

# HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

REPORT 2023/2024  
OVERVIEW



**Breaking  
the  
gridlock**

**Reimagining  
cooperation in  
a polarized world**

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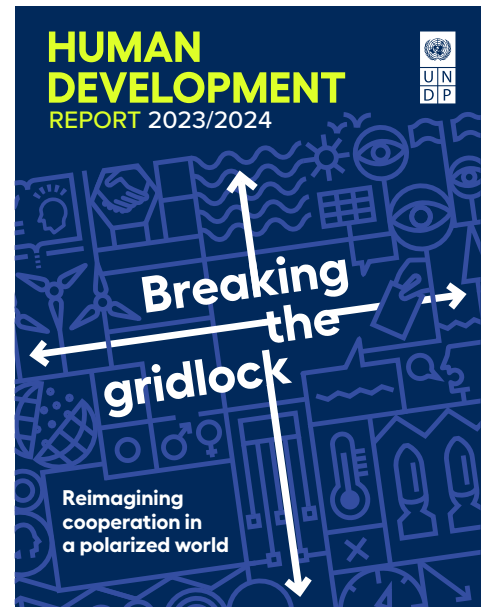
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The 2023/2024 Human Development Report



**HUMAN DEVELOPMENT  
REPORT 2023/2024**

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**OVERVIEW**

# **Breaking the gridlock**

Reimagining cooperation in a polarized world



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## Foreword

We live in a tightly knit world. Yet shared, interlinked global challenges, such as runaway climate change, are outpacing our institutions' capacities to respond to them. We face "a global gridlock," exacerbated by growing polarization within our countries, which translates into barriers to international cooperation.

Why, despite all our riches and technologies, are we so stuck? Is it possible to mobilize action to address globally shared challenges in a world that is intensively polarized? These questions motivate the 2023/2024 Human Development Report. Firmly grounded in the advancement made in its predecessors, the Report reminds us that our shared aspirations for development need to go beyond wellbeing achievements to also enable people to feel more in control of their lives, less threatened and more empowered to act on shared challenges.

The human toll of this growing gridlock is huge. In lives lost, in opportunities forgone, in feelings of despair. After 20 years of progress, and for the first time on record, inequalities in Human Development Index (HDI) values—which measure a country's health, education and standard of living—are growing between countries at the bottom and countries at the top of the index. Following the 2020 and 2021 declines in the global HDI value, the world had the opportunity to build forward better. Instead, this Human Development Report shows that our global community is falling short. Deaths in battle and displacement from violent conflicts are increasing, reaching the highest levels since World War II. Leading up to a decade of increasingly higher temperatures, 2023 has been the hottest ever recorded. The path of human development progress shifted downwards and is now below the pre-2019 trend, threatening to entrench permanent losses in human development.

Unless we change course.

We can still redress inequalities in human development, but we must rapidly learn some lessons. To start, the Report argues that we need to capitalize on our global connections, choosing cooperation over conflict. The Report shows how the mismanagement of cross-border interdependencies (the response to the Covid-19 pandemic, for example) is at the root of many contemporary challenges, ranging from debt distress in numerous low- and middle-income countries to threats to food security to a pervasive sense of

disempowerment around the world. New analysis in the Report using data from the World Values Survey shows that only half the global population feels in control of their lives and that only one-third of people believe that their voice is heard in their political system.

Looking ahead, there will only be more globally shared opportunities and challenges. Besides the high economic interdependence, two main drivers of interdependence are likely to shape our future in the decades to come. First, the dangerous planetary changes of the Anthropocene are deepening the global connections among societies, economies and ecosystems: viruses, microplastics in our oceans and forest fires do not care much for national borders. As the Report argues, we may choose to deglobalize, but we cannot "deplanetize." Second, an unfolding Digital Revolution has led to a dizzying increase in the sharing of data, ideas and culture across societies.

To break the gridlock, the Report is an invitation to reimagine cooperation by pursuing three ideas that it encourages the world to fight for.

First, it is imperative to pursue common ground while accepting that people will have the right to retain their diverse interests and priorities. Piercing a fog of false differences, or misperceptions, is one of the most effective ways of changing behaviour towards cooperation that addresses shared challenges.

Second, we must enable people to pursue their legitimate and natural human security ambitions without protectionism. It has now been 30 years since the 1994 Human Development Report introduced the notion of human security. It focuses on what gives people agency to shape their lives free from fear, want and living without dignity. From the energy transition to artificial intelligence, discussion of risks and challenges needs to be rebalanced with the consistent articulation of the potential to live, for the first time ever, with a surplus of energy and with artificial intelligence that augments what people can do.

Third, we need a 21st century architecture for international cooperation to deliver global public goods. This includes the planetary public goods required to navigate the Anthropocene—from climate change mitigation to pandemic preparedness to biodiversity preservation—as well as the digital public infrastructure and digital public goods that would enable the Digital

Revolution to be harnessed to enable people to flourish in more equitable ways. Global public goods are vital for our interdependent future as global citizens and require rethinking international finance to complement development assistance (supporting poor countries) and humanitarian assistance (saving lives in emergencies).

Indeed, we need to recognize the undeniable fact that we now have access to new financial mechanisms,

extraordinary technologies and our greatest asset: human ingenuity and our cooperative capacities. Yet today, psychologists warn that many children report feeling anxious and that they feel they live in a world that does not care about their future. This Report is a rallying cry—we can and must do better than this. It charts ways forward and invites to a conversation on reimagining cooperation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Achim Steiner', with a stylized, flowing script.

**Achim Steiner**

Administrator

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How to make sense of producing a Human Development Report at a time of war? Not only of wars between and within countries but also with our planet, with ourselves and with our future? These questions weighed heavily on our minds. But over time they strengthen the resolve of the team, fuelled by the conviction that the recurring messages of successive Human Development Reports are more relevant than ever. They bear repeating and reaffirming, because even though they may have been said many times before, they seem to be pushed more and more into the background. The primacy of people as the purpose and agents of development. The crucial importance of enabling people to live free from want, fear and indignity, still relevant 30 years after the introduction of the concept of human security in the 1994 Human Development Report.

This, as other Human Development Reports, is an examination of the barriers that enable people to live their lives to their full potential and what to do about them. And here there is much that is new in the world today. Building on the 2021/2022 Human Development Report, which identified polarization as a barrier to addressing shared challenges as one of the novel layers of uncertainty confronting the world, this Report does a deep dive into the reasons why polarization is increasing, how that creates gridlock in collective action and how to reimagine cooperation to break the gridlock. The Report was possible only because of the encouragement, generosity and contributions of so many, recognized only imperfectly and partially in these acknowledgments.

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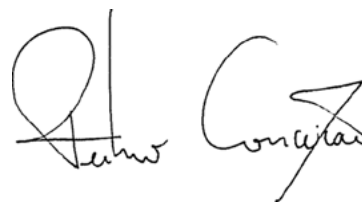
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A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Pedro Conceição', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Pedro Conceição**

Director

Human Development Report Office

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# Breaking the gridlock

A snapshot of the 2023/2024  
Human Development Report

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## **Breaking the gridlock**

A snapshot of the 2023/2024 Human Development Report



We can do better than this. Better than runaway climate change and pandemics. Better than a spate of unconstitutional transfers of power amid a rising, globalizing tide of populism. Better than cascading human rights violations and unconscionable massacres of people in their homes and civic venues, in hospitals, schools and shelters.

We must do better than a world always on the brink, a socioecological house of cards. We owe it to ourselves, to each other, to our children and their children.

We have so much going for us.

We know what the global challenges are and who will be most affected by them. And we know there will surely be more that we cannot anticipate today.

We know which choices offer better opportunities for peace, shared prosperity and sustainability, better ways to navigate interacting layers of uncertainty and interlinked planetary surprises.<sup>1</sup>

We enjoy unprecedented wealth, knowhow and technology—unimaginable to our ancestors—that with more equitable distribution and use could power bold and necessary choices for peace and for sustainable, inclusive human development on which peace depends.

So why does pursuing the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement feel like a half-hearted slog through quicksand?

Why in many places does restoring peace, even pauses or ceasefires as hopeful preludes to peace, feel so elusive?

Why are we immobilized on digital governance while artificial intelligence races ahead in a data goldrush?

In short, why are we so stuck? And how do we get unstuck without resorting myopically to violence or isolationism? These questions motivate the 2023/2024 Human Development Report.

Sharp questions belie their complexity; issues with power disparities at their core often defy easy explanation. Magic bullets entice but mislead—siren songs peddled by sloganeering that exploits group-based grievances. Slick solutions and simple recipes poison our willingness to do the hard work of overcoming polarization.

Geopolitical quagmires abound, driven by shifting power dynamics among states and by national gazes yanked inward by inequalities, insecurity and polarization, all recurring themes in this and recent

Human Development Reports. Yet we need not sit on our hands simply because great power competition is heating up while countries underrepresented in global governance seek a greater say in matters of global import. Recall that global cooperation on smallpox eradication and protection of the ozone layer, among other important issues such as nuclear nonproliferation, happened over the course of the Cold War.

Slivers of hope have emerged even now. The Ukraine grain deal, before its suspension in 2023, averted widespread food insecurity, which would have hurt poorer countries and poorer people most. The production of Covid-19 vaccines, which saved millions of lives, relies on global supply chains, although, tragically, many more lives could have been saved if vaccine coverage had been more equitable.<sup>2</sup> Countries continue to cooperate on genomic sequencing of variants, even as shameful inequities in vaccine access persist.<sup>3</sup> At the 28th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the world established a new loss and damage fund to benefit more than 3 billion people, with pledges totalling over \$600 million.<sup>4</sup> Global clean energy investment, and the jobs and opportunities that come with it, reached an all-time high of \$1.8 trillion in 2023 (equivalent to the size of the economy of the Republic of Korea), almost twice the amount in 2020.<sup>5</sup>

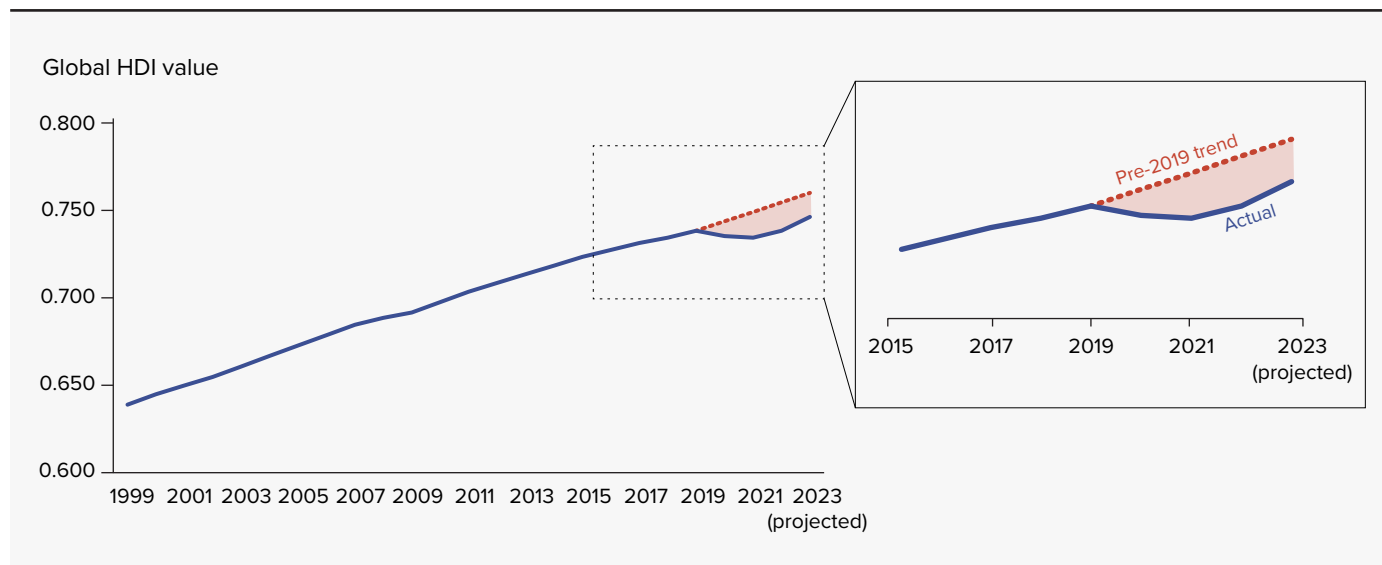
However challenging they are, geopolitics are simply not an excuse to stay stuck in gridlock. There are paths through. Reimagining and fully providing global public goods in ways that meet national development needs at the same time is one of them.

The 2021–2022 Human Development Report argued that a new uncertainty complex is unsettling lives the world over and dragging on human development. The global Human Development Index (HDI) value fell for the first time ever—in both 2020 and 2021.

The global HDI value has since rebounded to a projected record high in 2023 (figure S.1). All components of the global HDI are projected to exceed their pre-2019 values.<sup>6</sup>

Despite being projected to reach a new high, the global HDI value would still be below trend. And the global figure masks disturbing divergence across countries: every Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development country is projected to have recovered, but only about half of the Least

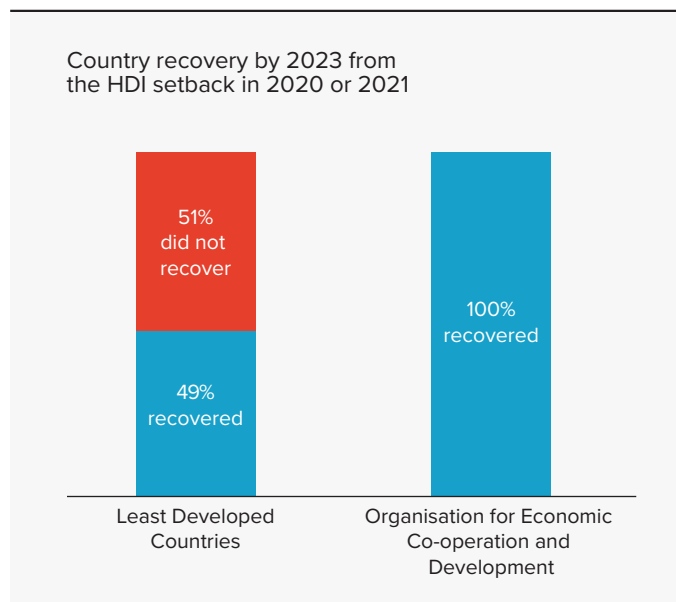
**Figure S.1 A permanent shift in the Human Development Index (HDI) trajectory?**



**Note:** The global HDI value for 2023 is a projection. The pre-2019 trend is based on the evolution of the global HDI value in the previous 20 years.

