

Reflections on *Putting People First*

What's This?

Putting People First, and a series of reports published between 2009 and 2018 contain facts, hypotheses, conclusions and recommendations about human development in Millennial economies.¹ The monograph was launched on 8 September 2023 in two webinars at Green Templeton College, Oxford (GTC). It examines: (i) interrelated, interdependent and interactive human development issues in a cohort of twenty emerging economies, known as the *Millennial Cohort*; (ii) compares the urgency, fragility, intractability, and contentiousness of these issues; and (iii) summarises the main outcomes of nine symposia organised by the Emerging Markets Symposium (EMS) at GTC between 2009 and 2018. This postscript summarises comments made at the launch events and by participants in EMS symposia unable to attend them.

In 2008, despite numerous economic, social and political differences, cohort economies had enough in common to hang together. By 2018, they were increasingly diverse. Some, notably China and India, had prospered mightily. Others had been less successful. The cohort nonetheless provided and continues to provide a framework for interpreting the forces and factors that shaped human development in these economies in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and their recent histories and future prospects.

The Monograph

The EMS was present at the creation of Green Templeton College in 2008.² A decade later, the EMS Steering Committee, chaired by H.E. Shaukat Aziz,³ commissioned a book, based on insights from the symposia, to examine the hypothesis that 'Human development in Millennial economies is an enabling condition of sustainable growth, social cohesion and political stability'.

By early 2020, with a first draft partially completed, the publication schedule – like much else in the world – was capsized by the COVID pandemic/syndemic.⁴ Work on the book was suspended until: (i) much more could be learned about its causes, consequences and impact on human development in Millennial economies; (ii)

¹ Emerging economies that acquired some comparable attributes at the end of the last and the beginning of this century

² Through a merger between Green College and Templeton College

³ Steering Committee members included HE Shaukat Aziz (Chair), Sir George Alleyne, Suman Bery, Peter Bourne, Tsung-Mei Cheng, Michael Earl, Saul Estrin, Alexandre Kalache, Serra Kirdar, Sania Nishtar and K. Srinath Reddy.

⁴ COVID was a *pandemic/syndemic* but, for convenience, is generally referred to in this note (and elsewhere) as a *pandemic*; see *Putting People First*.

decisions could be taken on how to manage complex analytical challenges made more complex by the pandemic; and (iii) reset the publication schedule.

When work resumed in 2021, it was decided – partly because of time lost and partly because the pandemic changed the scope of the project – to produce a shorter and less comprehensive version of what had been written; to make it a *monograph*, not a book; to trace the direct and indirect impacts of COVID on human development in Millennial economies; and to publish sooner than later.

The monograph was written primarily because, having asked many questions and suggested some answers, the EMS chose to explain itself to policy makers, business executives, students, academics and non-specialist audiences, such as those who might read *The Economist* or *Foreign Affairs*.

The main sources of data, information and knowledge were:

- The knowledge, insights and understanding of more than 230 participants in EMS symposia who, directly or indirectly, contributed to: (i) the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the symposia; (ii) assessments of the impact of COVID on human development in Millennial economies *after* the series of symposia was completed in 2018 and (iii) the *EMS Approach*.
- Exchanges of information, ideas, insights and knowledge in the secure environment of the Chatham House Rule that governed all EMS symposia.
- Confidential summaries of *unattributed* thoughts and ideas on every session of every symposium prepared by graduate students from Green Templeton College.

The monograph is grounded in:

- The expertise of symposia participants in anthropology, biology, climatology, demography, economics, education, environmental sciences, epidemiology, geography, gerontology, history, medicine, philosophy, public health, sociology, statistics and urbanism.
- Consistent definitions of emerging markets, emerging and Millennial economies; human development, human welfare and well-being; human capital formation and accumulation, economic growth, social coherence and political stability.
- The commitment of Green Templeton College to multidisciplinary studies of complex issues, including: the human lifecycle, fertility, the first 1000 days of life, NEET populations,⁵ longevity, old (and prospective old) age and dependency ratios; internal, external and circular migration; urbanisation; economic convergence; initial advantage, circular and cumulative causation; and personal, institutional, social, economic, urban, regional and national resilience.

