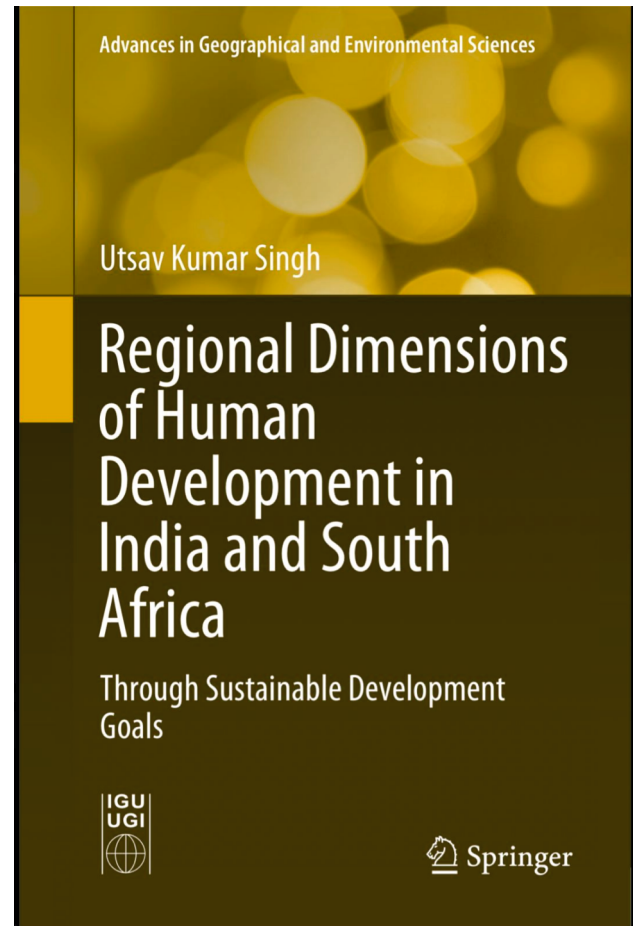


Utsav Kumar Singh, Regional Dimensions of Human Development in India and South Africa Through Sustainable Development Goals, Springer Publication, 2024, 221 pg, ISBN 978-981-97-5845-6.

Human development in contemporary world has a multidimensional and comprehensive approach to it. It involves the well-being, dignity, and autonomy of each and every individual. It transcends economic growth and aims at increasing people's choices, capabilities, and opportunities. By investing in human development, individuals, communities, and societies can thrive and reach their full potential. For attainment of this potential, in the year 2015 there was a universal call from the United Nations to adopt and achieving Sustainable Development Goals by the year 2030. Human development and SDGs are intrinsically linked. These SDGs not only ensure the well being of each and every individual (its targets such as eradicating poverty, ensuring healthy lives, inclusive and equitable quality education, access to water and sanitation, and achieving gender equality and zero hunger, etc.) but also corroborates it through promoting sustainable practices for protecting the planet as well (promoting urgent action to combat climate change, conserving and sustainably using the oceans, seas, and marine resources, additionally protecting, restoring, and promoting sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, etc.)

As the world is in the last phase of achieving SDGs, the book *“Regional Dimensions of Human Development in India and South Africa through Sustainable Development Goals”* authored by Dr. Utsav Kumar Singh unveils the ongoing contradictions and deliberations upon how to achieve developmental goals efficiently and effectively? What should be the focus of policy formulation and implementation of state - economic growth as suggested by neoliberal scholars like Arvind Panagariya in India or human development as suggested by Amartya Sen? Why is there a presence of regional heterogeneities and how socio-economic, cultural contexts hinders or prospers the attainment of SDGs?

The book sets out to explore these questions by spatial comparison of India and South Africa through the analysis of their respective achievements in attaining Sustainable Development Goals through five chapters. Both India and South Africa belong to Global South and share the common lineage of colonial exploitation, hence starting from the very bottom in a world which was already way ahead. The two countries serve as perfect exemplar of the contradiction between economic or human development as India is marching aggressively towards becoming one of the fastest growing economies, but when it comes to human development indicators it still lags behind country like



South Africa, who is not doing so well on economic scale.