**Source:** Human Development Report Office calculations based on data from Barro and Lee (2018), IMF (2023d), UNDESA (2022, 2023), UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2023), United Nations Statistics Division (2023) and World Bank (2023).

**Figure S.2 Recovery of Human Development Index (HDI) values since the 2020–2021 decline is projected to be highly unequal**



**Note:** Least Developed Countries have low levels of income and face vulnerabilities that make them “the poorest and weakest segment” of the international community (<https://www.un.org/ohrlls/content/about-least-developed-countries>). Recovery means that countries that suffered a decline in HDI value in 2020 or 2021 are projected to reach or surpass their pre-decline HDI value by 2023.

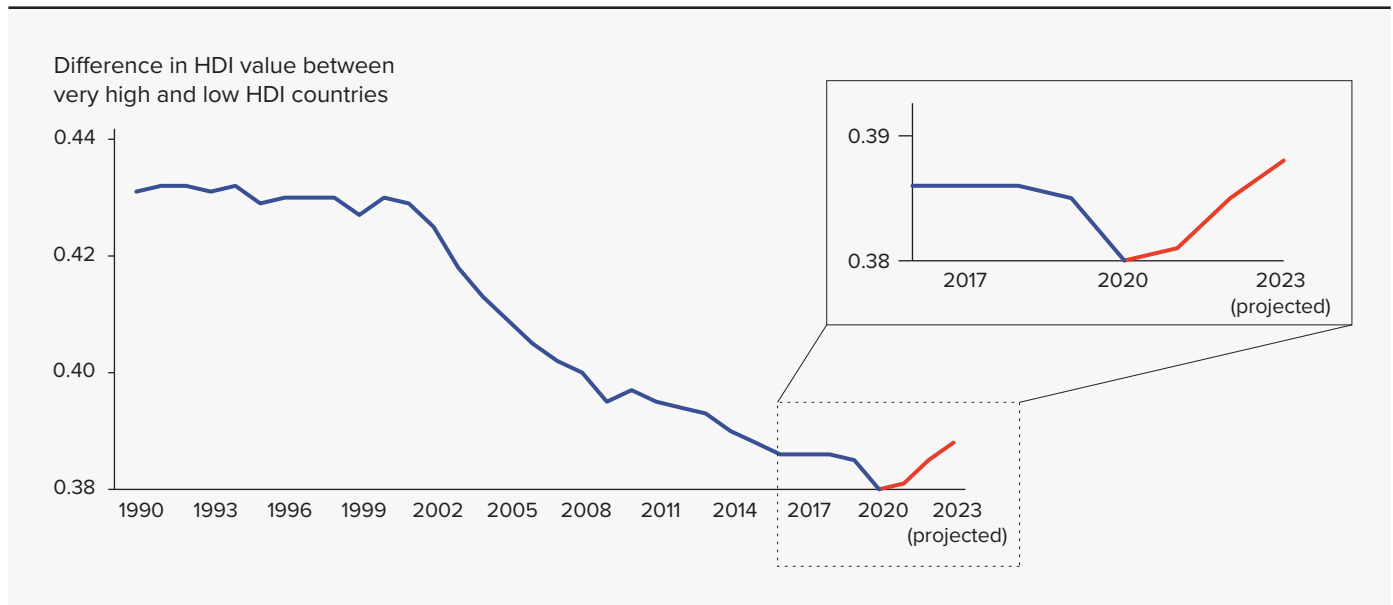
**Source:** Human Development Report Office calculations based on data from Barro and Lee (2018), IMF (2023d), UNDESA (2022, 2023), UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2023), United Nations Statistics Division (2023) and World Bank (2023).

Developed Countries are projected to have done so (figure S.2). After 20 years of steady progress, inequality between countries at the upper and lower ends of the HDI has reversed course, ticking up each year since 2020 (figure S.3).

If the global HDI value continues to evolve below the pre-2019 trend, as it has since 2020, losses will be permanent. Based on the 1999–2019 trend, the global HDI value was on track to cross the threshold defining very high human development (a value of 0.800) by 2030—coinciding with the deadline to meet the Sustainable Development Goals. Now, the world is off track. Indeed, every region’s projected 2023 HDI value falls below its pre-2019 trend. Whatever its future trajectory, the global HDI value will capture—incompletely, if at all—many other important elements, such as the debilitating effects of chronic illness or the spikes in mental health disorders or in violence against women, all restricting people’s possibilities for their lives. For rich and poor countries alike some losses will never be recovered. Whatever the charts and indicators may say about people today, the Covid-19 pandemic took some 15 million lives.<sup>7</sup> We cannot get them back. Nor the time siphoned off in so many ways—in isolation, in caregiving, in not attending school.

The HDI is an important, if crude, yardstick for human development. Just a few years ago wellbeing had never been higher, poverty never lower. Yet people

**Figure S.3** Inequality between very high Human Development Index (HDI) and low HDI countries is increasing, bucking long-run declines



**Note:** The difference in HDI values for 2023 is based on projections.  
**Source:** Human Development Report Office calculations based on data from Barro and Lee (2018), IMF (2023), UNDESA (2022, 2023), UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2023), United Nations Statistics Division (2023) and World Bank (2023).

around the world were reporting high levels of sadness, stress and worry (figure S.4).<sup>8</sup> Those self-reported measures have since risen for nearly 3 billion people.<sup>9</sup> And while 9 in 10 people show unwavering support for the ideal of democracy, there has been an increase in those supporting leaders who may undermine it: today, for the first time ever, more than half the global population supports such leaders (figure S.5).<sup>10</sup>

The uncertainty complex has cast a very long shadow on human development writ large, with recent years marking perhaps an unfortunate and avoidable fork in its path rather than a short-lived setback.

What gives?

Progress feels harder to grasp, especially when planetary pressures are brought into view; our standard development measures are clearly missing some things. One of those things may be the disempowerment of people—gaps in human agency—which is taking combined hits from new configurations of global complexity and interdependence, uncertainty, insecurity and polarization.

People are looking for answers and a way forward. This can be channelled helpfully via shared ambition that brings everyone along (not necessarily on everything) in areas of cooperation that are not zero-sum, enabled by cooperative narratives and

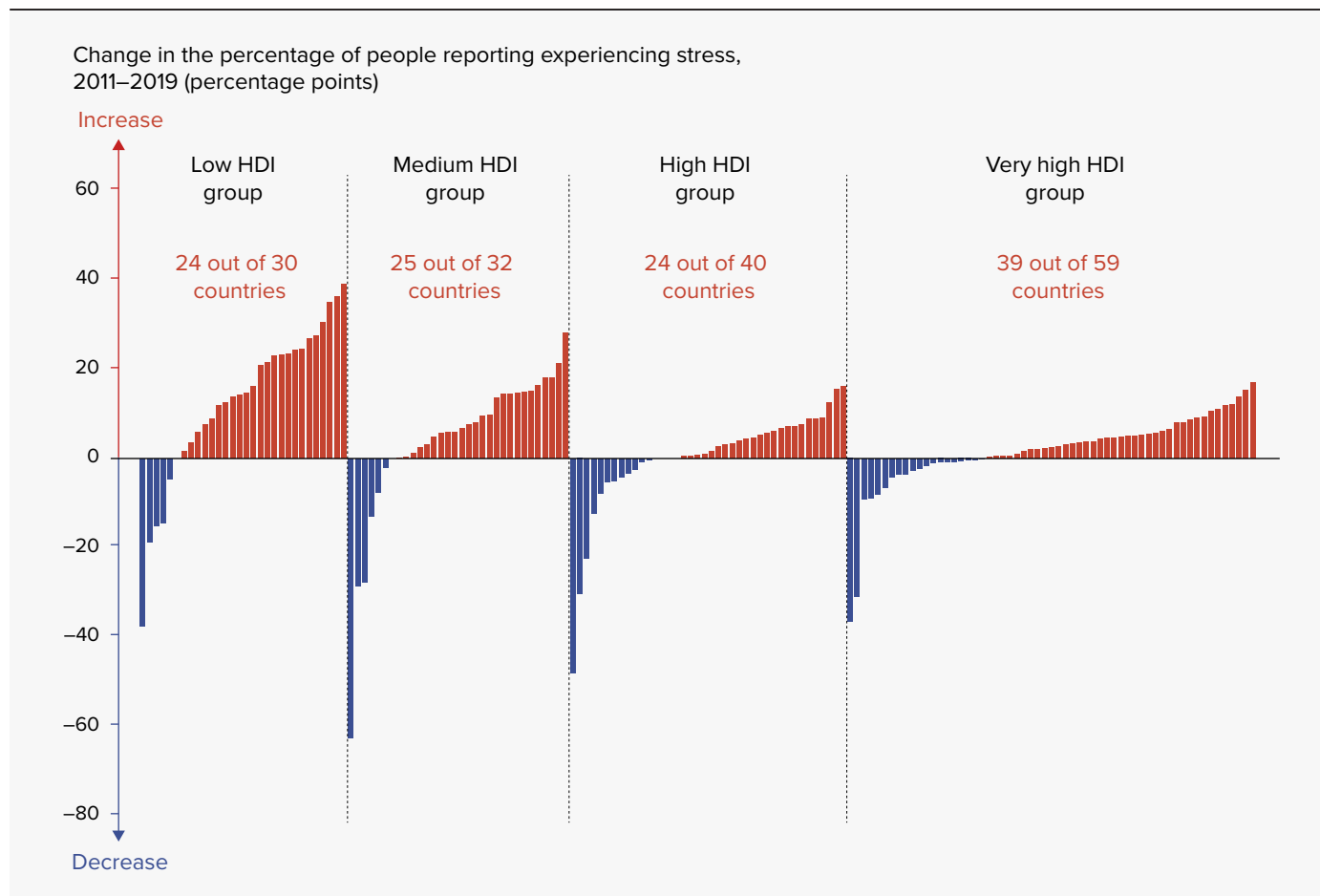
institutions built on a bedrock of generalized trust. Over the past 10 years both very high and high HDI countries have improved their HDI values without increasing planetary pressures, a shift from previous trends of the two increasing together, so there are reasons to hope that this might be possible (figure S.6).

Or it can be channelled, as it seems now, into vicious cycles of demonizing blame games that breed, at best, suspicion and distrust and, at worst, prejudice, discrimination and violence.

Troublingly, populism has exploded, blowing past last century’s peaks, which roughly corresponded to periods of mismanaged globalization.<sup>11</sup> That is happening alongside, and in many cases exploiting, wicked forms of polarization, such as the winnowing and hardening of narrow identities, a sort of coercion or unfreedom enabled, if not outright celebrated, by an ongoing fetishization of so-called rational self-interest.

People’s ability to determine for themselves what it means to live a good life, including defining and reassessing their responsibilities to other people and to the planet, has been crowded out in many ways. Metastatic hands-off dogma hides the raiding of the economic and ecological cookie jar. Dog-eat-dog and beggary-neighbour mindsets harken back to mercantilist eras. And policies and institutions—including those

**Figure S.4 Self-reported stress rose in most countries, even before the Covid-19 pandemic**



HDI is Human Development Index.

**Note:** Values refer to the change in the percentage of people who reported experiencing stress “during a lot of the day yesterday.”

**Source:** Human Development Report Office, based on Gallup (2023).

that have mismanaged globalized market dynamics—default to “me” before “we.”

We are at an unfortunate crossroad. Polarization and distrust are on a collision course with an ailing planet. Insecurity and inequalities have a lot to do with it. So does a constellation of disempowering narratives that engender defensive fatalism and catastrophic inertia—all circumscribed and, in some sense fuelled by, dizzying political polarization.

What can we do to help turn things around? Quite a lot.

