

SAARC Countries and their State of Human Development: A Comparative Data Analysis

Dr. R. Latha

Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Annamalai University (Deputed to M.V.M. Government Arts College for Women, Dindigul)

Dr. P. Nalraj

Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Annamalai University (Deputed to D.G. Government Arts College for Women, Mayiladurai)

Dr. R. Sankarakumar

Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Annamalai University (Deputed to Government Arts College for Women, Nilakkottai)

Abstract: Human development is a process of enlarging people's freedom and opportunities to improve their wellbeing. With the Human Development index, it is possible to measure and compare the basic human achievements of the countries in three basic dimensions- Health, Education and Standard of living. This study attempts to make a comparison of SAARC countries Human achievements based on the 2018 statistical update of UNDP.

Keywords: Human development index, SAARC, Life expectancy at Birth, Expected years of schooling, Mean years of schooling, Gross National Income (GNI) per capita.

1. INTRODUCTION

Human development is about human freedoms. It is about building human capabilities—not just for a few, not even for most, but for everyone. In 1990 UNDP published the first Human Development Report (HDR). Since then, it has produced more than 800 global, regional, national and subnational HDRs and organized hundreds of workshops, conferences and other outreach initiatives to foster human development. These activities have extended the frontiers of analytical thinking about human progress beyond economic growth, firmly placing people and human well-being at the centre of development policies and strategies.

Human development is a process of enlarging people's range of choices. It is the real freedom given to the ordinary people to decide what to do and how to live. Human development index is a statistic composite index of Life expectancy, education and per capita income indicators. These indicators are used to rank the countries into four tiers of human development on the basis of scores earned by their HDI. They are Very High Development index, High development index, Medium Development Index and Low Development index.

Almost three decades, all regions and human development groups have made substantial progress. The global HDI value in 2017 was 0.728, up about 21.7 % from 0.598 in 1990. Across the world, people are living longer, are more educated and have greater livelihood opportunities. The average lifespan is seven years longer than it was in 1990, and more than 130 countries have universal enrolment in primary education. This update includes the 2017 values for the HDI and other composite indices as well as current statistics in key areas of human development for use by policymakers, researchers and others in their analytical, planning and policy work.

UNDP publishes the HDI report of all the member countries of UN individually, and continent wise, region-wise and group wise as well. South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation is one of such group. SAARC was established in 1985 with a broad objective of promoting the welfare of the people of South Asia through regional co-operation. Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri-Lanka are the founder members of the organization from its establishment. The number of member states reaches eight when Afghanistan joined it in 2007. This analysis is based on the Human Development Report 2018. Efforts have been made to compare the position (rank) of individual country in SAARC and total/ average annual rate of change for the period 1990-2017 is selected for the study. Besides, it has also been tried to ascertain in which group a particular country falls.

2. OBJECTIVE

The objective of this study attempts to make a comparison of SAARC countries Human achievements based on the 2018 statistical update of UNDP, to analyse the trends in the HDI and its Components from 1990-2017, the average annual growth rate of HDI and the change in the HDI rank.

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this present study is a combination of qualitative and quantitative approach. The study makes use of only secondary data. As it was not possible to personally collect the data, the data were collected from the UNDP Human Development Report 2018. The sample consists of SAARC countries. Some statistical tools such as percentage, mean were used in data analysis along with qualitative description. The scope of the study is narrowed down to SARRC countries only.

4. PRESENTATION AND DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1 shows the grouping of countries on their basis of the HDI values. 59 countries have shown Very High Development Index (0.800 and above), 53 countries are High Development Index (0.700-0.799), 39 countries have shown Medium Development Index (0.550-0.699) and 39 countries are under Low development Index (Below 0.550) category.

Table 1: Grouping of countries on the basis of 2017 HDI values

<u>TIER</u>	<u>RANGE OF VALUE</u>	<u>NO. OF COUNTRIES</u>
Very High Development Index	0.800 or greater	59
High Development Index	0.700 – 0.799	53
Medium Development Index	0.550 – 0.699	39
Low Development Index	Less than 0.550	38
Global	0.728	189

Source: UNDP REPORT 2018

Although HDI values have been rising across all regions and Human Development groups, the rates vary significantly. South Asia was the fastest growing region over 1990-2017 at 45.3%. SAARC countries are also showing development in HDI values and the trends hold promise for reducing gaps in Human Development among SAARC countries too. Table 2 shows the grouping of SAARC countries on the basis of 2017 HDI value and rank.

Table 2: Grouping of SAARC countries on the basis of 2017 HDI value

<u>SAARC COUNTRIES</u>	<u>RANK</u>	<u>HDI VALUE</u>	<u>GROUPS</u>
Afghanistan	168	0.498	Low HDI
Bangladesh	136	0.608	Medium HDI
Bhutan	134	0.612	Medium HDI
India	130	0.640	Medium HDI
Maldives	101	0.717	High HDI
Nepal	149	0.574	Medium HDI
Pakistan	150	0.562	Medium HDI
SriLanka	76	0.770	High HDI

Source; UNDP REPORT 2018

As per the Table: 2, among SAARC countries, Sri Lanka is in 76th place followed by Maldives (101), India (130), Bhutan (134), Bangladesh (136), Nepal (149), Pakistan (150) and Afghanistan (168) respectively.

