

منتدى الدوحة للبيانات

من أجل الابتكار في التنمية المستدامة

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DOHA DATA FORUM

FOR INNOVATION IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

October 22-23, 2024

Reconstructing Development metrics: Embracing diverse cultural realities beyond the Global North

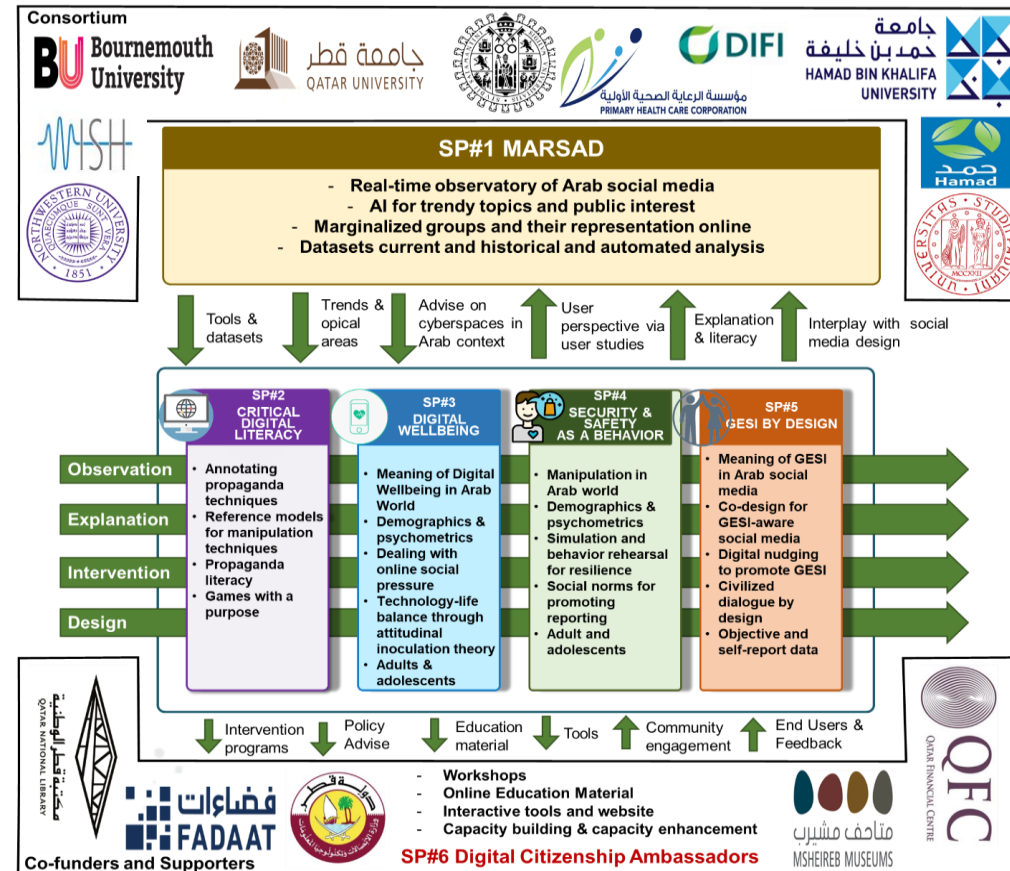
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Acknowledgements