The main legacies of the EMS are lessons learned from the findings, conclusions and recommendations of its symposia. Another legacy is the *EMS Approach*⁶ to

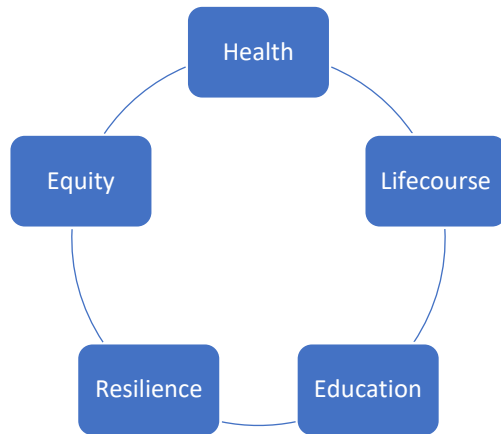
⁵ NEET: 'Not in employment, education or training'

⁶ To human development in Millennial economies

investigating human development in Millennial economies that could possibly be adapted to the investigation of other twenty-first-century issues.

Propositions on Human Development

Putting People First and previous EMS publications (all accessible on the Green



Templeton College website)⁷ present findings, conclusions and recommendations on human development in Millennial economies and the events and trends that shaped the past and will shape the future. They include: (i) life-course perspectives; (ii) health, healthcare and public health; (iii) lifetime education; (iv) income, social, economic, gender, spatial and other forms of inequity and inequality; and (v) national resilience.

The Human Life Course

The drawbacks, diseconomies, discontinuities, and disadvantages of temporally and spatially segregated approaches to health, education and other social and economic policies are well known. And mainly ignored. Yet, over the next decade, the world's economies will be challenged: (i) to recognise that every phase and stage of life is directly or indirectly linked to every other; and (ii) to create, prioritise, coordinate and execute policies and programmes to address such complex issues as child and maternal health and nutrition; teenage morbidity, psychological well-being, and 'NEET' phenomena; and longevity, dependency and social care for elders.

To succeed, Millennial and other economies must also recognise that human development is anchored in life course perspectives embracing: (i) biological, developmental, historical and geographic forces that affect the arc of change; (ii) continuities and deviations in the rhythms of change that measure relationships between chronological, biological, psychological, social and spiritual age; (iii) organisational and personal relationships that reflect elusive equilibria between (a) control, coordination and autonomy; (b) individuals, families, communities, enterprises, and nations; (c) independence, interdependence and dependency; and (d) prenatal, early-life, mid-life and older-life experiences.

Although most often referenced in the context of health, healthcare and public health, the life course is integral to the design and management of policies, programmes and projects to promote and improve many other aspects of human

⁷ <https://www.gtc.ox.ac.uk>

development. They include education, training, employment, social care and interactions between individuals, states and civil societies.

The hidden difficulty in all efforts to conceptualise and manage across sectoral boundaries, is that joined-up approaches are at best elusive, at worst unmanageable. Accordingly, Millennial and other economies must be steadfast or suffer the consequences of denying that life is a continuum.

Health, Healthcare and Public Health

Population health is strongly influenced throughout the human life course by socioeconomic determinants; the effects of health and development gradients in childhood and early adulthood on later life; and connections between shelter, nutrition, climate, education, well-being and other factors that influence the quality of personal and familial life.

A realistic understanding of current health issues (at any point in time) also hinges on recognising that (i) problems may be buried under experiences that occurred years or decades earlier; and (ii) that social and economic policy decisions made today will affect health profiles in the future, just as today's profiles were shaped by decisions made in the past.

Most Millennial economies have struggled to create and manage: (i) coherent infant, child and maternal development policies and programmes that could enhance babies' life chances even as, across the world, child development issues become increasingly complex; (ii) effective responses to the fact that the thousand days between conception and (approximately) age two are critical to future physical, cognitive and emotional development; and (iii) the reality that physical, cognitive and emotional maturity generally occurs in the early twenties, creating major challenges for social and economic policies, particularly in concentrated NEET populations.