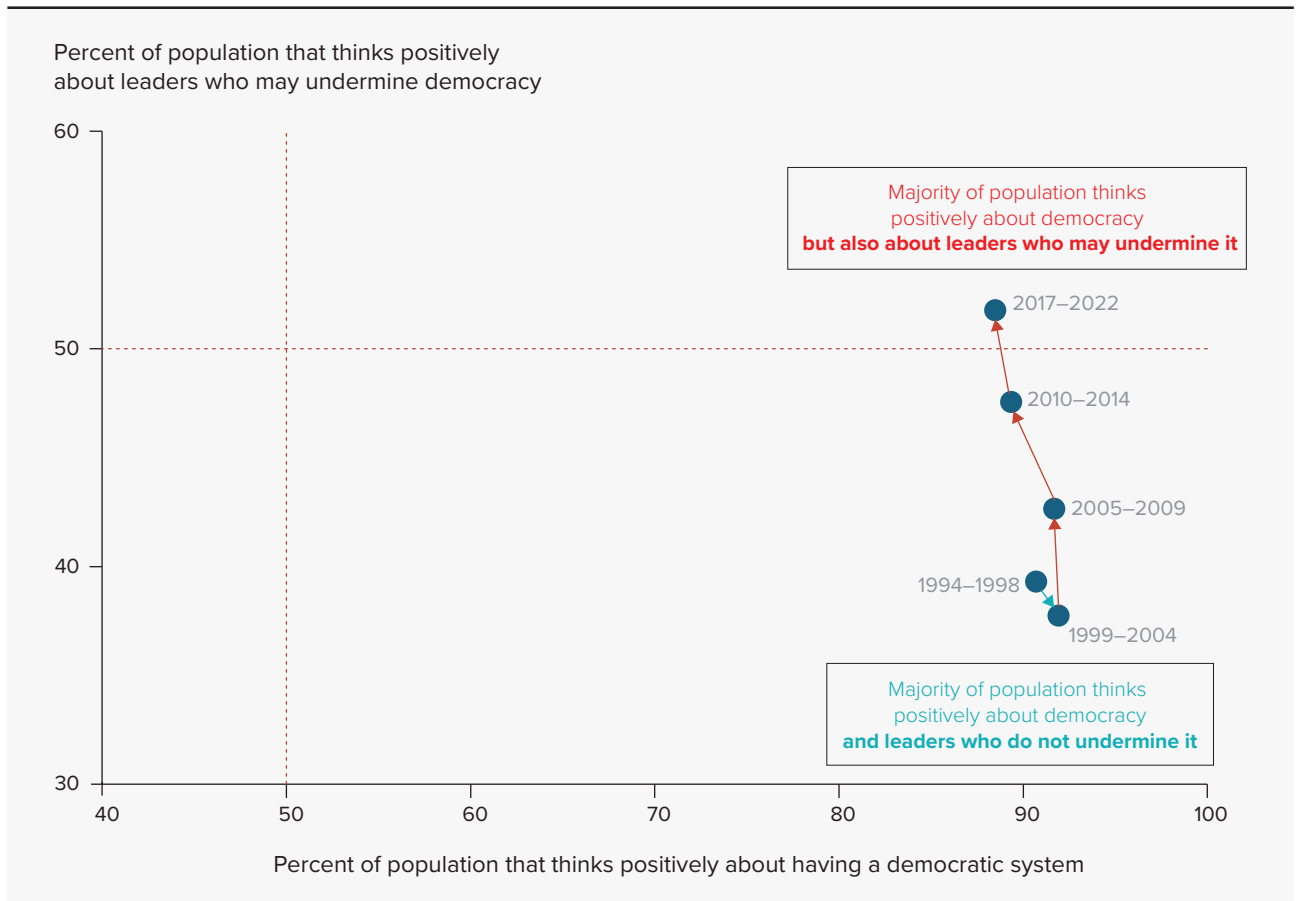
### Build a 21st century architecture for global public goods

First, we should build out a 21st century architecture to deliver the global public goods that we all depend on. It would function as a third track to international

cooperation, complementing development assistance focused on poorer countries and humanitarian assistance focused on emergencies. These tracks are not silos. Distinctively, a global public goods architecture would aim for transfers from rich countries to poorer ones that advance goals for every country to benefit. Every country has a chance to have a say, as well as an opportunity to contribute. As such, this third track is intrinsically multilateral.

Global public goods will require additional financing as a complement, rather than substitute for or competitor, to traditional development assistance. The financing can come in many forms. For example, when some portion of an investment in a poorer country generates global benefits, the corresponding financing (or technology transfer) should tend to be concessional, so that alignment is achieved between who benefits (the rest of the world) and who pays (the

**Figure S.5** The- democracy paradox? Unwavering support for democracy but increasing support for leaders who may undermine it



**Note:** Data are population-weighted averages for a panel of countries representing 76 percent of the global population. Percent of population on the vertical axis refers to people who responded that having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections is “very good” or “fairly good.” Percent of population on the horizontal axis refers to people who responded that having a democratic political system is “very good” or “fairly good.”  
**Source:** Human Development Report Office based on data from multiple waves of the World Values Survey (Inglehart and others 2022).

rest of the world). The flipside is the case of hazards or shocks that are not of a single country’s making. Automatic triggers can be embedded in bonds or loan agreements, especially state-contingent debt instruments, to help poorer countries cope with crises that they had little part in generating, as with climate change. This would create more predictable conditions in navigating an uncertain world that could mobilize and attract private finance to those countries.

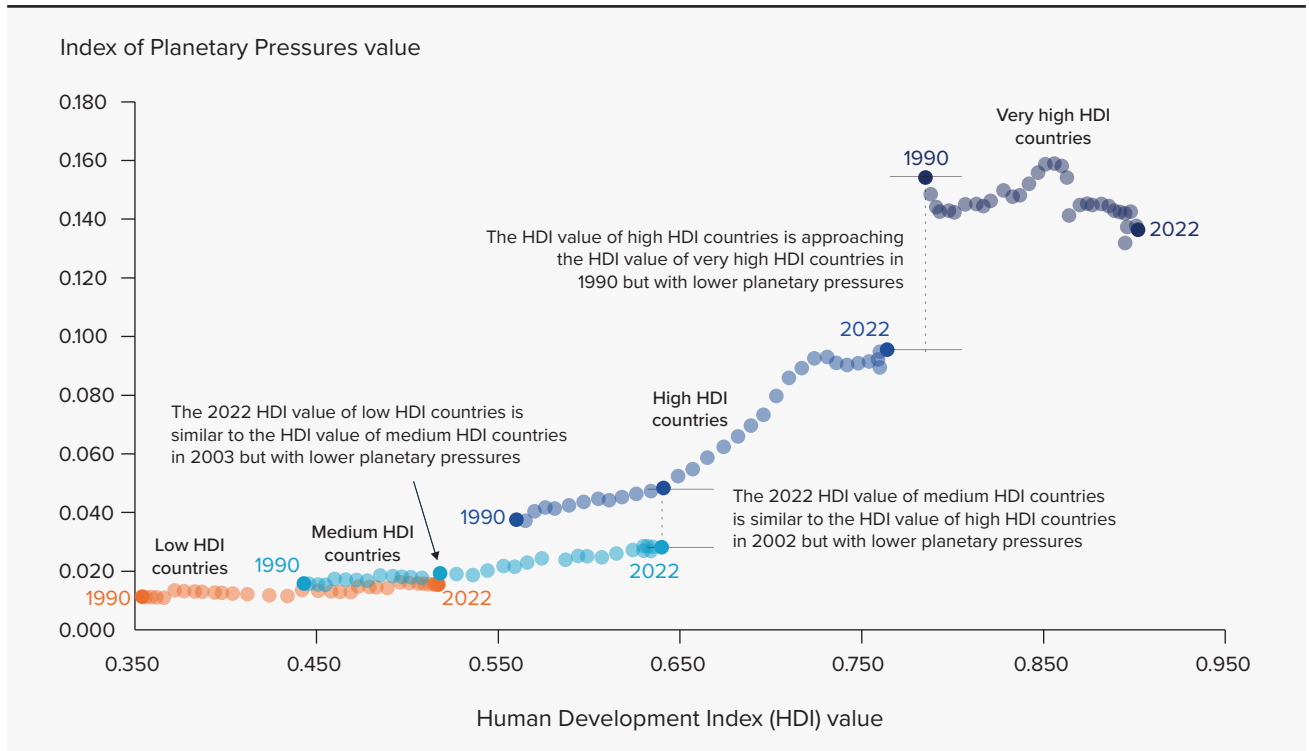
### Dial down temperatures and push back polarization

Second, we need to dial down the temperature and push back on polarization, which poisons practically everything it touches and impedes international cooperation. Providing global public goods will help. So

will correcting misperceptions about other people’s preferences and motivations. All too often people make biased assumptions about other people, including people on the other side of political divides. Often, people agree with one another more than they think. For example, while 69 percent of people around the world report being willing to sacrifice some of their income to contribute to climate change mitigation, only 43 percent perceive others believing the same (a 26 percentage point misperception gap).<sup>12</sup> The result is a false social reality of pluralistic ignorance where incorrect beliefs about others hampers cooperation that, if recognized and corrected, could help build collective action on climate.

Not all polarization can be reduced to misperception, however big a role it plays. That makes it important to create spaces of deliberation to bridge divides.

**Figure S.6** Reasons for hope: Improvements on the Human Development Index without increasing planetary pressures



**Note:** The Index of Planetary Pressures is constructed using the per capita levels of carbon dioxide emissions (production) and material footprint in each country (it is 1 minus the adjustment factor for planetary pressures presented in table 7 in the *Statistical Annex* of the full Report).

**Source:** Human Development Report Office. See specific sources in tables 2 and 7 in the *Statistical Annex* of the full Report.

Citizen assemblies can function in this way, but they are not the only means. Practical schemes to facilitate more deliberative processing of information can help counter the growing danger of people becoming trapped in beliefs that have no basis in fact.<sup>13</sup> In contexts of intergroup conflict, presenting information in a frame that does not provoke anger can be depolarizing.<sup>14</sup> Interventions that rely on qualitative and narrative-based approaches, such as storytelling and vignettes, are particularly effective.<sup>15</sup>

The key words are deliberate and deliberative. Polarization is more likely to self-destruct badly than to self-correct helpfully. Steady positive pressure that encourages empathy, builds interpersonal trust and emphasizes overlapping, shared identities is the way to go.

### Narrow agency gaps

Third, we need to narrow agency gaps—fuelled in part by the divergence between what people believe is possible or probable and what is objectively possible.<sup>16</sup> Agency gaps are also apparent in half of people

worldwide reporting that they have no or limited control over their lives and more than two-thirds perceiving that they have little influence in the decisions of their government (figure S.7).

To help narrow agency gaps, institutions need to become more people-centred, co-owned and future-oriented.

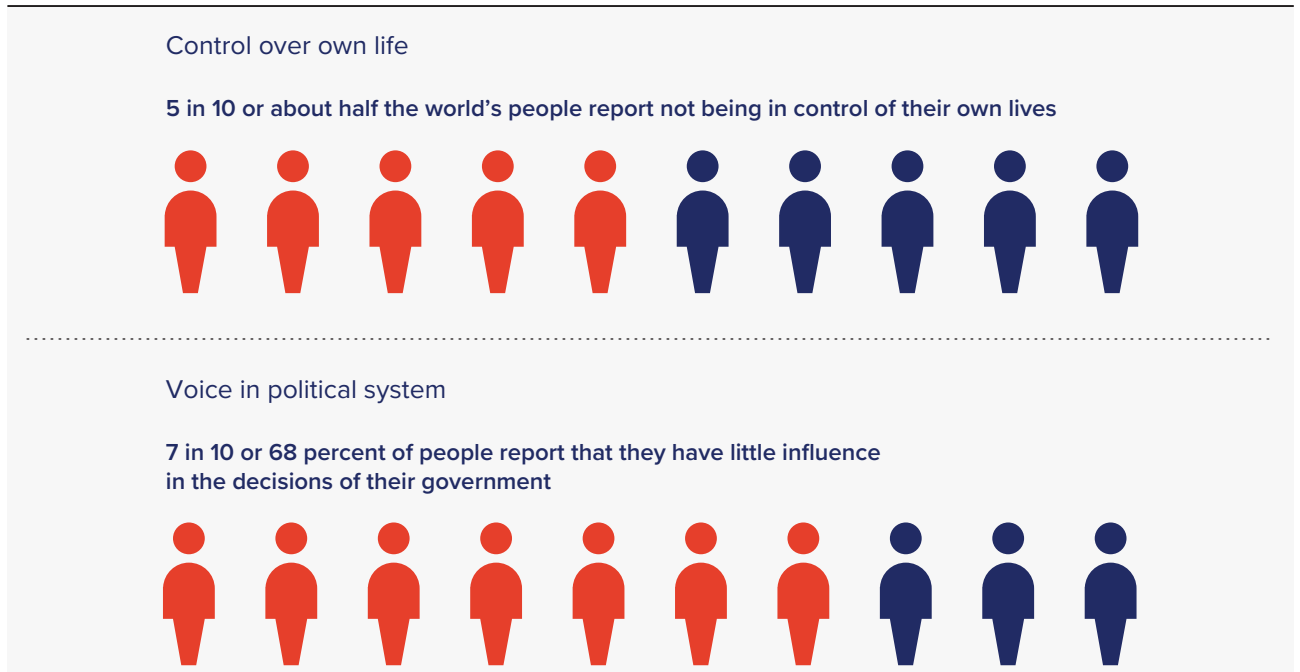
People-centred is about placing ultimate objectives in terms of human development and human security, recognizing the interdependence of people and the planet.

Co-owned is about the fair distribution of the power to set collective goals, the responsibilities to pursue them and the resulting outcomes. It stresses the formation of social norms that cultivate the value of collective achievements and cooperative behaviour.<sup>17</sup>

Future-oriented is about focusing on what we can shape and create if we work together, enriching the space for deliberation and agreement.<sup>18</sup> In the face of challenges, a future-oriented perspective opens possibilities for hope and creative resolve.

Tailoring these principles to different contexts will put us on the road to productive dialogue and action,

**Figure S.7** Agency gaps in collective action are higher than those in control over one’s own life



**Note:** Agency is the ability of people to act as agents who can do effective things based on their commitments (Sen 2013). It is proxied by two indicators: the share of the population that reported feeling in control over their lives (measured on a scale of 1–10, where 1–3 indicates an acute agency gap, 4–7 indicates a moderate agency gap and 8–10 indicates no agency gap) and the share of the population that reported feeling that their voice is heard in the political system (those who responded “A great deal” or “A lot”). Data are computed using microdata and equal weights across countries. **Source:** Human Development Report Office based on data from wave 7 (2017–2022) of the World Values Survey (Inglehart and others 2022).

which must be flexible and iterative amid so much uncertainty, for lessons to inform course corrections.

They will help us break through the tyranny of single adversarial narratives and single exclusive identities.

They will help us better manage evolving global interdependence.

They will help us cooperatively and peacefully break through the global gridlock.





## OVERVIEW

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# Managing interdependence in a polarized world

# Managing interdependence in a polarized world

## Mismanaged global interdependence hurts people

The human toll of mismanaged interdependence is huge—in lives lost or uprooted, in opportunities forgone, in feelings of despair. Aggression, conflict and violence are extreme realities when complex webs of interdependence fester, especially against backdrops of prolonged power imbalances.

From wars in Gaza and Ukraine to Sudan, Yemen and elsewhere, to gang violence and civil insecurity, peace and stability are under strain or breaking down at alarming rates. Large-scale conflicts involving major powers are escalating. War fatalities have jumped (figure O.1). Sadly, we live in a violent new era characterized by the highest level of state-based armed conflicts since 1945 and a growing share of one-sided conflicts where unarmed civil populations are being attacked.<sup>1</sup>

Violence and peace can both be contagious. Major political events such as coups, revolutions and democratic transitions have a habit of spilling across borders. Conflicts often change the perception of war, making it more acceptable and increasing the likelihood of violent outbreaks elsewhere.