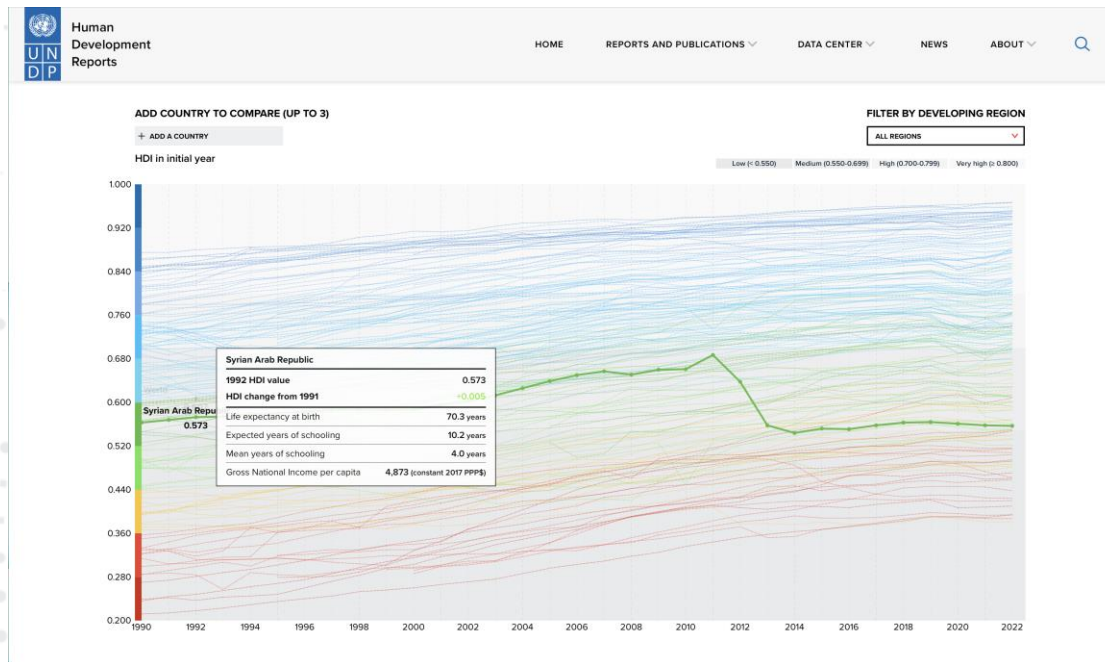
A Critical Examination of Socio-Economic Metrics, based on insights from our NPRP-C project *The Future of Digital Citizenship in Qatar: a Social-Technical Framework* (Subproject 6: **Digital Citizenship Ambassadors** NPRP14C-0916-210015)



Introduction

- **Overview of Global Development Metrics**

- Our modern world relies on widely used metrics like the HDI or the SDGs.



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Main argument / question (1)

- **Global Competitiveness Index**

- Deemed obsolete after running from 2004-2020:
- “...none of the indicators used to determine this report's competitiveness ranking reflect any of the countries' environmental dimensions such as energy, water, climate risks, resource or food security, etc. The Global Competitiveness Report 2018 and 2019 used the ecological footprint as a context indicator, but the footprint was not included in the scoring algorithm that determines the ranking.”
- “Two types of data are used in the GCI: (a) Survey data: These data are the results drawn from the World Economic Forum’s Executive Opinion Survey. (b) Hard data: These data come from indicators obtained from a variety of sources”.

Data Requests

If you are interested in using the Executive Opinion Survey data, please submit the [Data Request Form](#). It is recommended that you identify the indicator of your interest using this [Correspondence Table](#). The team will get back to you as soon as possible.

[Link to Data Request Form](#)

Methodology

Learn more about the survey administration and data validation process of the Executive Opinion Survey.

[Explore](#)

Executive Opinion Survey

Part of Centre for the New Economy and Society

Main argument / question (1)

- **As part of our conceptual exploration in subproject 6:**
 - There is an overall dominance of Western socio-economic frameworks
 - To explore how these metrics might misrepresent or not properly serve non-Western contexts

The Western framework

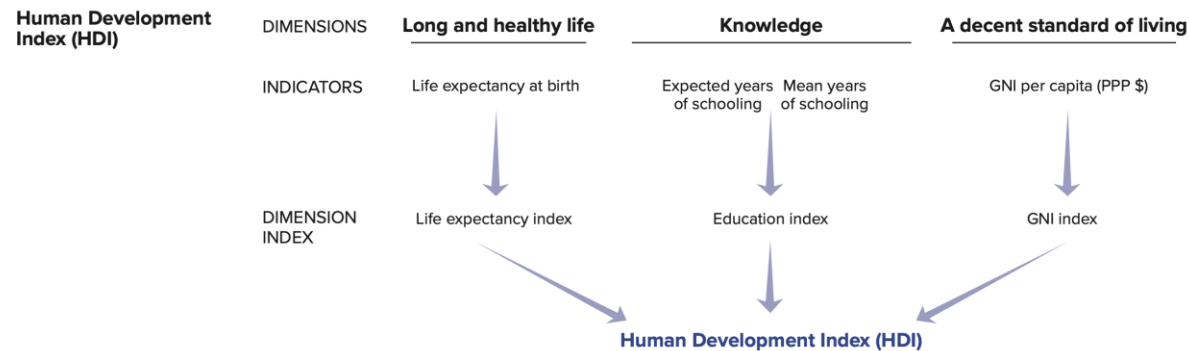
- **Generally...**

- Emphasis on **individualism** and market-driven growth
- Focus on formalised labour and economic structures
- Metrics centered around industrial economies

