



MANILA — The Philippines ranked 97th out of 169 countries in the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)'s annual Human Development Report, which measures quality of life.

The Philippines improved in ranking from 2009, when it placed 105th.

In the 2007/2008 report, the Philippines ranked 90th among 177 countries.

The UNDP report made an assessment of the state of human development of countries on the basis of health, education and income indicators, as an alternative to purely macroeconomic assessments of national progress.

UNDP administrator Helen Clark and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen spotlighted the countries that made the greatest progress in recent decades as measured by the Human Development Index

(HDI), with China, Nepal, Indonesia, Lao PDR and South Korea all making the report's "Top 10 Movers" list.

The report, however, highlighted the difficulty of breaking into the rich club of nations. Norway — with its 81.0 years of life expectancy and average annual income of \$58,810 — has now topped the HDI for all but two years since 2001.

It does not top any individual category — average income in Liechtenstein is a wallet-busting \$81,011 and Japan's life expectancy is 83.6 years — but Norway's all-round performance gave it superiority in the UNDP 20th annual rankings.

Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Ireland followed at the top of the standings.

Zimbabwe came in last among the 169 nations ranked, behind Mozambique, Burundi, Niger and Democratic Republic of Congo.

The HDI, a composite measure of human development covering health and education, as well as income, was devised by the late Pakistani economist Mahbub ul Haq for the first Human Development Report in 1990.

The report also revealed life expectancy in South Asia is now estimated at 65 years, compared to 49 in 1970.

One big factor has been the gradual decline in South Asia's infant and child mortality rates, which now stand at 56 and 73 per 1,000 live births, respectively.

In education, literacy in South Asia increased to 66 percent in 2010 from 31 percent in 1970, still below the global average for the 135 countries assessed of 83 percent.

In East Asia and the Pacific, the region's literacy rates rose to 94 percent in 2010 compared to 53 percent in 1970.

The Republic of Korea ranked highest among the countries grouped on the HDI as part of East Asia and the Pacific — number 12 in the world, which is in the “very high human development” category, followed by Hong Kong at 21 and Singapore at 27.

Afghanistan ranked lowest among Asian countries at 155 out of the 169 countries assessed.

The report revealed East Asia and the Pacific had the strongest performance of any region over the past 40 years — twice the average worldwide progress.

China, the second highest index achiever since 1970, has been successful mainly because of income rather than health or education, the report said.

China's per capita income increased 21-fold over four decades, lifting hundreds of millions out of poverty.

Yet its school enrollment has dropped since 1970 and life expectancy has not improved as much as other nations.

On the other hand, Congo, Zambia and Zimbabwe are the only three countries to see their HDI value fall below 1970 levels.

“These countries offer lessons on the devastating impact of conflict, the AIDS epidemic and economic and political mismanagement,” said UNDP's Clarke, the former New Zealand prime minister.

The study aims to give a broader assessment of quality of life than just income — by including health, education, gender equality and political freedom.

Its lead writer Jeni Klugman said most of the world has seen “dramatic progress” since 1970.

Average life expectancy rose from 59 to 70 years, primary school enrollment grew from 55 to 70 percent, and per capita incomes doubled to more than \$10,000.

Poor nations have made particular progress.

‘Healthier’

Overall, countries “are healthier, more educated and wealthier and have more power to appoint and hold their leaders accountable than ever before,” Klugman said.

“But some countries have suffered serious setbacks, particularly in health — sometimes erasing the gains of several decades,” she added.

The nations that have risen most up the rankings include “growth miracles” such as China, which has risen eight places in the last five years to 89th, as well as Indonesia and South Korea.

Nepal surprisingly emerged as one of the most improved nations, despite its longstanding civil war.

A child born today in Nepal can expect to live 25 years longer than a child born in 1970.

Among the top 10 countries showing marked improvement are Oman, Nepal and Laos, while Ethiopia, Cambodia and Benin are in the top 20 — countries which the report notes are “not typically described as success stories.”

In six sub-Saharan African countries and three in the former Soviet Union, life expectancy is now below 1970 levels, mainly because of the HIV epidemic and tougher conditions for adults in former communist nations.

And even though incomes have grown dramatically, poor nations are not making the same economic strides as they are in health and education.

“On average rich countries have grown faster than poor ones over the past 40 years,” the report said.

The report highlighted serious inequalities, both within and between countries.

Over the past 40 years, countries at the lower end of the HDI experienced an improvement of less than 20 percent, compared to the top-performing group, which averaged gains of 54 percent.