In 2022 the number of forcibly displaced people in the world reached 108 million, the highest level since World War II (figure O.1) and more than two and a half times the level in 2010.<sup>2</sup>

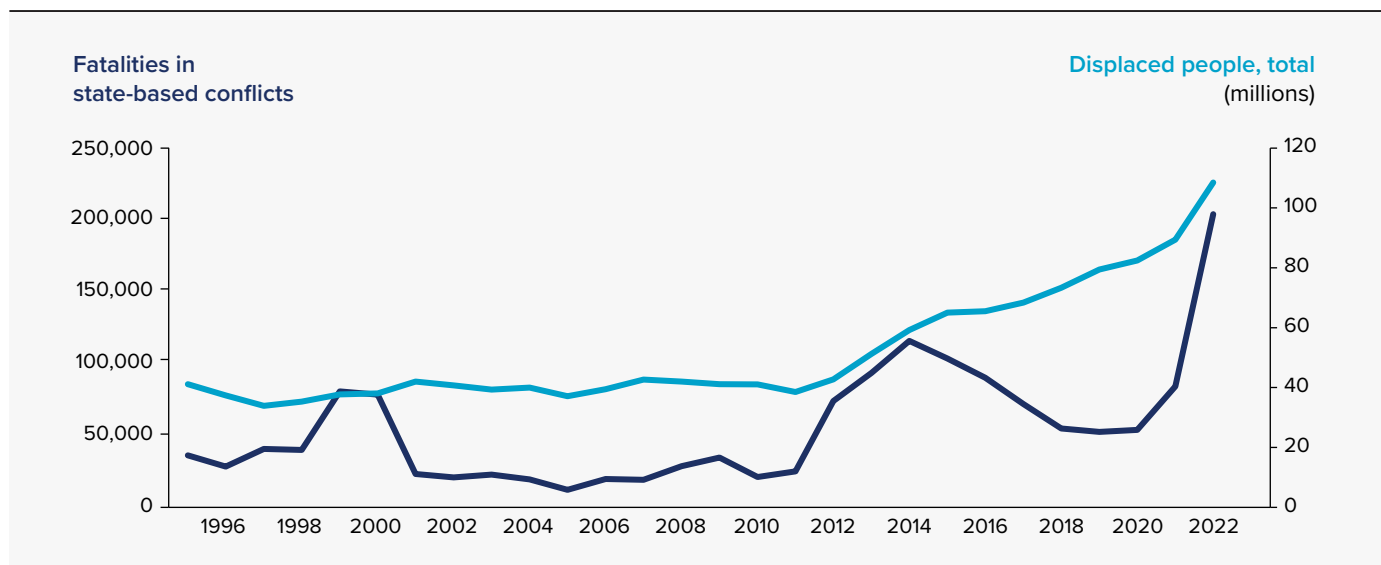
Violent conflicts and their consequences for people are the tip of the iceberg. Gridlock means that systemic risks arising from global interdependence are mismanaged or simply unaddressed, that people are walloped by surprises not capitalizing on them. In extreme cases surprises spiral into full blown crises, ricocheting and amplifying in unexpected ways in an unequal, tightly knit world. The extreme is becoming the norm.

A long series of disease outbreaks preceded the Covid-19 pandemic, which caught the world flatfooted and struggling for a modicum of global coherence over the course of the emergency. Some 15 million people (perhaps more) died worldwide,<sup>3</sup> and the global Human Development Index value tanked.

In addition to huge, unjust divides in access to effective vaccines, a missing ingredient was trust—in our governments and in each other.<sup>4</sup> According to one estimate, if all countries had attained the levels of interpersonal trust seen in the top quarter of countries, global infections might have been reduced by 40 percent, saving millions of lives.<sup>5</sup> In polarizing societies around the world, vaccine status identification became another factional marker separating one camp from the other.<sup>6</sup>

The Covid-19 vaccine story exemplifies the possibilities of global cooperation, as well as the grave injustices that can result when it breaks down. The development of mRNA vaccines relied heavily on cross-border, cross-regional partnerships for sourcing components,<sup>7</sup> for clinical development and trials<sup>8</sup> and

**Figure O.1** War deaths and forced displacement are getting much worse



Source: Uppsala Conflict Data Program 2023; UNHCR 2023.

for manufacturing. But the Covid-19 vaccine story follows pernicious patterns of inequality in access to technologies generally, including lifesaving ones.<sup>9</sup> The pattern is all too familiar—and must be broken for its own sake. And because technological trajectories, from artificial intelligence to synthetic biology, are so steep, so fast and so powerful, the deep cleavages between haves and have-nots could worsen.

Perhaps the greatest casualty of global gridlock, climate change is already exacerbating those cleavages.

Last year was the hottest in more than 140 years.<sup>10</sup> The average belies considerable regional differences that the United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) Human Climate Horizons<sup>11</sup> platform projects will worsen under business-as-usual climate scenarios (figure O.2), with climate change resulting in an explosion of inequalities.

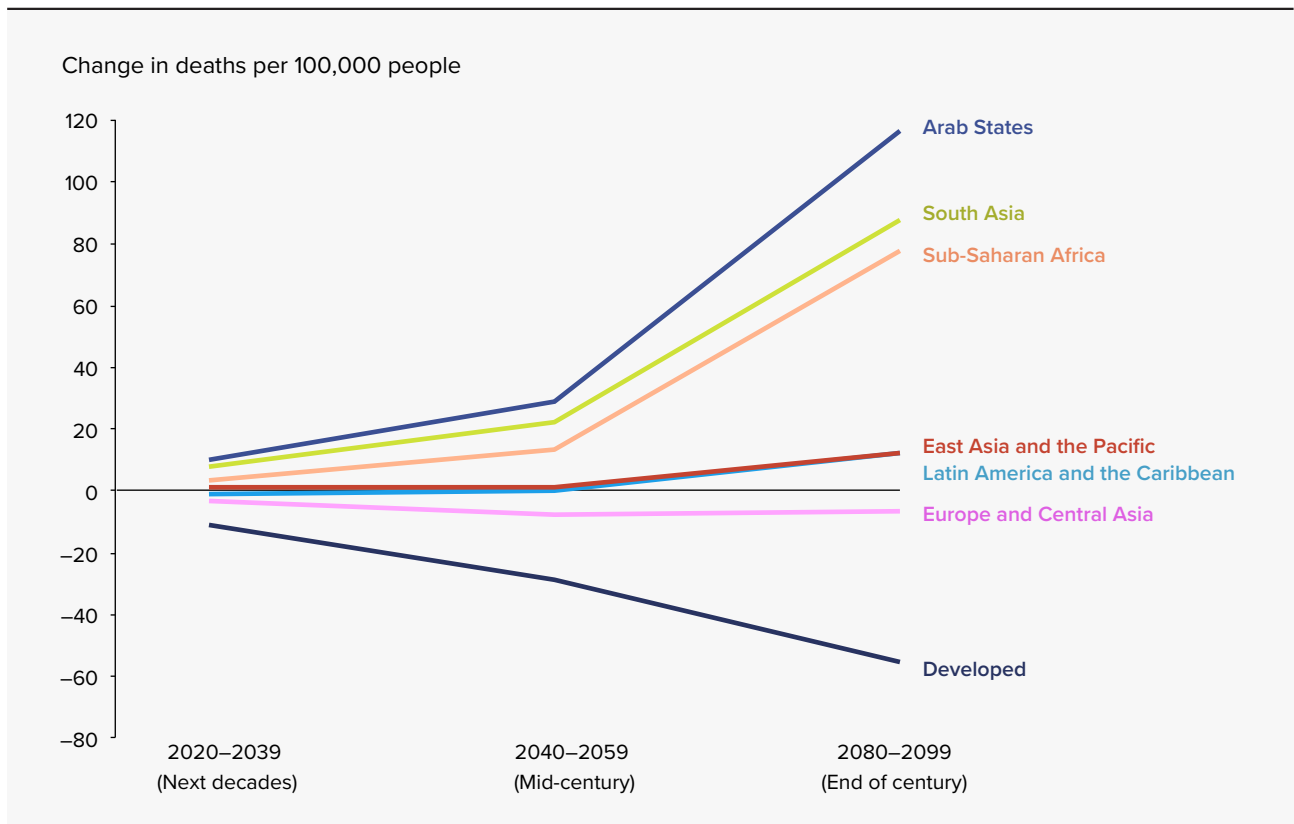
The consequences of climate change are already shaking communities and societies, exacting social, emotional and mental tolls. Among the various stressors of climate change is a crippling eco-anxiety, a “generalized sense that the ecological foundations

of existence are in the process of collapse.”<sup>12</sup> Disappearing biodiversity, landscapes and ways of life can be paralysing, skewing major life decisions such as investing in school or having a child.<sup>13</sup> Effectively, this is a restriction on human development—in freedoms and possibilities in life—owing to both the reality of human-induced planetary pressures and how that reality is mediated by technical reports, the popular press and political leaders. Narratives of shared futures rooted in denialism, fatalism or fearmongering leave little space for agency and imagination.

Political systems mediate, for good or ill (or both), the impacts of crises on people, and the systems themselves are often shaken by crises, including those from mismanaged global interdependence. The destabilizing effects of shocks, alongside the perceived inability of institutions to protect people from them, can stir populism.<sup>14</sup>

Owing to a shock or other cause, populist turns often upset democratic norms and practices and tend to be very costly economically.<sup>15</sup> In parallel, recent literature suggests that the economic losses of certain

**Figure O.2 Climate change could result in an explosion of inequalities**



**Note:** Very high emissions scenario.

**Source:** Human Development Report Office based on Carleton and others (2022) and Human Climate Horizons (<https://horizons.hdr.undp.org/>).

kinds of shocks are never fully recovered, that trajectories on growth or poverty reduction permanently downshift following crises.<sup>16</sup> When crises and other shocks precede populist turns, and in some cases precipitate them, these populist turns can function as crisis refractors and compounders rather than buffers and mitigators, twisting and propagating shockwaves in an interdependent world.

## Global interdependence is evolving

The Covid-19 pandemic, climate change, and the global surge in populism and conflicts all point to a hard truth: ignoring or otherwise mismanaging global interdependence hurts people. Rolling them back in any time frame of relevance, whether for the climate or national security or whatever other reason, is equally foolhardy.

Neither business as usual nor fantasies of deglobalization will do. Instead, we must embrace the complexity of global interdependence and better manage its old and new forms in ways that protect and expand people’s possibilities, even as geopolitical

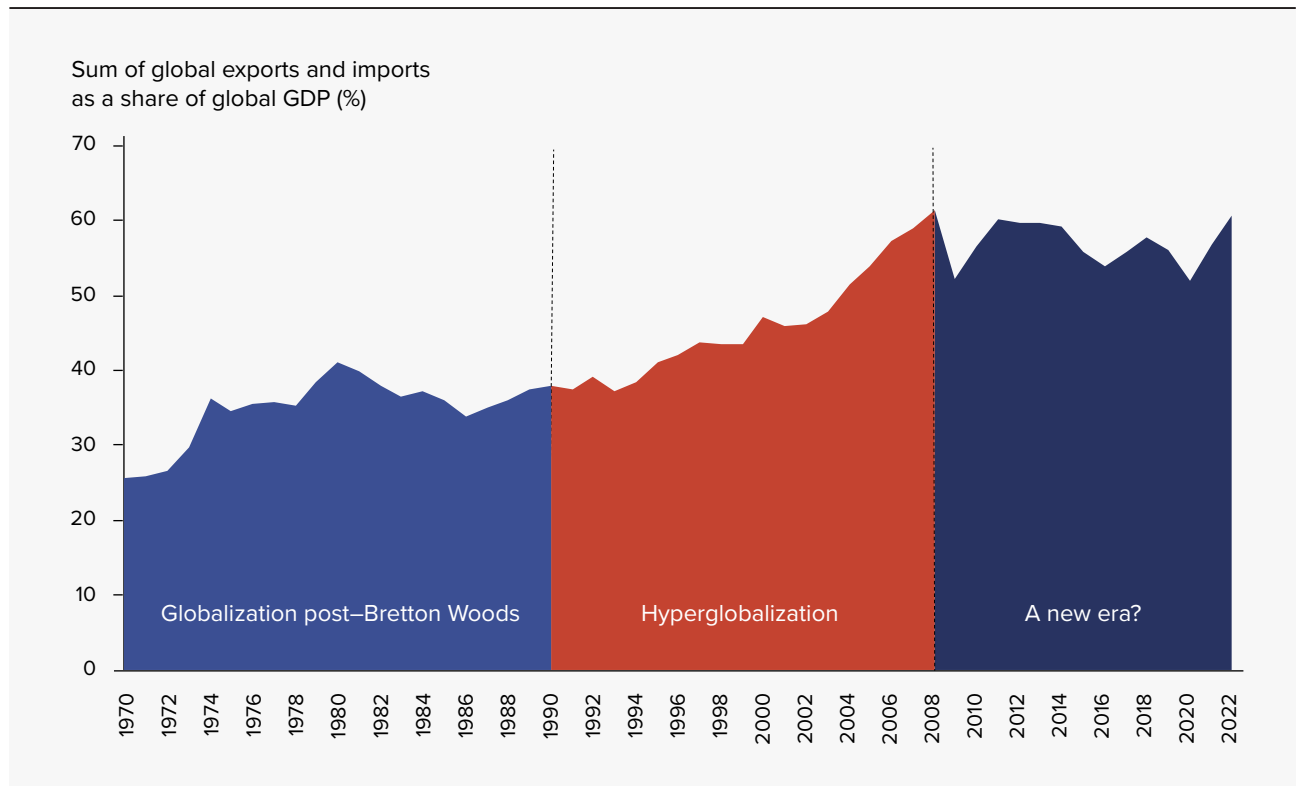
fog—alongside uncertainty, insecurity, inequalities and polarization—complicates hopeful paths forward.

By some measures global interconnectivity is at record levels, even as the pace of economic integration stabilizes (figure 0.3).<sup>17</sup> Trade in intermediate goods now slightly exceeds trade in final goods.<sup>18</sup> Altogether, goods today travel twice as far as they did 60 years ago, and cross more borders, before final consumption.<sup>19</sup> The production of smartphones, for example, looks nothing like last century’s assembly line. Various inputs, from mined cobalt on up to batteries and camera modules, crisscross the globe, sometimes retracing their steps and too often leaving avoidable social and environmental scars along the way.

