PUBLIC POLICY

Public Policy and Human Development: An Analytical Review of Health, Education and Livelihood for Inclusive Growth

Byrappa

Department of Political Science, Jnana Bharathi Campus, Bangalore University, Bangalore, India

Published November 2026

Abstract

Public policy plays a critical role in promoting human development and ensuring inclusive growth. Human development extends beyond economic growth and focuses on expanding people's capabilities, choices, opportunities, and quality of life. Health, education, and livelihood constitute three fundamental pillars of human development. This paper analytically examines the relationship between public policy and human development, with particular emphasis on health, education, and livelihood. It explores how government interventions in these sectors contribute to improving human capabilities, reducing inequalities, generating employment opportunities, and promoting social inclusion. The paper argues that economic growth alone cannot ensure human development unless its benefits are equitably distributed across different social and economic groups. Effective public policies, institutional capacity, social protection, gender equality, and participatory governance are therefore essential for achieving inclusive and sustainable development.

Keywords: Public policy; human development; health; education; livelihood; inclusive growth; social justice; equality

1 Introduction

Public policy represents the deliberate actions, programmes, laws, and institutional interventions undertaken by governments to address social and economic challenges.

In contemporary democratic societies, the objective of public policy is not merely to increase economic production but also to improve people's well-being and expand their opportunities.

The human development approach, associated particularly with Mahbub ul Haq and Amartya Sen, places people at the centre of the development process.

The three fundamental dimensions of human development are (1) a long and healthy life, (2) access to knowledge and education and (3) a decent standard of living.

Therefore, public policy becomes an important instrument for transforming economic resources into better human outcomes.

2 Statement of the problem

Despite significant economic growth, many societies continue to experience health inequalities, educational disparities, unemployment and underemployment, rural–urban inequalities, gender inequalities, regional disparities, poverty and livelihood insecurity, and social exclusion.

The central question of this paper is: How can public policy effectively transform economic growth into better health, quality education, secure livelihoods, and inclusive human development?

3 Objectives of the study

The major objectives are:

1. To examine the relationship between public policy and human development.
2. To analyse the role of health policy in improving human development.
3. To examine the contribution of education policy to human capabilities.
4. To analyse livelihood and employment as components of human development.
5. To examine the relationship between human development and inclusive growth.
6. To identify major challenges in public policy implementation.
7. To suggest policy measures for equitable and sustainable human development.

4 Research methodology

The study is primarily based on secondary sources and analytical methods. The major sources were:

- UNDP Human Development Reports
- Government of India reports
- NITI Aayog reports
- Census of India
- Economic Survey
- Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Rural Development
- Academic books and research articles
- Government policy documents

The study adopts a descriptive, analytical and comparative approach.

5 Concept of human development

Human development is a people-centred approach to development. It focuses on expanding capabilities → choices → opportunities → freedom → well-being.

Human development therefore cannot be measured only through income or GDP.

The major dimensions of human development and their key indicators are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Major dimensions of human development.

Dimension	Key indicator
Health	Life expectancy
Education	Years of schooling and learning
Income	Standard of living

Dimension	Key indicator
Livelihood	Employment and economic security
Equality	Equal access to opportunities
Social Inclusion	Participation of vulnerable groups

6 Public policy and human development

The relationship can be represented as Public Policy → Investment in People → health + education + livelihood → Human Capabilities → Social Inclusion → Inclusive Growth → Human Development.

Public policy therefore acts as a bridge between economic resources and human well-being.

7 Health and human development

Health is one of the most important foundations of human development. A healthy population is more capable of learning, working, earning income, and participating in social and political life.

Key policy areas include Primary healthcare, Universal health coverage, Maternal and child healthcare, Nutrition, Immunisation, Sanitation, Safe drinking water, Medical infrastructure, Affordable medicines, Preventive healthcare.

The health–development link can be represented as Better Healthcare → Improved Health Status → Higher Productivity → Higher Income → Better Quality of Life → Higher Human Development.

8 Education and human development

Education is a powerful instrument for expanding human capabilities.

It enhances Knowledge, Skills, Employment opportunities, Income-earning capacity, Social mobility, Political awareness, Gender equality, Social participation.

The education–development link can be represented as Access to Education → Knowledge & Skills → Employment Opportunities → Higher Income & Empowerment → Improved Standard of Living → Human Development.

Quality education is therefore more important than merely increasing enrolment.

9 Livelihood and human development

Livelihood provides the economic foundation for a dignified life. Secure livelihoods enable individuals and families to access: Food, Housing, Healthcare, Education, Financial services, Social security

Major livelihood sectors include agriculture, horticulture, industry, services, small and medium enterprises, self-employment, rural employment, skill-based employment and entrepreneurship.