In the context of the human life-course, the principle forward-looking propositions on health, healthcare and public health in Millennial economies are that: (i) sustainable economic growth will partly depend on health, healthcare and public health services which enable children to learn and adults to work; (ii) health services should, in principle, be prioritised over all other human services; (iii) whereas the concept of shared accountability for health outcomes is currently less understood in Millennial than in Advanced economies, it is, in principle, divided between patients, preventive and clinical healthcare providers, and other caregivers.

Although healthcare coordination will continue to be resisted because it transfers degrees of freedom from autonomous agencies to central authorities, efficient coordination of public health and healthcare policies and services will be essential to human development in Millennial economies.

It will also be complicated by simultaneous efforts to coordinate health and non-health sectors (e.g. education, housing, nutrition, agriculture), largely because scale and complexity are magnified. Meanwhile, resistance to coordination may be tamed by empowering ministers of health (or their equivalents) to monitor the health implications of all government decisions across all sectors; create 'joined up' health policies; and coordinate health-related social interventions.

Some Millennial economies have explored innovative approaches to healthcare, through AI and other technological applications. Numerous replicable, scalable and affordable experiments now support the expectation that frugal innovation and other novel approaches will continue to yield significant benefits.

The quality and professionalism of healthcare in some Millennial economies is now (for those who can afford it) second to none, due, in part, to improved medical education. Yet huge gaps remain in the availability, breadth, depth and quality of medical training in these economies, along with cost issues and unresolved questions about the implications of internal and international migrations of healthcare providers at all levels.

Education

Recent evidence confirms the inefficiency of labour markets in many Millennial economies, particularly in sectors where labour/capital substitution is occurring at pace and businesses are grappling with the accumulated consequences of mismatched supply and demand for hard and soft skills.

It also shows progress will partly depend on the capacity of Millennial economies to:

- (i) improve access to and the relevance, consistency and quality of primary education;
- (ii) develop learning skills that equip children and students to adapt, survive and thrive in fast changing economies by relearning how to learn;
- (iii) focus on improved coordination between secondary and tertiary education to facilitate efficient transitions between schools, colleges, universities and other institutions;
- (iv) improve coordination between schools, colleges and workplaces by developing partnerships between educators and employers to anticipate evolving skill requirements, promote apprenticeships and normalise workplace placements;
- (v) reduce deficits in adult literacy and numeracy in resource-constrained environments;
- (vi) balance academic and technical competencies in secondary and tertiary institutions to help students and teachers manage risks of premature specialisation;
- and (vii) enhance access to tertiary institutions for financially and socially disadvantaged students, recognising complex trade-offs between enlarging tertiary education estates, expanding student numbers, enhancing the relevance and quality of tertiary education, and avoiding unrealistic and/or unaffordable goals.

Inequities and Inequalities

Like most Advanced economies, few Millennial economies have fully embraced the *desiderata* of economic and social equity/equality. Fewer have made significant progress towards communitarian ideals. Not, in general, because they can't, but because they choose not to.

Some Millennial economies have sought to preserve economic, financial and political stability by favouring fiscal, monetary and social policies that support human investment and environmental protection as conditions of sustainable growth. Others have tolerated social and

Inequality in its various forms is an issue that will define our time. Confronting inequalities has moved to the forefront of many global policy debates as a consensus has emerged that all should enjoy equal access to opportunity. 'Leave no one behind' serves as the rallying cry of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

United Nations UN75: 2020 and Beyond

economic inequity and unequal outcomes on the grounds that initial advantages and disadvantages and the processes of cumulative and circular causation may promote growth, albeit at the likely cost of perpetuating the *status quo* and inhibiting social change.

Economic, financial, social, spatial, educational, health, housing and environmental inequities and inequalities are major determinants of the quality of life and life chances in all economies and will continue to be critical determinants of social progress in Millennial economies. Inequities of opportunity are interactively determined by inequalities of income, gender, age, origin, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, class, and religion. Meanwhile, new gaps are emerging in such areas as access to online and mobile technologies. The result is an increasingly complex and expanding mix of internal and external challenges. Two decades into the twenty-first century, notwithstanding widespread commitments to poverty alleviation and social justice, few Millennial economies are quick-marching to the sound of that drummer.