Global financial interdependence remains high, even if the pace of integration stalled somewhat following the 2007/2008 financial crisis.<sup>20</sup> Low- and middle-income countries’ debt servicing costs ballooned over the past two years, following a torrent of interest rate hikes unleashed by central banks to combat inflation.<sup>21</sup>

Cross-border flows of information break records every year. Digital services exports now account for

**Figure 0.3 Economic interdependence is stabilizing at very high levels**



Source: Human Development Report Office based on the World Bank’s World Development Indicators database; recreated from Aiyar and others (2023).

more than half of global trade in commercial services.<sup>22</sup> Almost the entire global population is now within the range of a mobile broadband network, and 5.4 billion people were internet users in 2023, though inequities remain stark.<sup>23</sup>

The number of people living outside their country of birth has tripled since 1970, from 84 million to almost 280 million in 2020—or nearly 3.6 percent of the global population.<sup>24</sup> International migration is an exercise of people’s agency, expanding their choices and human potential.<sup>25</sup> It creates social, cultural and economic ties between host and sending countries<sup>26</sup> and drives cross-border financial flows.<sup>27</sup>

We should expect familiar forms of interdependence to persist well into the future. Regulation that helps manage them better will be crucial, unless the objective is to privatize rewards and socialize risks.<sup>28</sup> After all, we sometimes build roads with speed bumps. Yet, interdependence in the 21st century is much more than bean counting based largely on 20th century metrics—that is, how many goods or people or bits are moving across borders. The qualities of the interconnections matter, too. Our interdependence is increasingly planetary and instantaneous.

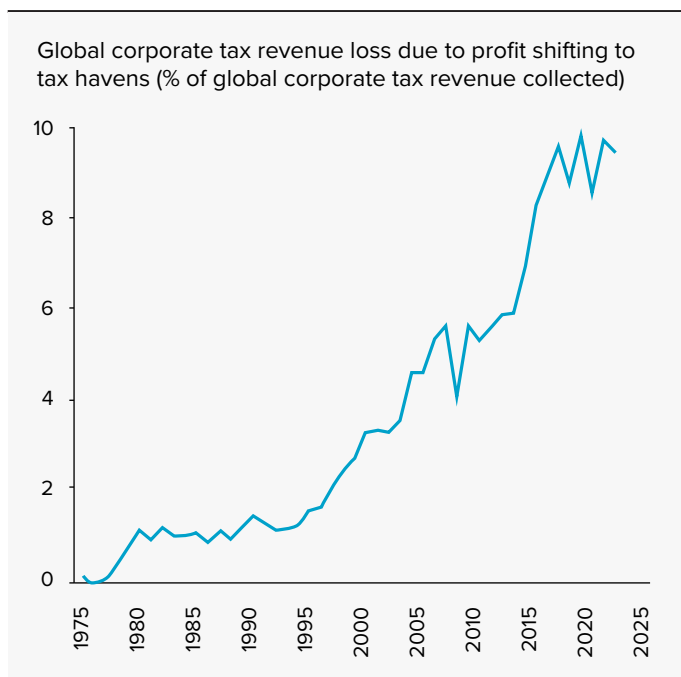
Many interdependences among economies, people and planet are emerging and deepening as the Digital Revolution powers ahead and we go deeper into the Anthropocene—the age of humans. Expanding global trade has helped generate enormous wealth, especially for some, and lift millions out of poverty.<sup>29</sup> Regrettably, it has also paralleled the dismantling of social, economic and ecological guardrails that would otherwise protect and promote human development. Markets have become more concentrated, encouraging rent seeking. Almost 40 percent of global trade in goods is concentrated in three or fewer countries—even for goods where more suppliers exist.<sup>30</sup>

Antiglobalization sentiment has grown louder in overall partisan discourse.<sup>31</sup> Populists’ anti-elite ire has global dimensions. Fuelling that frustration is a sense that the forces of globalization have benefited some at the top and left everyone else behind. Multinational companies may have shifted as much as \$1 trillion of profits to tax havens in 2022.<sup>32</sup> Global losses in corporate tax revenue have skyrocketed since the mid-1990s as a result of profit shifting (figure O.4). Caught up in the antiglobalization maelstrom, international cooperation is being politicized.

Advocates for deglobalization or any of its lexiconic kin—reshoring, nearshoring and friendshoring—may have their reasons, but those have little to do with practicably addressing new evolving and, in some cases, inescapable forms of global and planetary interdependence. Whatever dent might be made in international trade and capital flows would not come close to offsetting plane tickets, smartphones, carbon dioxide and other means of transboundary hyperconnection. For reasons of water and food security, among others, some countries face major constraints on their ability to restrict trade and would suffer if others chose to do so. No country or region is close to self-sufficient, as all rely on imports from other regions for 25 percent or more of essential goods and services.<sup>33</sup> The climate remains largely indifferent to national borders, and its worsening impacts will continue to also ignore them. The same applies to current and future pandemics.

In other words if we deglobalize—even if partially—we cannot deplanetize, not in the Anthropocene. We must view 21st century global public goods, from pandemic preparedness and peace to climate and digital governance, as opportunities to grasp rather than challenges to avoid. The answer to mismanaged interdependence is not shying away from them

**Figure O.4 Profit shifting to tax havens has skyrocketed**



Source: Alstadsæter and others 2023.

by retreating within porous borders; it is to embrace and manage them better, learning and improving as we go. Rather than be unwound or reversed, globalization can and should be done differently, in ways that do not destroy the planet, that do not over-concentrate supply chains and that do not generate cost-of-living crises that fuel debt crises in low- and middle-income countries. Global interdependence is tenacious, deepening and evolving. A shift in mindsets, policies and institutions is essential to manage them better and to get unstuck.

## Providing global public goods will help

A global public goods lens can add much. When fully provided, global public goods go a long way to better manage deeply rooted and evolving global interdependence, to safeguard and promote human development and to encourage virtuous cycles of cooperation and trust building. They help us work with complexity rather than ignore it. They challenge corrosive zero-sum thinking that pits groups against one another. They spark our imagination to frame and reframe shared problems into win-win opportunities. And they invigorate our sense of duty to one another and to our single, shared planet. All without wishing away divergent interests or even disagreements.

What is a global public good?<sup>34</sup> In a nutshell, a global public good is anything—an object, an action or inaction, an idea—that, when provided, everyone around the world can enjoy. Climate change mitigation is a global public good. So is the work of 13th century poet Rumi. And so is freedom of the seas. A special subcategory of global public goods is planetary public goods, which correspond to planetary interdependence and respond to spillover impacts between countries that cannot be managed or mitigated at their borders. Another may be that of digital public infrastructure and what have been called digital public goods, associated with the Digital Revolution.

While global public goods can serve as a rallying cry for redress against injustices or inefficiencies, they are not merely things that are desirable. In fact, global public goods are less “goods” or concrete things per se and more a choice about how we humans can enjoy them together. They can be seen also as a mindset—an aspiration—and can mobilize cooperation in many forms. As such they are limited

from the bottom by our imagination and collective will and from the top by the way power is structured and wielded. They are thus social choices, not just in how we imagine them but whether we decide to imagine them at all.

Understanding that vaccine development and, say, blowing up an asteroid hurtling towards Earth can be framed as global public goods—and, what is more, a specific kind of global public good known as best-shot (box O.1)—means we do not need to start from scratch when we respond. Time means lives. It means we can think across sectors and silos and get better prepared. It means we can draw from our Covid-19 pandemic experience, for example, when an asteroid or a deadly new pathogen or a bout of global financial instability does come. They will come. But we do not have to chase yesterday’s crisis.

“A global public goods lens helps us disentangle complex issues, many of which are complex precisely because their different aspects call for different ways of organizing ourselves

A global public goods lens helps us disentangle complex issues, many of which are complex precisely because their different aspects call for different ways of organizing ourselves. Much of our response, and its shortcomings, to the Covid-19 pandemic can be understood through a global public goods lens, with insights on how to structure incentives to foster cooperation and how to design supportive financing.

Recognizing that global public goods can be enjoyed by everyone is one thing; the distribution of their benefits is another. Because countries have different interests and resources, the value of each global public good to each country will be shaped by those factors. Some of the challenges with providing global public goods are driven by this asymmetry in benefits.

A global public goods lens can also offer insights about reframing challenges. For instance, climate change mitigation (a summation global public good) could be advanced by accelerating the technologies and innovations for renewable and clean energy sources (including moonshots such as nuclear fusion)—which reframes the challenge as providing best-shot global public goods. Imagine massive carbon sequestration plants, powered by nuclear fusion, in the Arctic tundra or across the Sahara. Framing

## Box O.1 Global public goods 101: What are summation, best-shot and weakest-link global public goods?

Three kinds of global public goods stand out: summation, best-shot, and weakest-link. Climate change mitigation is a typical example of a summation global public good, where the overall level of mitigation depends on the sum of contributions from each individual agent, or country. Institutions must aggregate contributions big and small, work to resolve free riding and navigate game-theoretic problems, such as those posed in the classic prisoner's dilemma (where cooperating produces a better outcome than acting separately in one's self-interest).

Now imagine a cataclysmic, but destructible, asteroid hurtling towards Earth. What would be the best course of action? The probability of destroying the asteroid depends on whichever country or other agent develops the most accurate asteroid-busting technology—in other words, a best-shot global public good. The benefit to everyone on the planet is determined by the agent (in this example, a country or pool of countries) that invests the most resources effectively. Much technology production, such as the race to sequence the human genome, as well as knowledge in the public domain, can generally be considered best-shot global public goods.

Stubborn pockets of endemic polio illustrate the third kind of global public good: weakest-link. While two of the three wild polio viruses have been eradicated (type 2 in 2015 and type 3 in 2019),<sup>1</sup> polio eradication efforts have not succeeded yet—and have missed several target dates—because the third strain of the virus (wild polio type 1) persists in only a few small areas in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and vaccine-derived type 2 also continues to circulate.<sup>2</sup>

Disease eradication, as with smallpox, is a global public good. Yet, as with polio, the entire world remains at risk if the pathogen circulates anywhere. The global benefit is then tied to the circumstances of the weakest agent. The implications for focusing pooled resources are clear. Disease surveillance is also generally considered a weakest-link global public good.<sup>3</sup>

### Notes

1. <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/two-out-of-three-wild-poliovirus-strains-eradicated>. 2. Barrett 2011; Cohen 2023. 3. Post-Covid-19 pandemic assessments established that countries with more generic public health capacities were better able to control the disease, highlighting the importance of not only an emergency response but also the buildup of capacities for surveillance and public health where they are lacking (Neill and others 2023).

climate change as a technological opportunity to be solved could have a crowding-in effect, generating its own positive momentum, instead of the foot dragging of voluntary carbon emissions reductions.

As important as human choice is for establishing, framing and providing global public goods, it is not the whole story. Technology plays an important role, too. The advent of broadcast radio and television opened access to information carried through the airwaves to anyone with a receiving device. Cable television—and later streaming services—created opportunities to fence off programming, excluding nonpayers and leading to the proliferation of subscription services, which could be classified economically and epithetically as excludable. The demise of public telephones after mobile phones burst onto the scene offers a similar story: the technology created opportunities for exclusion that policy choices permitted, if not outright encouraged.

As with technology itself, global public goods often are not given but created. By us! By our imagination and social choices. Therein lies a good measure of their power. They require and therefore activate our imagination for a different world, a different way of

doing things, exactly what is needed to navigate in uncertain times. Marrying that creativity with the right incentives and institutional architectures, whose general features we can already anticipate, will go a long way to get things moving and build out a 21st century global architecture to provide global public goods.

## Wicked forms of polarization are getting in the way

Easier said than done. What is getting in the way?

For starters, us.

Group-based polarization is widespread and increasing around the world.<sup>35</sup> It is affecting national and international politics that will shape how shared global challenges will be addressed in the decades to come.<sup>36</sup> Because polarization often translates into intolerance and an aversion to compromise and negotiation, it can lead to political gridlock and dysfunction. It does so in part by eroding trust across communities, impeding efforts to address major societal issues, such as health crises, violent conflict and climate change. Since many of these issues engender



opposing beliefs and intense political competition, polarization poses a major societal obstacle to addressing shared problems.<sup>37</sup>

Polarization is not the same as difference or disagreement, even vigorous disagreement. Diversity in preferences and perspectives enriches collective decisionmaking and action.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, political institutions have been designed to harness rivalry to serve the public interest. For instance, the arguments invoked by James Madison in designing the US Constitution did not assume away competing interests but rather designed institutions that leveraged those differences to be both adaptable and to serve the public interest.<sup>39</sup>

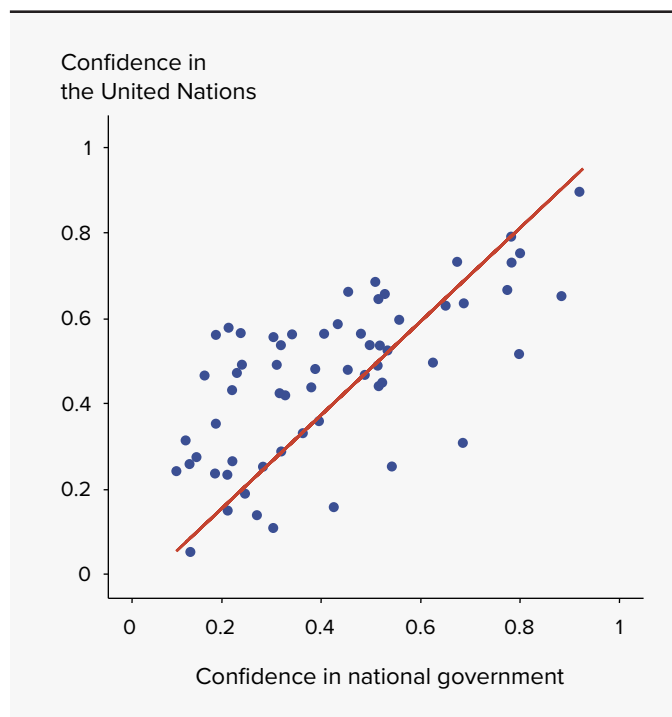
But polarization presents new challenges that are fraying those institutions.<sup>40</sup> All differences in view are collapsed into questions of a narrow or single identity. The Brexit referendum gave rise to new social identities—Leaver and Remainer—which formed the basis of heightened group-based polarization between those two groups.<sup>41</sup> In the United States and elsewhere, Covid-19 vaccine status identification became a factional marker separating one camp from the other.<sup>42</sup>

Polarization at the national level has global consequences; it is a drag on international cooperation, including for the provision of global public goods. Between 1970 and 2019 there were 84 referendums concerning international cooperation (such as membership in international organizations), with an increase in more recent decades.<sup>43</sup> There have been campaigns for withdrawing from international institutions.<sup>44</sup> The European Union, the World Trade Organization and international justice institutions have been described as facing legitimacy challenges.<sup>45</sup>

For one, highly polarized societies that seesaw between political extremes make international partners less reliable. There is also a trust problem. Polarization signifies an erosion in trust, and lower trust—or confidence, more broadly—in national institutions tends to correlate with lower confidence in international organizations such as the United Nations (figure O.5). And polarization tends to feed on zero-sum thinking and breed cynicism about compromise and tolerance, all antithetical to global public goods.