- Examples: HDI's reliance on income, education, life expectancy

Human Development Report 2023/2024 technical notes

Calculating the human development indices—graphical presentation



Health Index (Life Expectancy Index):

- Normalized using the formula:

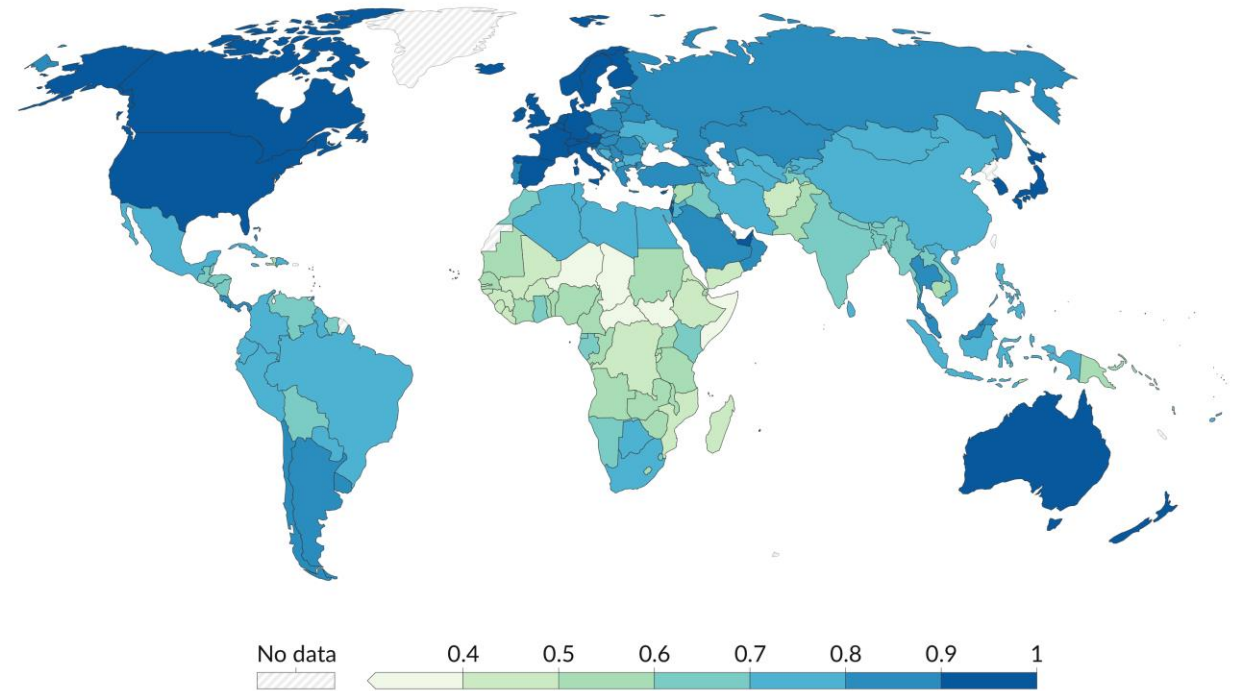
$$\text{Life Expectancy Index} = \frac{\text{Life Expectancy} - 20}{85 - 20}$$

Where 85 is the maximum expected life expectancy and 20 is the minimum.

Human Development Index, 2022

The Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure of key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, a good education, and a decent standard of living. Higher values indicate higher human development.

Our World
in Data



Data source: UNDP, Human Development Report (2024)

OurWorldinData.org/human-development-index | CC BY

The Issue of cultural relevance

- **What is missing?**
 - Lack of inclusion of informal economies
 - Overlooking communal and support-based systems in non-Western societies
 - Different cultural approaches to education, work, and well-being
 - Unemployment and its alternative definitions across cultures

Case study:

Unemployment in MENA informal sectors

- **The Challenge of defining Unemployment in the MENA region**
 - Unemployment in many Western economies is typically defined as the percentage of the labour force that is actively seeking employment but unable to find work within the formal economy.
 - This definition tends to emphasise formal, wage-based labour structures and do not account for the complexity of employment patterns outside of the formal job market.
 - In the MENA region large portions of the population are involved in informal economies, which include family-run businesses, self-employment, street vendors, agricultural labor, and trade work that is not officially recorded by government institutions. **These activities often go unrecognised by conventional unemployment metrics.**
 - Egypt's informal economy accounts for an estimated **60%** of all employment.

