higher chances of dropping out of school and this will have long term consequences in terms of economic participation and empowerment. The children who grow up in a background characterized by violence and displacement have broken education, psychological trauma, and malnutrition. They are not short-lived effects, but they define the life course and the generational outcomes. What is development anyway when it comes to growing generations of people in fear and insecurity?

The present geopolitical situation dictates a more in-depth consideration of the global priorities. Security is of course a critical factor, but the state of permanent peace cannot be established by the military power only. It calls upon commitment in human potential, institutions that are inclusive, as well as economic systems that are fair. Development policy should not then be considered as a pretext to an end but a source of stability. When the societies focus on health, education, gender equality, and economic opportunity, they become resilient to conflict as opposed to reacting to it.

At the end of the day, future of human development lies in the joint decisions to be taken by governments, international institutions, businesses and the civil society. Will global leadership keep on bending the resource towards strategic competition, or will it retrench a decision to human centered progress? The response will make this period in history marked by enhanced divisions or by the new attempts to put human dignity at the center of world governance.



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