Providing global public goods does not require a kumbaya moment among nations (divine intervention for harmony). But nor does it live on the other end of the spectrum, where prevailing assumptions about

**Figure O.5 Lower confidence in national government tends to correlate with lower confidence in the United Nations**



**Note:** Confidence in institutions (the national government and the United Nations) implies reporting “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence (other options: “not very much” or “none at all”).

**Source:** Human Development Report Office based on data from wave 7 (2017–2022) of the World Values Survey (Inglehart and others 2022).

human behaviour (and that of countries) are limited to self-interest and where cooperation is relegated to reciprocity—that is, repeat games of the prisoner’s dilemma. Providing global public goods will languish at either extreme. People and their countries have other, often more dominant motivations that are shaped by social preferences and norms, many of which are culturally contingent. For cooperation crowding-in is just as possible as crowding-out—if not more so—not on everything, but on challenges that are not zero-sum.

Doing so will require additional financing for global public goods as a complement to, rather than a substitute for or competitor to, traditional development assistance. The costs of inaction in not providing global public goods pale in comparison with the benefits.<sup>46</sup> Mindsets and narratives matter here, too. Many motives for support to global cooperation, including global redistribution, go beyond self-interest and have to do with people’s views on fairness and equity and whether their sense of duty stops at their country’s border or expands around the world. When

provided, global public goods are a win-win, the opposite of zero-sum. If we want to provide them, giving more salience to the nature of these challenges and setting up institutions to facilitate their provision will be crucial.

Mismanaged global interdependence, particularly when culminating in shocks and crises, stokes polarization in many ways. One, by making people feel insecure, and two, when sloganeering transforms insecurity into fear and is exploited for political and personal gain. That is why providing global public goods is so important. By helping us manage global interdependence, they will dampen a major driver of polarization around the world.

**“By helping us manage global interdependence, global public goods will dampen a major driver of polarization around the world**

Polarization can also be eased directly. One way to do this is by correcting misperceptions about others’ beliefs, misperceptions that are widespread. For instance, the prevalence of pro-climate beliefs in the United States is twice what people think it is.<sup>47</sup> The result is a false social reality that hampers collective action on climate change.

Another way to cool things down is by creating spaces of deliberation to bridge divides. Citizen assemblies are one way to do this. Avenues for structured, repeat personal interaction like these matter a lot. It is far easier to objectify, dismiss and malign behind the impersonal safety of a flamethrowing social media post or to hurl vitriol through a television camera than it is when sharing a meal with someone, even with political foes. This may be why storytelling and vignettes have been shown as effective ways to ease polarization.<sup>48</sup> They make “othering” harder.

## **We need to narrow gaps in agency**

Our institutions are struggling to keep up with evolving, deepening forms of global interdependence and provide global public goods. Polarization is a big part of the problem. So are narrow and self-fulfilling assumptions about human behaviour that limit it to self-interest, assumptions that have long held sway over institutions at all levels. Space for social preferences, norms, duties and culture have been squeezed out.

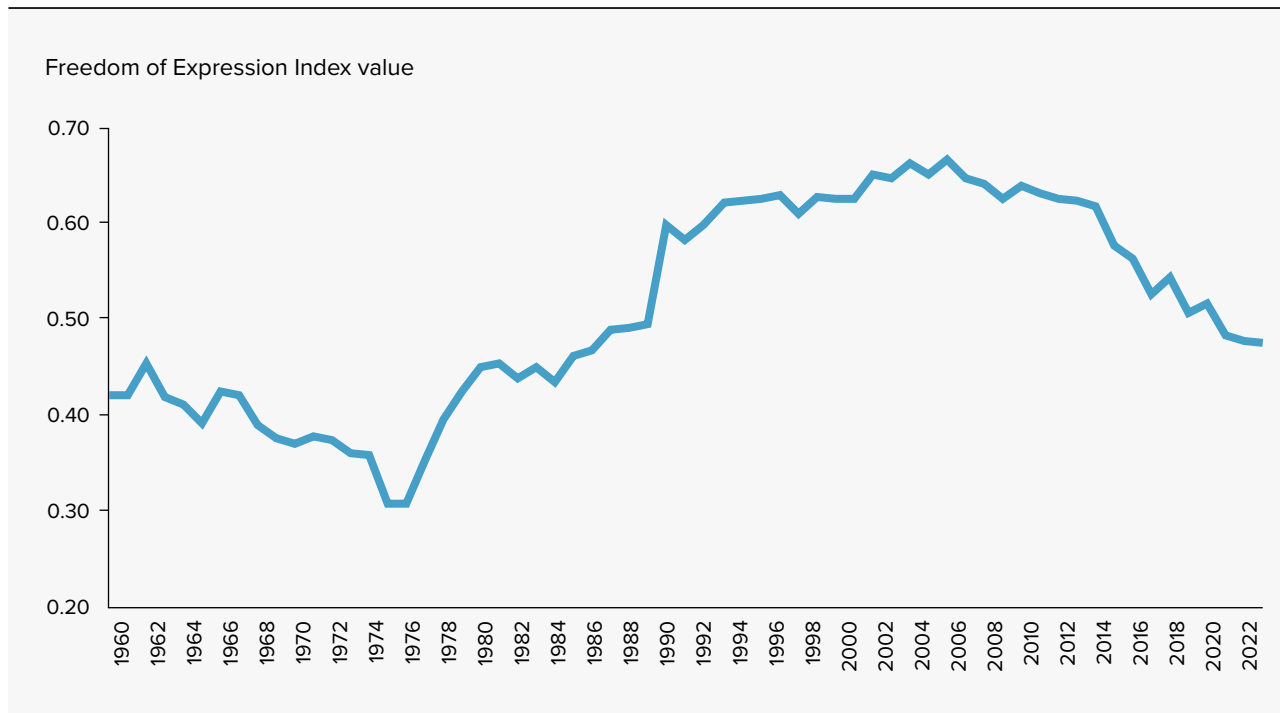
Populism has become an unhelpful pressure valve. The result is that institutions are failing to deliver. No wonder that while the vast majority of people support democracy as an ideal, more than half now support leaders that may undermine it in practice.

Agency is a cornerstone of human development. Albeit difficult to measure directly, agency in pursuit of collective action<sup>49</sup> may be eroding (figure O.6), at least for a sizeable portion of people around the world.<sup>50</sup> For many there is a sinking feeling—evident in widespread increases in self-reported measures of stress, worry and despair—that options for exercising choice in their lives, based on what they have reason to value, is shrinking. From among a diminishing set of options, they are less sure—more insecure—that a choice they want to make can be realized.

These are threats to the human psyche—to our sense of self and autonomy, to our sense of securely belonging and commitment to shared intentionality,<sup>51</sup> to our ability to decide what we value and how we can and do act on those values—of no less importance than the threats posed by a super typhoon, a disease outbreak or violence. Conventional metrics such as GDP or even the Human Development Index are missing something important that is being voiced loudly on the streets, at the ballot box and in the increase in support for leaders that may undermine democracy. Agency may be a way of understanding the gaps and, alongside concepts of insecurity, is an area ripe for innovative measurement. Indeed, across all regions human security and agency gaps go hand-in-hand (figure O.7).

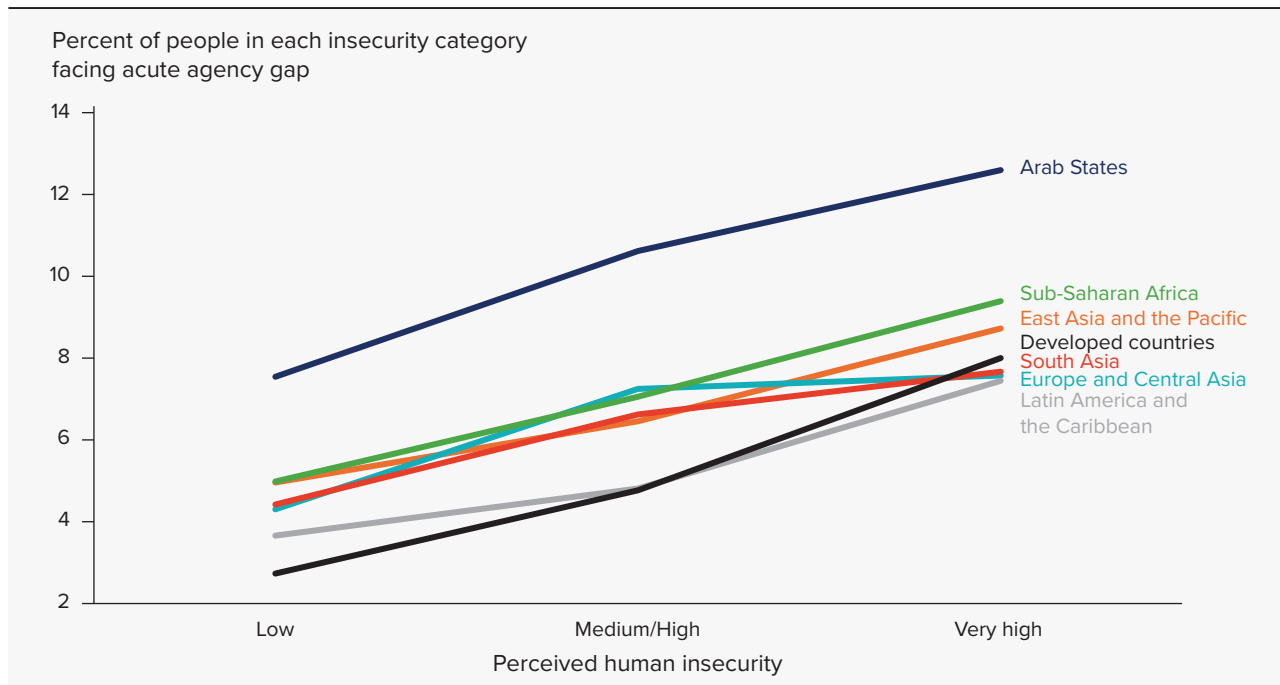
Now add inequality. There is a steep decline in the share of people reporting having very low control over their lives along the income distribution for the bottom 50 percent of the income distribution (figure O.8). That is, agency increases as income grows for the bottom 50 percent of the distribution. At the very bottom lack of agency is particularly heightened (agency gaps are three times greater among people in the lowest income decile than in decile 6 and above). Moreover, the share of people reporting having very high control over their lives is low and relatively equal for the bottom 50 percent of the population but rises with income for deciles 6 and above. Thus, income inequalities, which often intersect and are associated with other inequalities in human development, shape agency.

**Figure O.6 Freedom of expression goes hand-in-hand with agency and has been receding in recent years**



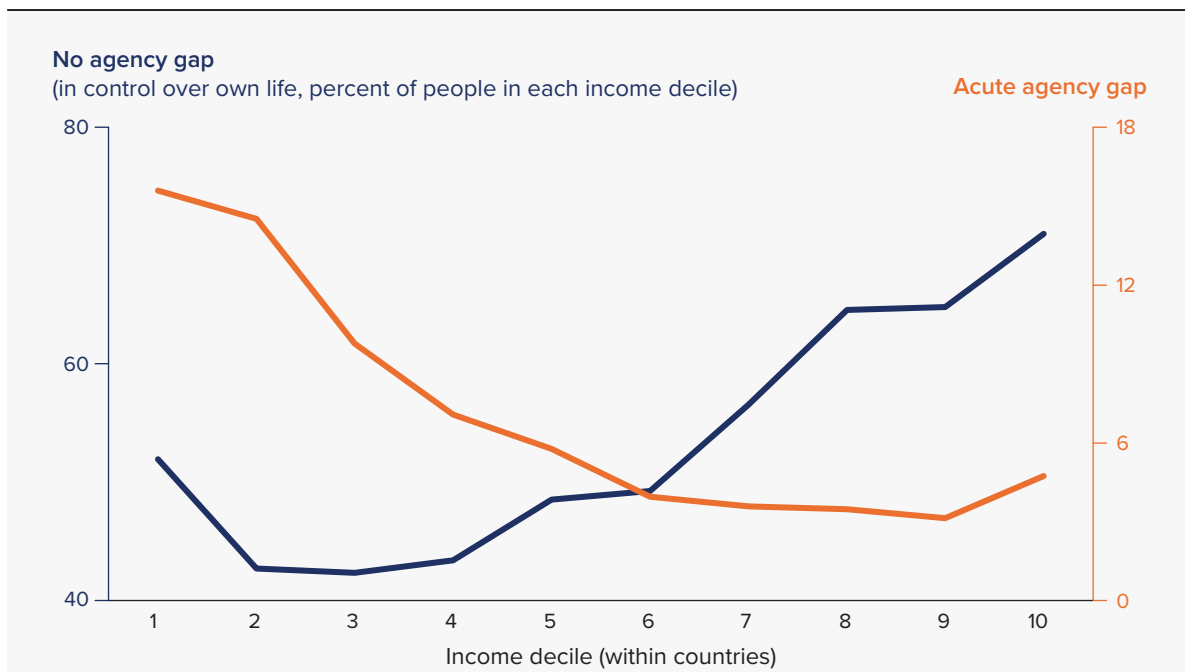
**Note:** Data are population-weighted global averages.  
**Source:** Human Development Report Office calculations based on data from the Varieties of Democracy project and the World Bank’s World Development Indicators database.