Alternative metrics: MENA case study (1)

- **MENA Socio-Economic dynamics**

- The role of **informal economies** (e.g., street vendors, family-based economies)
- Communal definitions of work (work as a family or community activity)
- Support systems rooted in family, tribe, and communal networks

- **Egypt:** 60% of the workforce in the informal sector.
- **Morocco:** Informal economy contributes 40% of GDP; 75% of artisanal workers (carpet weaving, pottery, and leather goods) are informal.
- **Cairo:** 1.5 million street vendors.
- **Women's Work:** Only 18% of Egyptian women in formal employment, though many work informally.
- **Youth Employment:** Up to 50-70% of youth in informal employment in some MENA countries.
- **GDP:** Informal sector contributes 30-40% of Egypt's GDP, 40% of Morocco's, and 35% in Lebanon.

Alternative metrics: MENA case study (2)

- **Family-based work:** In many MENA societies, work is often **family-centered** rather than individually driven. Family members contribute to family businesses without formal contracts or titles, which are typically excluded from Western measurements of employment.
 - **Example:** In rural areas of **Morocco** and **Yemen**, extended families run small-scale farms where all family members participate. These contributions are vital to family survival but are not counted in official unemployment statistics.
- **Social solidarity and barter systems:** In some MENA regions, traditional barter economies and systems of **social solidarity** are prominent. These involve exchanges of goods and services rather than formal wage employment.
 - **Example:** In **Lebanon**, communities have long relied on systems of exchange (e.g., food for services) that don't involve monetary transactions, yet provide key sustenance and services to families.

Limitations of Global Development metrics

- **GDP as the dominant Metric**

- GDP emphasizes economic output and market transactions, valuing activities that generate monetary income. However, it ignores non-market activities that may be crucial in non-Western societies, such as subsistence farming, barter systems, or care work performed within families.

- **Formal labour bias:**

- Capitalist systems equate **formal employment** with economic productivity.

- **Inadequate Policy Responses**

- Metrics may encourage solutions that do not address local realities, widening social inequalities.

- **Cultural sensitivity in policy**

- Development frameworks must be adapted to local contexts, with a focus on **cultural sensitivity** and inclusivity. This requires consulting with local communities, respecting alternative definitions of success and productivity, and valuing **social capital** over purely economic outcomes.

Case Studies from the Global South (1)

- **Case Study 1: MENA Informal labor systems**
 - Cultural norms around communal work and **informal trade**
- **Case Study 2: African communal healthcare**
 - Traditional healing and **community-driven healthcare systems**
 - Ethiopia's Health Extension Program (HEP) or Uganda's Village Health Teams (VHTs)
 - *The IAEG recently changed one of the two indicators for SDG target 3.8 — “to achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health care services, and access to safe, effective, quality, and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all” — to be defined as the “number of people covered by health insurance or public health system per 1,000 population.” ([here](#))*

Case Studies from the Global South (2)

- **Case Study 3: Indigenous definitions of well-being**

- In Western societies, well-being is often measured through **individual income levels, material wealth, access to healthcare, education**, and other formal metrics. Well-being tends to be associated with **economic success**, individual achievement, and the accumulation of personal assets. ([See challenge to this framework](#))
- Alternative conceptions of **happiness and quality of life** in South America
- In contrast, many Indigenous communities, particularly in South America, emphasize **collective well-being**, social harmony, and a deep connection to the natural environment. Well-being is seen not as individual prosperity but as **balance** and **sustainability** in community life and the environment.
- **Ecuador** and **Bolivia**, **Buen Vivir** (or **Sumak Kawsay** in Quechua). Incorporated into their national constitutions, recognising the **rights of nature** and emphasizing social welfare over economic growth.
- Buen Vivir promotes values such as **collective ownership of resources, respect for Pachamama (Mother Earth)**, and a **non-extractive approach to development**.

Conclusion: Moving beyond Western metrics

- **Recommendations for policy makers and scholars**
 - Adopt **contextualized development frameworks** specific to local realities
 - Promote **community engagement** in policy formation
 - Collaborate with local scholars and **civil society organisations**
- **Conclusion:** Shifting towards a more inclusive and diverse approach to understanding global development

Thank you for your attention

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