The EMS assessment of *Gender Inequality* (2013) was a graphic expression of many of the 'global' issues of poverty, conflict, corruption and human welfare including economic and social inequality – with which the EMS had grappled since its inception. The symposium took place against the background of globally reported reactions to extreme examples of gender discrimination and inequality in Millennial (and other) economies and widespread lack of understanding of phenomena the world had, for the most part, chosen to ignore. While that symposium was sharply focussed on distributive equity, social justice and human rights for women, the issues raised had both intrinsic and extrinsic implications, most fundamentally that all aspects of inequity and inequality are related to all others.

National Resilience and the Covid Pandemic/Syndemic

The global community may eventually recognise that COVID's parting gift was not death, disruption and dislocation on every continent, but the realisation it was more

than a disease.⁸ The pandemic exacerbated economic and social contrasts in almost all economies but particularly Millennial economies, as relatively disadvantaged populations were further disadvantaged by turmoil in schools, colleges and universities, sharp differences in the availability, cost, quality and consistency of preventative and clinical health care, and the dislocation of business and civic organisations.

Some of those who, when COVID arrived, believed that: (i) as in the past, the world would find ways and means to manage pandemic threats; (ii) dismissed some concerns as hyperbolic; and (iii) suggested it was naïve to take them seriously. Evidence from the pandemic strongly suggested the opposites.

The *Doomsday Clock* (mentioned twice in the monograph) is a useful metaphorical device (without predictive credibility) invented by the Bureau of Atomic Scientists in 1947. It has been regularly maintained and updated. Its original purpose was to focus some of the world's best informed and brightest minds on nuclear Armageddon. Later, as the shape and nature of plausible global disasters evolved, the Clock was adjusted to raise awareness and sharpen understanding of potential catastrophes associated with health, environmental, biological, economic and political threats. These adjustments also provoked evidence-based analysis of those threats, stressed the imperative of learning from experience, and acknowledged that most catastrophic events have futures as well as presents and pasts.⁹

While the monograph would have been written COVID or no, the pandemic was a 'canary in a coalmine' warning of the potential consequences of unmanageable Anthropocene forces and an alert that hitherto unknown pathogens could turn the world upside-down with remarkable speed. It also raised awareness that the world was politically, psychologically and technologically unready to manage simultaneous - and in many cases linked - swathes of atmospheric, biological, cultural, economic, oceanic, political, social, and technological threats to human development. By 2023, the COVID crisis had: (i) receded but not disappeared; (ii) provoked a surge of disciplined and undisciplined speculation about how the world at large would manage the threats and uncertainties of the next decade; and (iii) mostly since c. 2020,¹⁰ spawned a trickle of *National Resilience Strategies* (NRSs) that used a variety of approaches and methodologies. The novelty of these strategies is reflected

⁸ Global Britain in a competitive age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy', UK Government, December 2022

⁹ Having institutionalised lessons learned from SARS and MERS, South Korea (an emerging economy in the 1960s and 70s, managed COVID with relative success, highlighting the importance of experiential learning in the development and management of plausible National Resilience Strategies.

¹⁰ "A time has come to build a more resilient nation... where all Australians are able to adapt to change...and better able to bounce back from disaster." Robert McClelland Attorney-General of Australia; December 2009

in the fact that by December 2022, only 23 had been published, including just two (Poland and Turkey) from Millennial economies.

At a time when the world is confronting environmental, pathological, ideological and other natural and unnatural threats, serviceable NRSs are overdue. First, because they pose largely self-evident intellectual, political, organisational and administrative challenges. Second, because many threats (e.g. COVID) to which Millennial economies are particularly vulnerable, can only be resolved through international collaboration. Third, because many already-published resilience strategies (e.g. the UK's) are inward rather than outward looking.¹¹

The monograph reminds us that 'No man is an island'¹² and emphasises that the Millennial cohort will be increasingly enmeshed in cyber economies, polities and societies where national and nonstate actors will play expanding roles. It also stresses that in the interdependent, interconnected and increasingly febrile setting of the modern world, no nation-state can detach its economic or political thinking from nearby or far-off events.

