

# OPINION & ANALYSIS

## PERSONAL VIEW

### Boost for adult literacy will feed into country's human development rating

Some important measuring sticks have been developed in recent years to assess how far a country has progressed in developing the potential of its human resources. As such, they can be used to guide policy including budgetary policy.

The human development index (HDI), generated by the United Nations, is one of these.

It allows countries to be ranked in order of their level of human development. In selecting the indicators needed to calculate the HDI of a country, the UN asked: what are the basic capabilities that people must have to participate in and contribute to the development of their society?

Their answer was: an ability to lead a long and healthy life, to be

knowledgeable and to have access to the resources needed for a decent standard of living.

These factors translate into a society's life expectancy at birth; its level of educational attainment, measured both in terms of its adult literacy rate and the combined enrolment at primary, secondary and tertiary institutes of education; and the income regarded as adequate for a reasonable standard of living.

The adult literacy rate of a nation is viewed as extremely significant to its human development. The HDI reflects this in the weighting it gives to adult literacy.

So, if we are concerned about our position on the world-scale ratings of human development, we can rejoice at last week's decision

of the department of education to add an extra R5 billion over the next few years to the paltry R148 million (under 1 percent of the total education budget) currently allocated



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to its adult basic education and training programme (Abet).

A conservative estimate of 25 percent of our population, or 9.5 million of our black people, the majority of them women, are illiterate. They are included among the vast number of mainly blacks who suffer extreme poverty and

inaccessibility to a healthy life.

It is small wonder that on the scale of human development, while South Africa as a whole ranks 95th out of 174 countries, white South Africa ranks 24th and black South Africa 128th.

The top four countries in the HDI rankings are Canada, the US, Japan and the Netherlands, in that order.

Cyprus, Hong Kong, Barbados and the Bahamas lead the developing areas at 23rd, 24th, 25th and 26th respectively.

The lowest levels of human development exist in Ethiopia, Somalia, Sierra Leone and Niger.

The UN's gender development index (GDI), another measure of the development of human potential, is a country's HDI calculated

for its female population only. In every one of the countries for which the GDI can be calculated from available statistics based on gender differences, the GDI is lower than the HDI.

This means that so far no country has been found where gender inequality in the education, health and income required for economic development and growth does not exist. Of course, the degree of this form of gender inequality varies from country to country.

Because the official statistics during apartheid were collected on a racial basis and not also systematically broken down by gender, there is not yet the data for South Africa's GDI to be calculated. However, Central Statistical Service is engaged in such gender-sensitive

data collection, not just for calculating South Africa's GDI, but also for the purposes of related projects, including the Women's Budget Initiative and the Common Wealth Gender and Macroeconomic Policy Initiative, currently under way.

The top four countries in the GDI rankings are Sweden, Finland, Norway and Denmark, in that order. The reason for this is that these countries have for many years deliberately pursued in practice their national policy of women's empowerment and gender equality.

Bearing in mind our own efforts in this direction, we keenly await South Africa's standing on this international scale of women's empowerment.

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The Norwich Unit Trusts

received 0.5% of the total amount from Monday.