TABLE 3: CLASSIFICATION OF SAARC COUNTRIES ON THE BASIS OF HDI

<u>HDI GROUP</u>	<u>COUNTRIES</u>
Very High Human Development	-- (0)
High Human development	Sri Lanka, Maldives (2)
Medium Human Development	India, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan (5)
Low Human Development	Afghanistan (1)

Source; UNDP REPORT 2018

According to the Table 3, among SAARC countries, Sri Lanka and Maldives are having the High HDI value of 0.770 and 0.717 respectively. Five countries India, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan are in the category of Medium HDI values of 0.640, 0.612, 0.608, 0.574 and 0.562. And also, no one country from SAARC region are having the Very High HDI value (0.800 and above). The numbers inside the bracket denotes the number of countries belonging to the HDI group.

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Human Development Index trends, 1990–2017, provides a time series of HDI values allowing 2017 HDI values to be compared with those for previous years. From the table 4 and table 5, it is found that almost all countries have shown rising HDI values, but the rates vary significantly. HDI values of Afghanistan and Bhutan is available since 2005 and that of Maldives since 1995. Sri Lanka has shown promising trend and its HDI value is above the Global HDI value, 0.728 which was up above 21% from 0.598 in 1990. The trends hold promise for reducing gaps in human development across regions.

HDI growth has slowed in all regions particularly in the last decade because of Global food, financial and economic crisis. But, as human progress advances, slower HDI growth is inevitable.

TABLE 4: SAARC COUNTRIES AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT TRENDS 1990-2017 BASED ON CONSISTENT TIME SERIES DATA

	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2012	2014	2015	2016	2017
Afghanistan	-	-	-	0.408	0.463	0.482	0.491	0.493	0.494	0.498
Bangladesh	0.387	-0.425	0.468	0.505	0.545	0.566	0.583	0.592	0.597	0.608
Bhutan	-	-	-	0.510	0.566	0.585	0.5999	0.603	0.609	0.612
India	0.427	0.460	0.493	0.535	0.581	0.600	0.618	0.627	0.636	0.640
Maldives	-	0.539	0.606	0.631	0.671	0.688	0.705	0.710	0.712	0.717
Nepal	0.378	0.410	0.446	0.475	0.529	0.548	0.560	0.566	0.569	0.574
Pakistan	0.404	0.428	0.450	0.500	0.536	0.535	0.548	0.551	0.560	0.562
Sri Lanka	0.625	0.650	0.685	0.718	0.746	0.757	0.763	0.766	0.768	0.770
World	0.598		0.642		0.698	0.709	0.718	0.722	0.726	0.728

Source; UNDP REPORT 2018

TABLE 5: AVERAGE ANNUAL GROWTH RATE (%) AND CHANGES IN HDI DURING 2012-2017

Countries	Average Annual Growth Rate (%)				Change in HDI Rank 2012-2017
	1990-2000	2000-2010	2010-2017	1990-2017	
Afghanistan	-	-	1.05	1.56	-1
Bangladesh	1.93	1.54	1.57	1.69	7
Bhutan	-	-	1.14	-	4
India	1.45	1.64	1.40	1.51	2
Maldives	-	1.03	0.96	-	4
Nepal	1.66	1.72	1.19	1.56	0
Pakistan	1.08	1.57	0.95	1.23	1
Sri Lanka	0.93	0.84	0.47	0.78	2
Global	0.72	0.84	0.60	0.73	--

Source; UNDP REPORT 2018

TABLE 6: HUMAN DEVELOPMENT GROUPS AND THEIR COMPONENTS INDICATORS FOR 2017

Human Development Group	HDI Value	LEB in years	Expected Years of Schooling	Mean Year of Schooling	GNI per Capita 2017 (PPP US\$)
VHHD	0.894	79.5	16.4	12.2	40,041
HHD	0.757	76.0	14.1	8.2	14,999
MHD	0.645	69.1	12.0	6.7	6849
LHD	0.504	60.8	9.4	4.7	2521
Developing Countries	0.681	70.7	12.2	7.3	10,055

Source; UNDP REPORT 2018

Table 6 shows the Human Development Index and its components, rank of countries by 2017 HDI value and the values of three HDI components: longevity, education (with two indicators) and income per capita

Life expectancy at birth: Number of years a new-born infant could expect to live if prevailing patterns of age-specific mortality rates at the time of birth stay the same throughout the infant's life.

Expected years of schooling: Number of years of schooling that a child of school entrance age can expect to receive if prevailing patterns of age-specific enrolment rates persist throughout the child's life.

Mean years of schooling: Average number of years of education received by people ages 25 and older, converted from education attainment levels using official durations of each level.