The first chapter aims to conceptualize what human development is, its evolution and how it has encapsulated different forms of growth from time to time. Starting from Buddha's all-inclusive idea of development to the modernized Sustainable Development Goals. It deals with multiple epistemic reckonings with respect to the idea of development. It further elucidates on how all endeavors are focused on achieving the goals of human development set forth by Mahbub Ul Haq and Amartya Sen. It further elaborates on the extension of the parameters for measuring poverty and deprivation refined by Foster and Sabina Alkire in concept of Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index from Human Development Index.

The second chapter deals with strides and contestations regarding the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals in Indian context and its learnings from Millenium Development Goals. Not only for the country itself, but achieving SDGs in India also has a global impact since 1/6th of the world's population lives in the country. This

chapter presents a statistical analysis on various targets of SDGs in India and how much has been achieved. While the author mentions about how country has done well in various indicators relating to health and literacy but what concerns him the most is the persistent challenge of spatial and social heterogeneities in achieving progress. Also, even though the country has done economically well, but is it reaching the lower strata of society is what Singh ponders upon. Singh also stresses upon the diversity across the nation, socio-political and economic context which effects the entire policy process, hence the variation in results. As Nussbaum suggests, one needs to be in consonance with the local particularities when it comes to enhancing capabilities of an individual.

The next chapter takes the same Sustainable development goal analysis to South Africa. The author mentions how South Africa embraced right-based strategies and with increased public expenditure and infrastructure, has become a nation with extensive reach of social safety net programs, as compared to the low-income nations that rely on international donor organizations. South African practice of "Ubuntu" forms the epistemic root of its Sustainable practices which helps them in harmony between humans and their biotic and abiotic surroundings. He further elaborates on how South Africa's National Development Program in convergence with SDGs assists them in achieving social security goals much efficiently and effectively. Even though South Africa does well in many social indicators however, author highlights the need to address the poverty, public health and gender pay gaps for wholistic development.

The second last chapter has a lot of empirical and quantitative data of the two countries which the author analyses. The analysis reveals the causality between GDP growth rate (proxy for well-being) and chosen indicators of SDGs, which are envisioned in long term development goals in India and South Africa. The findings also unmasked the pertinence of local preview and asymmetric strategies, dismantling the one size fits all model to achieving SDGs. For instance, Singh highlights how GDP effects health and hunger indicator in India but not in South Africa to substantiate the argument.

The last chapter concludes the entire findings and tries to suggest alternatives and recommendations for these two countries in the light of their asymmetric structures. Singh argues that the COVID Pandemic which pushed many people deep into the abyss and unveiled the catastrophic conditions of health and social sectors all across the world. Singh throughout his book and in conclusion ardently believes in following the Amartya Sen's idea of "Freedom as development". Following the capability approach, Singh pushes for moving beyond glittery economic development

and to tap into the existing reservoir of human's capabilities. A calibrated and composed approach towards human development with both economic and social security is fundamental to human development.

The book does provide some nuanced arguments; however, falls short on some aspects. Firstly, the author who highlights historical "Ubuntu" practice in South Africa should also have made reference to major ancient Indian practices which focuses on collective and community-based living, as emphasized by Gandhi. Secondly, the author though includes the gender analysis of the SDGs, but fails to recognize that these universalistic goals are themselves Eurocentric, patriarchal and doesn't question the unequal socio-economic power relations. Thirdly, the author uses Sen's "development as freedom" framework for enhancing the capabilities but he fails to recognize the limitations of the same model which universalizes the concept of freedom, keeping many perspectives from Global South at bay.

However, with all its limitations, the book offers a compelling read for researches, academicians and scholars who are working or choose to work in the development sector.

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Declaration

Conflict of interest: None

Funding: None

How to cite: Mani S. Regional dimensions of human development [book review]. *Ann Med Med Ethics*. 2026;1(1):65-66. Review of: Singh UK. *Regional Dimensions of Human Development in India and South Africa Through Sustainable Development Goals*. Cham: Springer; 2024.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.66765/amme.2026.012>

Submission received: 12th April 2026

Submission accepted: 5th May 2026

Submission published: 13th June 2026

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