The livelihood–development link can be represented as Skills & Employment → Stable Income → Economic Security → Improved Living Conditions → Human Development.

10 Inclusive growth

Inclusive growth means ensuring that the benefits of economic development reach all sections of society. It combines economic growth + social justice + equal opportunity + employment + social protection.

Inclusive growth must address inequalities based on: Income, Gender, Geography, Social background, Rural–urban location, Access to education, Access to healthcare Economic growth becomes meaningful when it improves the lives of ordinary people.

11 Major public policies in India

The major public policies and programmes in India are listed in Table 2.

Table 2. Major public policies and programmes in India.

Sector	Major policy/programme	Expected contribution
Health	National Health Mission	Strengthening healthcare
Health	Ayushman Bharat	Health protection
Education	Samagra Shiksha	Quality school education
Education	PM POSHAN	Nutrition and school participation
Employment	MGNREGA	Rural employment security
Livelihood	DAY-NRLM	Rural livelihoods and women's empowerment
Skills	Skill Development Programmes	Employability
Financial inclusion	PM Jan-Dhan Yojana	Access to banking
Water	Jal Jeevan Mission	Safe drinking water
Housing	PMAY	Improved living conditions

12 Analytical framework

The analytical framework linking policy interventions to outcomes is summarised in Table 3.

Table 3. Analytical framework: public policy interventions and outcomes.

Public policy intervention	Immediate outcome	Human development outcome
Health policy	Better health care	Higher life expectancy
Education policy	Better learning	Improved capabilities
Employment policy	Higher employment	Better income
Skill policy	Improved skills	Greater employability
Social protection	Reduced vulnerability	Economic security
Gender policy	Equal opportunities	Women's empowerment
Rural development	Better infrastructure	Balanced development

13 Major challenges

Despite substantial progress, several challenges remain.

1. **Regional Inequality:** Development outcomes differ significantly across regions.
2. **Rural–Urban Divide:** Access to quality healthcare, education and employment remains unequal.
3. **Gender Inequality:** Women continue to face barriers in education, employment and economic participation.
4. **Quality Gap:** Access to services does not always guarantee quality outcomes.
5. **Implementation Gap:** There can be a significant difference between policy formulation and actual implementation.
6. **Livelihood Insecurity:** Informal employment and agricultural dependence can create income instability.
7. **Digital Divide:** Unequal access to technology can create new forms of social exclusion.

14 Major findings

The analysis indicates that:

1. Economic growth alone does not guarantee human development.
2. Health investment improves human capabilities and productivity.
3. Quality education increases employment and social mobility.
4. Secure livelihoods are essential for sustainable human development.
5. Women's empowerment has a multiplier effect on household and community well-being.
6. Social protection is essential for vulnerable populations.
7. Effective implementation is as important as policy formulation.
8. District-level planning can help address local disparities.
9. Integrated policies produce better human development outcomes than isolated interventions.
10. Inclusive growth must place human well-being at the centre of development planning.

15 Policy recommendations

1. **Strengthen Primary Healthcare:** Increase investment in accessible and affordable primary healthcare, especially in rural areas.
2. **Focus on Quality Education:** Move beyond enrolment and focus on learning outcomes, skills and employability.
3. **Promote Sustainable Livelihoods:** Develop employment and livelihood programmes according to local economic conditions.
4. **Empower Women:** Strengthen women's access to education, employment, entrepreneurship and financial resources.
5. **Strengthen Social Protection:** Ensure vulnerable groups receive effective social security and welfare support.
6. **Promote Evidence-Based Policy:** Use reliable and disaggregated data for policy formulation and monitoring.

7. **Strengthen Local Governance:** Empower Panchayats and local institutions to identify and address local development needs.
8. **Integrate Development Policies:** Health, education, employment and social protection should be planned as interconnected components of human development.

16 Proposed model for inclusive human development

The proposed model links health (healthy population) → education (knowledge and skills) → livelihood (employment and income) → social inclusion (equality and participation) → inclusive growth → sustainable human development.

17 Conclusion

Public policy is a powerful instrument for transforming economic resources into human capabilities and social well-being.

Health, education and livelihood are not independent sectors. They are deeply interconnected dimensions of human development. A healthy individual is more capable of learning; an educated individual has greater employment opportunities; and a secure livelihood enables individuals and families to maintain better standards of living.

Therefore, the ultimate objective of public policy should not be economic growth alone, but "growth with equity, development with dignity, and progress with inclusion".

A people-centred public policy framework that integrates health, education, livelihood, social protection and equality can create the foundation for sustainable and inclusive human development.

"Inclusive growth becomes meaningful when economic progress is translated into better health, quality education, secure livelihoods and equal opportunities for every citizen."

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