‘The EMS Approach’

The consensus among those who participated in EMS symposia on human development in emerging/Millennial economies in 2009-18 and in the virtual launch events in September 2023, was that while the symposia were intrinsically and extrinsically productive, there was no appetite for more symposia on (i) human development in those or other economies, or (ii) emerging economies (except in broader/global contexts). That is not to suggest there is no more to be said about emerging economies or human development; it simply reflects the reality there are numerous competing concerns.

The EMS focus on human development in Millennial economies exemplified GTC's original commitment to 'enhance human welfare and social, economic and environmental well-being in the 21st century'. Looking forward, aspects of what can be called 'the *EMS Approach*' could be useful in confronting other important issues and 'wicked problems' that will crowd the global agenda.

The *EMS Approach* is not an all-singing, all dancing,¹³ all-purpose design for investigating an infinite array of topics. It evolved with the sole purpose of organising symposia on a specific set of issues. It might prove adaptable for other investigations and could be particularly relevant to topics that are: (i) compatible with GTC's mission and comparative advantages; (ii) globally significant; (iii) weighty enough to

¹¹ "All parts of the UK must work together... We must energise and empower UK citizens and communities who can make a real contribution to the national resilience effort".

¹² John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, 1624

¹³ Phrase from advertising posters promoting 1929 film *Broadway Melody*

be potentially existential; (iv) relatively urgent; (v) grounded in accessible and reliable data, information and knowledge; (vi) tractable enough to offer acceptable risks of failure; and (vii) sufficiently intriguing to attract luminous international expertise. Possibilities, among many others – might include environmental, economic, social and political issues and other seemingly insuperable problems. Advocates for such themes could be told – as some proponents of the EMS series were told by otherwise well-meaning people in 2008 – that such issues are indeed insuperable.

In 2008, the EMS concluded that while these issues were complex they were not insuperable; could be neither evaded nor avoided and were best approached by: (i) relying on the convening power of the University to assemble academics, former and current government officials, public servants, entrepreneurs and business executives and leaders of civil society organisations from around the world; (ii) addressing issues and problems in secure environments; (iii) assuming the weight and influence of their findings, conclusions and recommendations would be functions of their authority, stature and reputations; and (iv) expecting *all* participants to be actively engaged as moderators and/or speakers.

Once the theme and purpose of the symposium series had been decided it was agreed that symposia would: (i) take place in Oxford; (ii) have approximately 50 participants¹⁴ (iii) produce credible outcomes in the form of published documents, presentations, speeches, lectures, and television/radio broadcasts and other methods of sharing and promoting findings, conclusions and recommendations, including personal conversations between EMS participants and influential individuals and groups around the globe; (iv) attract individuals with impeccable professional credentials and roughly comparable stature (bearing in mind the need for generational and gender balance); (v) stage all working sessions in a non-central but accessible Oxford location with modern informatics and meeting facilities of various sizes, and high (but not excessive) levels of residential comfort and cuisine; (vi) use other prominent Oxford locations for some social events; (vii) offer high but not gilded standards of international and local travel; (viii) employ selected graduate students with proven writing abilities and strong social skills to prepare graphical data sets, briefing books and reports on every session.

The EMS was financially predicated on the generosity of a sole sponsor.¹⁵ Other funding options could be considered¹⁶ and the EMS model could, in principle, be adapted to reduce costs and exclude flourishes. There would however be trade-offs in terms of convening power, opportunity costs, satisfying sponsors their funds were

¹⁴ Experience confirms this is a workable number for 'same time, same place' events of this kind.

¹⁵ The C&C Alpha Corporation, a conglomerate based in London and India

¹⁶ Bearing in mind that when the final EMS symposium was (of necessity) run at reduced costs, the cuts included sharp constraints on air travel that made it impossible to invite some participants from remote locations.

put to 'highest and best' uses and ensuring the priority, content and style of symposia or other gatherings met the expectations of sponsors, participants and Green Templeton College.