**Figure O.7 The higher the perceived human insecurity, the lower the sense of control over one’s own life**



**Note:** Perceived human insecurity is measured as “low,” “medium and high” and “very high,” using microdata and equal weights across countries, and is based on the index described in annex 1.2 of UNDP (2022d). Acute agency gap measures the share of the population reporting feeling no or very little control over their lives (options 1–3 on a 1–10 scale).  
**Source:** Human Development Report Office based on the latest available data from wave 6 (2010–2014) and wave 7 (2017–2022) of the World Values Survey (Inglehart and others 2022).

**Figure O.8** The perception of agency (control over one’s own life) is shaped by income



**Note:** Computed using microdata and equal weights across countries.

**Source:** Human Development Report Office based on data from wave 7 (2017–2022) of the World Values Survey (Inglehart and others 2022).

Polarization, insecurity, inequality and reductive narratives all exact human tolls that can be understood through agency, which threads these strands together as a common denominator and a lodestar for action.

Agency gaps are not just about formal institutions. Norms, which interact dynamically with institutions, matter a lot too. At the beginning of the 20th century, women in most countries were officially prohibited from participating in various societal roles, ranging from owning property and attending universities to engaging in politics. Women’s agency gaps were stark and widespread. Throughout the 20th century extensive reforms worldwide recognized the equal legal, social, economic and political rights of women and men. Although women in many countries still face legal restrictions affecting their agency, the progress in institutional reforms has been remarkable. Agency gaps encoded in formal laws have tended to disappear. The legal right to vote in elections—a fundamental form of political agency—serves as a visible example of this evolution.

However, the effective agency of women remains restricted in many areas. A notable example is women’s access to top political office—the pinnacle of

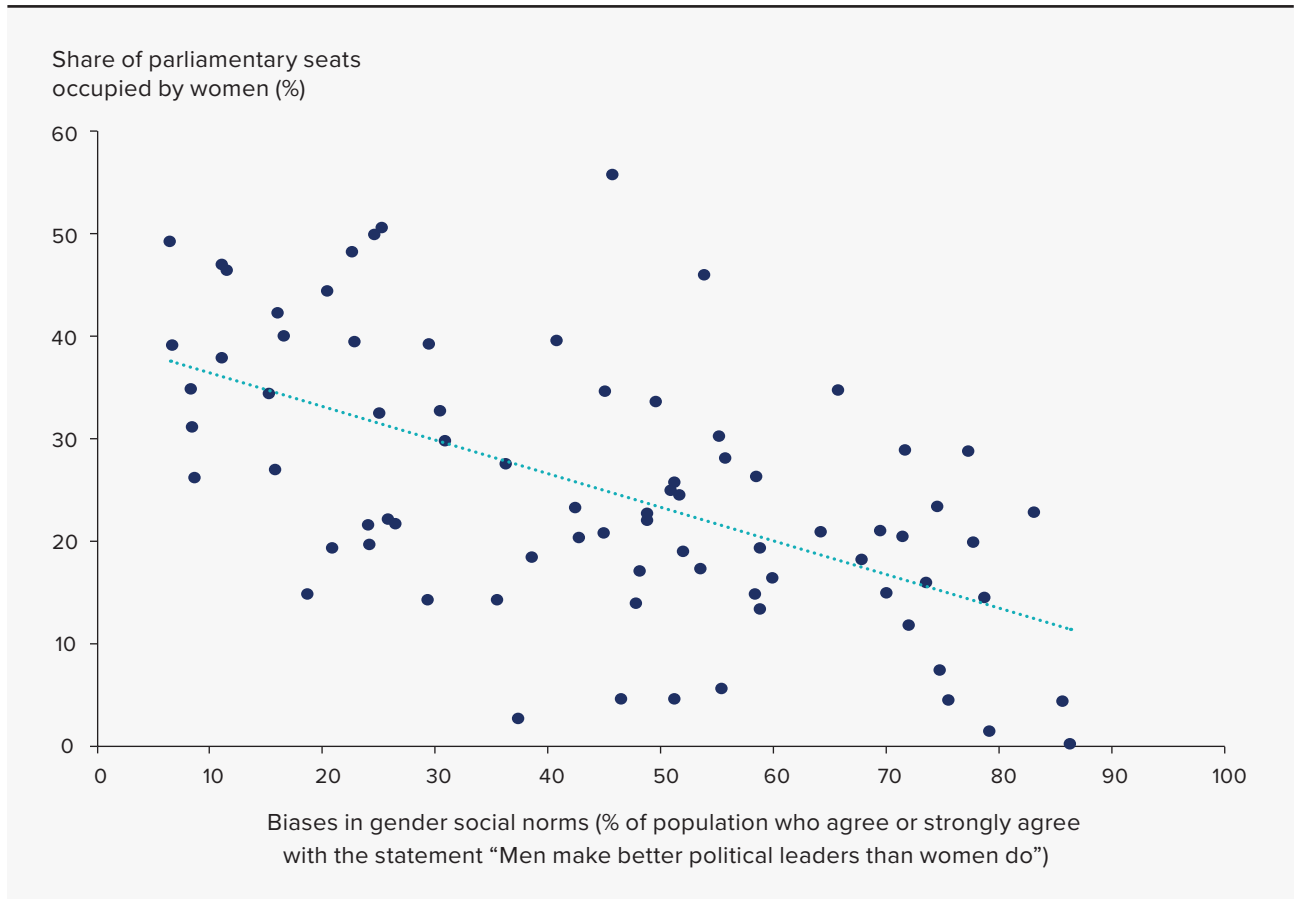
political agency. Women serve as heads of state or heads of government in only about 10 percent of countries, a statistic that has changed little over recent decades.<sup>52</sup>

The UNDP’s 2023 Gender Social Norms Index, which treats biases as deviations from global shared standards of gender equality, shows that gender equality is being constrained by biased social norms against women (figure O.9).<sup>53</sup> Almost half of people believe that men make better political leaders than women.<sup>54</sup> And biased norms might be so entrenched that we judge the women who occupy high political offices more harshly. These biases permeate voting booths, interview panels, board meetings and more—all limiting women’s agency.

To help narrow agency gaps, institutions need to be people-centred, co-owned and future-oriented. What do these principles mean for existing multilateral institutions?

One proxy for people-centred is human development, which multilateral institutions recognize, at best, in a limited or partial way. Economic performance still dominates the agenda. That’s why Beyond GDP, emphasized by UN Secretary-General António Guterres, is so important.<sup>55</sup> Gaps in co-ownership are manifested

**Figure O.9** Gender equality in politics is being constrained by biased social norms against women



**Source:** Human Development Report Office based on data from wave 7 (2017–2022) of the World Values Survey (for biases in social norms) and data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (for the share of parliamentary seats occupied by women in 2021). See also UNDP (2023a).

in the continuation of governance arrangements through written and unwritten rules that reflect a legacy of the distribution of power in the post-World War II world. This extends from the international financial institutions to the United Nations, with several proposals tabled over the years to redress the current lack of representativeness of governance arrangements.<sup>56</sup>

Co-ownership implies a fair distribution of the burden of government action, avoiding inequalities resulting from tax avoidance and evasion. Over the past decade there has been considerable progress in controlling tax evasion, mainly through increased information and transparency around the world.<sup>57</sup> The UN General Assembly has started the process for a Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation, to facilitate policy coordination on these issues.<sup>58</sup> Global minimum tax rates, such as the minimum effective corporate income tax, do not have to be very large to raise substantial amounts if they

are well enforced.<sup>59</sup> Enforcement is largely a policy choice and hinges on international coordination.

Future-oriented means accounting for the way interdependence is being reshaped in the Anthropocene and as a result of the Digital Revolution and finding ways to more systematically, efficiently and equitably providing global public goods.

### **Towards an agency-centred vision of development**

What is development and how is it best pursued? A central question in the postwar era whose answer has changed over time in response to emerging realities. Today, the dynamic interactions between the planetary pressures of the Anthropocene on the one hand and growing inequalities and insecurity on the other are together a gauntlet thrown to all development narratives.

Even to human development.

The first Human Development Report in 1990 proudly proclaimed that “people are the real wealth of a nation.” People still are; they always will be. What is the point of development if not for people? Yet, how we talk about and measure people has to go beyond wellbeing achievements, as measured by the Human Development Index and other conventional indicators, to include agency—the unique, limitless capacity for people to form and reform goals, commitments and values; to make reasoned choices that may or may not advance their own wellbeing; and, ultimately, to lead lives with purpose, which may be greater than their individual selves.

Agency has largely been left off development agendas in any explicit sense. And it shows. Agency gaps coincide with worrying trends on democratic norms and practices, polarization and declines in generalized trust and confidence in governments and international institutions. International cooperation itself is becoming more politicized. Our institutions are struggling with an agency gap.

In his landmark *Development as Freedom*, Amartya Sen recasts development as the pursuit of “greater freedom [that] enhances the ability of people to help themselves and also to influence the world [...] The concern here relates to what we may call [...] the ‘agency aspect.’”<sup>60</sup>

The 2023/2024 Human Development Report starts to mould what could be called an emancipatory vision for development that shines Sen’s notion of development as freedom on the grand challenge of our time: people and planet in joint crisis. This take on development centres the expansion of agency at the intersection of human development, human rights and sustainability. Its goal is the expansion of freedoms in their many forms, including freedom from the tyrannies of single exclusive identities, of zero-sum beliefs and of oversimplified models of behaviour that reduce people to number-crunching narcissists.

Institutions of the 21st century would narrow agency gaps and enlarge, rather than replace, those of the

20th century welfare state. Freedom blossoms into fuller meanings, going beyond the necessary and important “froms”—freedom from fear, from want, from deprivation—to the aspirational and important “ofs”—freedom of self, thought and action, including helpful collective action.

“States of all political stripes and incomes have the opportunity and obligation to shape agency-centred policies and institutions, anchored in human development and guided by human rights

States of all political stripes and incomes have the opportunity and obligation to shape agency-centred policies and institutions, anchored in human development and guided by human rights, the protection of the planet and institutions that liberate us from dysfunctional stasis, that better respond to and empower people and that free us all from rigid and divisive zero-sum narratives about ourselves and each other. When people feel freer to inhabit multiple, overlapping identities, when reasoned, issue-based dialogue prevails over emotionally charged rhetoric that exploits group-based grievances, when people meet people instead of tweeting at them, then people are more able and likely to pursue their own goals, as well as compromise and cooperate on shared objectives that make their own goals more achievable.

This is the virtuous cycle that an agency-centred vision for development, whose building blocks are outlined in this Report, aspires to. Global gridlock begins to give way to cooperation, including for global public goods, even when diverse preferences persist—and we should expect them to persist. Indeed, differences in what people value is a motivating observation behind human development and, as argued in previous Human Development Reports, diversity in its many forms is essential to navigating novel and interacting layers of uncertainty.

We can do better. We have a lot going for us. Let’s get moving.

# Notes

## SNAPSHOT

- 1 See UNDP (2020, 2022a).
- 2 Watson and others 2022.
- 3 See the United Nations Development Programme's Global Dashboard for Vaccine Equity at <https://data.undp.org/insights/vaccine-equity>.
- 4 Vaidyanathan 2024. These pledges still fall short of the annual loss and damages associated with climate change, which have been estimated to be as high as \$400 billion a year.
- 5 <https://about.bnef.com/blog/global-clean-energy-investment-jumps-17-hits-1-8-trillion-in-2023-according-to-bloombergnef-report/> (accessed 31 January 2024).
- 6 HDI data up to 2022 are from table 1 in the *Statistical Annex* of the full Report. Values for 2023 are projections using the same data sources used for that table.
- 7 Msemburi and others 2023.
- 8 See UNDP (2022a).
- 9 Some 3 billion people report feeling worried today, an increase of 687 million people over the past decade; 2 billion people report sadness, 540 million people more than a decade ago; and 2.9 billion people experience stress, an increase of 596 million people over the past decade (Human Development Report Office calculations based on data from Gallup 2023). Daly and Macchia (2023) document an increase in the prevalence of feelings of emotional distress between 2009 and 2021.
- 10 See Kurlantzick (2022), Nichols (2021) and UNDP (2023b).
- 11 Funke, Schularick and Trebesch 2023.
- 12 Andre and others 2024.
- 13 Fernbach and Van Boven 2022.
- 14 Gur, Ayal and Halperin 2021.
- 15 Graeber, Roth and Zimmerman 2023; Vogt and others 2016.
- 16 Demeritt and Hoff 2023. Expanding agency is about enhancing the ability of people to be agents of change. Policies have not stressed enough the central role of agency as a key pillar of human development. Narrowing agency gaps allows people to participate in public reasoning and decisionmaking through institutions they have confidence in.
- 17 On the importance of co-ownership for political institutions, see Allen (2023).
- 18 On the mobilization of the future as a political idea, see White (2023).

## OVERVIEW

- 1 Persson and Bennich 2023.
- 2 IRC 2023; UNHCR 2023b, 2023c.
- 3 Msemburi and others 2023; Wang and others 2022;
- 4 Bollyky and others 2022; Lenton, Boulton and Scheffer 2022.
- 5 Bollyky and others 2022.
- 6 Henkel and others 2023.
- 7 Kumar and others 2022.
- 8 Druedahl, Minssen and Price 2021.
- 9 Gleeson and others 2023.
- 10 NASA 2023.
- 11 UNDP's Human Climate Horizons is an interactive visualization platform (<https://horizons.hdr.undp.org/>) consisting of a dynamic digital public resource that projects up to the end of the 21st century impacts of climate change on people and its implications for human development.
- 12 Albrecht 2012, p. 250. See also Clayton and Karazsia (2020), Stanley and others (2021) and Wullenkord and others (2021).
- 13 Hickman and others 2021.
- 14 Funke, Schularick and Trebesch 2016; Guiso and others 2019; Gyöngyösi and Verner 2022; Mian, Sufi and Trebbi 2014.
- 15 Funke, Schularick and Trebesch 2023.
- 16 Cerra, Fatás and Saxena 2023.
- 17 Aiyar and others 2023.
- 18 Aiyar and others 2023; Xing, Gentile and Dollar 2021.
- 19 Ganapati and Wong 2023.
- 20 Chen, Mrkaic and Nabar 2019; Lane and Milesi-Ferretti 2018.
- 21 Holland and Pazarbasioglu 2024.
- 22 WTO 2023.
- 23 As of 2023, based on data from the International Telecommunication Union (<https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx>, accessed 16 November 2023).
- 24 IOM 2022.
- 25 UNDP 2009.
- 26 Koczan and others 2021.
- 27 Engler and others 2020.
- 28 Stiglitz 1998.