Gross national income (GNI) per capita:

Aggregate income of an economy generated by its production and its ownership of factors of production, less the incomes paid for the use of factors of production owned by the rest of the world, converted to international dollars using PPP rates, divided by midyear population.

TABLE 7: SAARC COUNTRIES AND THEIR HDI COMPONENTS BY 2017

S.No	Country	HDI Value	HDI rank	Life Expectancy at Birth	Expected Years of Schooling	Mean Years of Schooling	GNI per Capita (2011PPP US\$)
1	Afghanistan	0.498	168	64.0	10.4	3.8	1824
2	Bangladesh	0.608	136	72.8	11.4	5.8	3677
3	Bhutan	0.612	134	70.6	12.3	3.1	8065
4	India	0.640	130	68.8	12.3	6.4	6353
5	Maldives	0.717	101	77.6	12.6	6.3	13567
6	Nepal	0.574	149	70.6	12.2	4.9	2471
7	Pakistan	0.562	150	66.6	8.6	5.2	5311
8	Sri Lanka	0.770	76	75.5	13.9	10.9	11326
World		0.728	--	72.2	12.7	8.4	15295

Source; UNDP REPORT 2018

Table 7 shows the relationship of HDI components of SAARC countries. Comparing the LEB of SAARC countries, Maldives (76.6), Sri Lanka (75.5) and Bangladesh (72.8) are above the world LEB (72.2 years). Bhutan and Nepal are having the same LEB of 70.6 closer to the world LEB. India, Pakistan and Afghanistan rank 6th, 7th and 8th places with their LEB's 68.8, 66.6 and 64.0 respectively.

On comparison of expected years of schooling, Sri Lanka (13.9 years) stands first and above the World's 12.7 years. Except Pakistan (8.6 years), other six countries have shown the progress. Maldives (12.6 years) in the second place, Bhutan and India share the third place (12.3 years), Nepal (12.2 years), Bangladesh (11.4 years) and Afghanistan (10.4 years)

With respect to Mean Years of Schooling of world's 8.4 years Sri Lanka (10.9 years) is again performing well above the world. All other countries are below 6.4 years of India and 6.3 years of Maldives. Bangladesh and Pakistan are in the range of above 5 years. Even Afghanistan (3.8years) value is well better than Bhutan (3.1 years).

To compare with the GNI per capita on the basis of 2011 PPP (Purchasing Power Parity) in US\$. Maldives ranks 1st followed by Sri Lanka, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Afghanistan respectively.

5. FINDINGS

Due to a lack of available estimates of Income per capita, Afghanistan has not appeared since 1996 in UNDP's Human Development Index which is based on indicators for health, education and income. With less than 1/3rd of children enrolled in schools in 1999, Afghanistan lacks behind other SAARC countries as it is only country in the world that prohibits girls from attending schools.

While Pakistan is passing through a difficult phase of economic sustainability, it is faring well on per capita income basis. With a per capita GNI US\$ 5311, it is slightly behind India (17.87%) and ahead of other countries in South Asia. This progress in GNI per capita is being pulled back by the countries' social indicators. On the education

dimension of HDI, the expected years of schooling are 8.6 years which is quite low compared to other SAARC countries.

Sri Lanka ranks first in the HDI values and HDI components- LEB, expected years of schooling and mean years of schooling not only among the SAARC countries, but also above the World index. But, its GNI per capita of US\$ 11326 is low compared to the World (US\$15295).

Though India (0.640) ranks third in HDI value among SAARC countries, it is lagging behind mean years of schooling and GNI per capita. Maldives is performing well in the second place among HDI values of SAARC countries. It is first with US\$ 13567 GNI per capita and LEB of 77.6 years, but lagging behind in mean years of schooling 6.3 years.

Bhutan is in the fourth place of HDI values among SAARC countries and performing progress in LEB and expected years of schooling 70.6 and 12.3 years respectively. But it is very poor in the mean years of schooling of 3.1 years than the world average 8.4 years.

Bangladesh finds fifth place in HDI value of SAARC countries and very close to world average of LEB (72.2 years) and years of expected years of schooling (12.7 years). Its LEB is 72.8 years and 11.4 years of expected years of schooling.

Nepal has got sixth rank in HDI value. But it does well in LEB (70.6 years) and expected years of schooling (12.2 years). But it is very low in mean years of schooling and GNI per capita.

6. CONCLUSION

There is a trend of increase in Human Development Index value of SAARC countries from 1990 to 2017. Though there are differences between the countries in LEB, expected years of schooling, mean years of schooling and GNI per capita. The only country, Sri Lanka is performing very well in all components above the world average except in GNI per capita. Afghanistan is lagging behind but progress is seen in that country too. Every human being counts and every human life is equally valuable. With the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development no one should be left behind. Most people live longer, are more educated and more access to goods than ever before. But quality of human development reveals large deficit. Shifting the focus towards quality of Human Development is very important in monitoring future progress.

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