- 29 See Alcalá and Ciccone (2004), Bartley Johns and others (2015); Frankel and Romer (2017) and IMF (2001). See Birdsall and others (1993) for reflections on the East Asian miracle. Trade also had differential impacts across population groups (Engel and others 2021).
- 30 White and others 2023.
- 31 Walter 2021.
- 32 Alstadsæter and others 2023.
- 33 Minerals, energy, key crops, electronics, pharmaceuticals, basic metals, chemicals, financial services, professional services intellectual property (Seong and others 2022).
- 34 Contributions to conceptualizing global public goods gaining force at the turn of the 20th century (Kanbur, Sandler and Morrison 1999; Kaul, Grunberg and Stern 1999; Sandler 1997). A first wave of policy interest in global public goods is reflected in Kaul and Conceição (2006), Kaul and others (2003) and Zedillo and others (2006). For a recent review of the increasing importance of global public goods in today's world, see Buchholz and Sandler (2021).
- 35 Boese and others 2022; Card and others 2022; Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes 2012; McCoy and Somer 2019; Wagner 2021.
- 36 Levin, Milner and Perrings 2021.
- 37 See Van Bavel and others (forthcoming) for the costs of polarizing a pandemic.
- 38 Schimmelpfennig and others 2022.
- 39 As argued in Bednar (2021).
- 40 Bednar 2021.
- 41 Hobolt, Leeper and Tilley 2021.
- 42 Henkel and others 2023.
- 43 De Vries, Hobolt and Walter 2021.
- 44 Bearce and Jolliff Scott 2019.
- 45 Deitelhoff 2020; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015; Nye Jr 2001; Schneider 2018.
- 46 See Conceição and Mendoza (2006) and chapter 3 in the full Report.
- 47 Sparkman, Geiger and Weber 2022.
- 48 Graeber, Roth and Zimmerman 2023.
- 49 The notion of agency linked with collective outcomes has been referred to as "collective agency." See, for instance, Ibrahim (2006), LeBmann (2022), Pelenc, Bazile and Ceruti (2015) and Rauschmayer and others (2018).
- 50 See also Prados de la Escosura (2022).

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51 O'Madagain and Tomasello 2022; Tomasello 2022.

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52 UNDP 2023a.

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53 UNDP 2023a.

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54 UNDP 2023a.

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55 UN 2023.

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56 For instance, the Stiglitz Commission for the Reform of the International Financial and Monetary System (convened in 2008, in the middle of the 2007–2008 global financial crisis) suggested establishing a Global Economic Coordination Council as an option (Stiglitz Commission 2009).

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57 Through the 171 members of the Global Forum on Transparency and Exchange of Information

for Tax Purposes. In 2022 information on almost EUR 12 trillion in assets was automatically exchanged. See OECD (2024).

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58 United Nations Secretary-General 2023.

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59 Alstadsæter and others 2023.

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60 Sen 1999, p. 18.









HDI rank	Human Development Index (HDI)	Inequality-adjusted HDI (IHD)		Gender Development Index		Gender Inequality Index		Multidimensional Poverty Index			Planetary pressures-adjusted HDI	
	Value	Value	Overall loss (%)	Value	Group	Value	Rank	Value	Headcount (%)	Intensity of deprivation (%)	Value	Difference from HDI value (%)
	2022	2022	2022	2022	2022	2022	2022	2011-2022	2011-2022	2011-2022	2022	2022
<b>Other countries or territories</b>												
..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
<b>Human development groups</b>												
	0.902	0.807	10.5	0.988	-	0.150	-	0.002	0.5	35.9	0.779	13.6
	0.764	0.628	17.8	0.962	-	0.339	-	0.016	3.8	40.7	0.691	9.6
	0.640	0.447	30.2	0.870	-	0.476	-	0.091	20.5	44.1	0.622	2.8
	0.517	0.341	34.0	0.868	-	0.579	-	0.274	51.6	53.2	0.509	1.5
<b>Developing countries</b>	0.694	0.524	24.5	0.929	-	0.485	-	0.088	18.2	48.5	0.652	6.1
<b>Regions</b>												
Arab States	0.704	0.534	24.1	0.877	-	0.523	-	0.074	15.1	48.9	0.658	6.5
East Asia and the Pacific	0.766	0.640	16.4	0.962	-	0.340	-	0.022	5.1	42.4	0.683	10.8
Europe and Central Asia	0.802	0.708	11.7	0.963	-	0.224	-	0.004	1.2	37.1	0.743	7.4
Latin America and the Caribbean	0.763	0.605	20.7	0.991	-	0.386	-	0.024	5.6	43.1	0.716	6.2
South Asia	0.641	0.443	30.9	0.855	-	0.478	-	0.091	20.5	44.6	0.622	3.0
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.549	0.363	33.9	0.915	-	0.565	-	0.262	49.5	52.9	0.539	1.8
<b>Least developed countries</b>	0.542	0.363	33.0	0.890	-	0.556	-	0.268	51.7	52.0	0.533	1.7
<b>Small island developing states</b>												
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development	0.906	0.803	11.4	0.984	-	0.194	-	0.017	4.2	40.5	0.787	13.1
<b>World</b>	<b>0.739</b>	<b>0.576</b>	<b>22.1</b>	<b>0.951</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>0.462</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>0.088</b>	<b>18.2</b>	<b>48.5</b>	<b>0.685</b>	<b>7.3</b>

## Definitions

**Human Development Index (HDI):** A composite index measuring average achievement in three basic dimensions of human development—a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living. See *Technical note 1* at [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2023\\_technical\\_notes.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2023_technical_notes.pdf) for details on how the HDI is calculated.

**Inequality-adjusted HDI (IHDI):** HDI value adjusted for inequalities in the three basic dimensions of human development. See *Technical note 2* at [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2023\\_technical\\_notes.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2023_technical_notes.pdf) for details on how the IHDI is calculated.

**Overall loss:** Percentage difference between the IHDI value and the HDI value, calculated only for countries for which an IHDI value is calculated.

**Gender Development Index:** Ratio of female to male HDI values. See *Technical note 3* at [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2023\\_technical\\_notes.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2023_technical_notes.pdf) for details on how the Gender Development Index is calculated.

**Gender Development Index groups:** Countries are divided into five groups by absolute deviation from gender parity in HDI values. Group 1 comprises countries with high equality in HDI achievements between women and men (absolute deviation of less than 2.5 percent), group 2 comprises countries with medium to high equality in HDI achievements between women and men (absolute deviation of 2.5–5 percent), group 3 comprises countries with medium equality in HDI achievements between women and men (absolute deviation of 5–7.5 percent), group 4 comprises countries with medium to low equality in HDI achievements between women and men (absolute deviation of 7.5–10 percent) and group 5 comprises countries with low equality in HDI achievements between women and men (absolute deviation from gender parity of more than 10 percent).

**Gender Inequality Index:** A composite measure reflecting inequality in achievement between women and men in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market. See *Technical note 4* at [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2023\\_technical\\_notes.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2023_technical_notes.pdf) for details on how the Gender Inequality Index is calculated.

**Multidimensional Poverty Index:** Proportion of the population that is multidimensionally poor adjusted by the intensity of the deprivations. Not all indicators were available for all countries, so caution should be used in cross-country comparisons. When an indicator is missing, weights of available indicators are adjusted to total 100 percent. See *Technical note 5* at [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2023\\_technical\\_notes.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2023_technical_notes.pdf) for details on how the Multidimensional Poverty Index is calculated.

**Multidimensional poverty headcount:** Population with a deprivation score of at least 33.3 percent. It is expressed as a share of the population in the survey year, the number of multidimensionally poor people in the survey year and the projected number of multidimensionally poor people in 2021.

**Intensity of deprivation of multidimensional poverty:** Average deprivation score experienced by people in multidimensional poverty.

**Planetary pressures-adjusted HDI (PHDI):** HDI value adjusted by the level of carbon dioxide emissions and material footprint per capita to account for the excessive human pressure on the planet. It should be seen as an incentive for transformation. See *Technical note 6* at [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2023\\_technical\\_notes.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2023_technical_notes.pdf) for details on how the PHDI is calculated.

**Difference from HDI value:** Percentage difference between the PHDI value and the HDI value.

## Main data sources

**Columns 1 and 4:** HDRO calculations based on data from Barro and Lee (2018), IMF (2023), UNDESA (2022, 2023), UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2023), United Nations Statistics Division (2023) and World Bank (2023).

**Column 2:** Calculated as the geometric mean of the values in the inequality-adjusted life expectancy index, inequality-adjusted education index and inequality-adjusted income index using the methodology in *Technical note 2* (available at [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2023\\_technical\\_notes.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2023_technical_notes.pdf)).

**Column 3:** Calculated based on data in columns 1 and 2.

**Column 5:** Calculated based on data in column 4.

**Column 6:** HDRO calculations based on data from Barro and Lee (2018), ICF Macro Demographic and Health Surveys, ILO (2023), IPU (2023), OECD (2023), UNDESA (2022), UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2023), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys and WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank Group and UNDESA/Population Division (2023).

**Column 7:** Calculated based on data in column 6.

**Columns 8–10:** HDRO and OPHI calculations based on data on household deprivations in health, education, and standard of living from various years of ICF Macro Demographic and Health Surveys and UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys.

**Column 11:** HDRO calculations based on data from Barro and Lee (2018), IMF (2023), UNDESA (2022, 2023), United Nations Environment Programme (2023), UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2023), United Nations Statistics Division (2023) and World Bank (2023).

**Column 12:** Calculated based on data in columns 1 and 11.

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## KEY TO HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX RANKS, 2022

Afghanistan	182	Dominican Republic	82	Liberia	177	Saint Lucia	108
Albania	74	Ecuador	83	Libya	92	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	81
Algeria	93	Egypt	105	Liechtenstein	12	Samoa	116
Andorra	35	El Salvador	127	Lithuania	37	San Marino	43
Angola	150	Equatorial Guinea	133	Luxembourg	20	Sao Tome and Principe	141
Antigua and Barbuda	54	Eritrea	175	Madagascar	177	Saudi Arabia	40
Argentina	48	Estonia	31	Malawi	172	Senegal	169
Armenia	76	Eswatini (Kingdom of)	142	Malaysia	63	Serbia	65
Australia	10	Ethiopia	176	Maldives	87	Seychelles	67
Austria	22	Fiji	104	Mali	188	Sierra Leone	184
Azerbaijan	89	Finland	12	Malta	25	Singapore	9
Bahamas	57	France	28	Marshall Islands	102	Slovakia	45
Bahrain	34	Gabon	123	Mauritania	164	Slovenia	22
Bangladesh	129	Gambia	174	Mauritius	72	Solomon Islands	156
Barbados	62	Georgia	60	Mexico	77	Somalia	193
Belarus	69	Germany	7	Micronesia (Federated States of)	135	South Africa	110
Belgium	12	Ghana	145	Moldova (Republic of)	86	South Sudan	192
Belize	118	Greece	33	Monaco		Spain	27
Benin	173	Grenada	73	Mongolia	96	Sri Lanka	78
Bhutan	125	Guatemala	136	Montenegro	50	Sudan	170
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	120	Guinea	181	Morocco	120	Suriname	124
Bosnia and Herzegovina	80	Guinea-Bissau	179	Mozambique	183	Sweden	5
Botswana	114	Guyana	95	Myanmar	144	Switzerland	1
Brazil	89	Haiti	158	Namibia	142	Syrian Arab Republic	157
Brunei Darussalam	55	Honduras	138	Nauru	122	Tajikistan	126
Bulgaria	70	Hong Kong, China (SAR)	4	Nepal	146	Tanzania (United Republic of)	167
Burkina Faso	185	Hungary	47	Netherlands	10	Thailand	66
Burundi	187	Iceland	3	New Zealand	16	Timor-Leste	155
Cabo Verde	131	India	134	Nicaragua	130	Togo	163
Cambodia	148	Indonesia	112	Niger	189	Tonga	98
Cameroon	151	Iran (Islamic Republic of)	78	Nigeria	161	Trinidad and Tobago	60
Canada	18	Iraq	128	North Macedonia	83	Tunisia	101
Central African Republic	191	Ireland	7	Norway	2	Türkiye	45
Chad	189	Israel	25	Oman	59	Turkmenistan	94
Chile	44	Italy	30	Pakistan	164	Tuvalu	132
China	75	Jamaica	115	Palau	71	Uganda	159
Colombia	91	Japan	24	Palestine, State of	111	Ukraine	100
Comoros	152	Jordan	99	Panama	57	United Arab Emirates	17
Congo	149	Kazakhstan	67	Papua New Guinea	154	United Kingdom	15
Congo (Democratic Republic of the)	180	Kenya	146	Paraguay	102	United States	20
Costa Rica	64	Kiribati	137	Peru	87	Uruguay	52
Côte d'Ivoire	166	Korea (Democratic People's Rep. of)		Philippines	113	Uzbekistan	106
Croatia	39	Korea (Republic of)	19	Poland	36	Vanuatu	140
Cuba	85	Kuwait	49	Portugal	42	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	119
Cyprus	29	Kyrgyzstan	117	Qatar	40	Viet Nam	107
Czechia	32	Lao People's Democratic Republic	139	Romania	53	Yemen	186
Denmark	5	Latvia	37	Russian Federation	56	Zambia	153
Djibouti	171	Lebanon	109	Rwanda	161	Zimbabwe	159
Dominica	97	Lesotho	168	Saint Kitts and Nevis	51		



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