

# Human Development Progress in South Asia: Achievements and Challenges

## Abstract

Rapid human development progress in India, Bangladesh and other South Asian nations is helping drive a historic shift in global dynamics, with hundreds of millions of people rising from poverty and billions more poised to join a new global middle class (HDR-13, UNDP). South Asian nations achieved their achievements to some strong national commitments as better public health and education services, innovative poverty eradication programs and strategic engagement with the world economy. The main objective of the present paper is to assess the progress made by the countries of the South Asia in terms of human development for the period from 1990 to 2012 by undertaking values of various indices concerned to human development. In addition, an attempt is also made to identify the challenges at the front of human development.

The analysis revealed that Sri Lanka is in the high human development group whereas, Maldives, India and Bhutan are in the medium and the remaining four (Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and Afghanistan) are in the low human development group in the South Asia. Further, the average HDI value for the south Asian region registered 0.558, which is below the world average of 0.693. During the period from 1990 to 2012, the region registered 33.49 percentage increases in HDI value, which is the highest compared to other regions of the world. Looking at individual countries in the region, Afghanistan (52%) has achieved highest percentage progress in HDI value followed by Bangladesh (43%), Nepal (36%), India (35%), Pakistan (35%) and Maldives (30%), whereas the least percentage progress was registered by Sri Lanka (18%) and Bhutan (about 3 %). The region's average life expectancy at birth and average years of schooling are 66.2 years and 4.7 years respectively, however, these are significantly below to the world averages. The average gross national income (GNI) per capita of \$3,343 is only one-third of the world average of \$10,184. Nepal has highest average loss in potential human development due to inequality followed by Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, while, Sri Lanka has lowest average loss followed by Bhutan and Maldives. The loss to potential HDI value of South Asia is about 6 percentage points higher than the world's average loss of 23.3 percent. The loss is attributed to the prevalence of large inequalities in life expectancy at birth, education and income.

The analysis further suggests that both Afghanistan and India has higher gender inequality in South Asia while, Maldives followed by Sri Lanka has lowest gender inequality. The average Gender Inequality Index value for the South Asia region is registered 0.568 also represents a relatively high gender inequality. Moreover, Bangladesh has the highest percentage of the population lived in multidimensional poverty followed by India and Pakistan. In addition to this, the analysis also reveals significantly high percentage of the multidimensional poverty headcount compared to income poverty in each country- implies that individuals living above the income poverty line still suffer from deprivations in education, health and other living conditions.

Overall, it may be concluded that South Asia region including India has achieved an unprecedented progress particularly at human development front; however, it has still major challenges to overcome the problems of high multidimensional poverty, low per capita income, average years of schooling, average life expectancy at birth, unemployment, child labour and widespread multidimensional inequalities etc.

**Keywords:** Human Development, South Asia

## Introduction

South Asia is one of the most important regions of the world which almost contains one fourth of world's populations. Currently, South Asia

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represents the members of SAARC and it consists of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. During the last two decades, South Asia has undergone some extremely radical changes. The region is now largely seen on the way to democratization due to establishment of democratic regimes in Afghanistan, Nepal and Bhutan. The complete elimination of the LTTE in Sri Lanka also established the peace in the region to some extent.

South Asia region has been a story of mixed examples of human development. The region's recent economic growth rate of about 6 % compares well with the rest of the world. Despite, regions's impressive economic growth rates, South Asia has the world's largest concentration of people below the international poverty line. More than one billion people (75 per cent of the population) live on less than US\$2 a day. More than 600 million of these live in India. By percentage of population, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Nepal are least developed countries in the region and have been facing the greatest challenges of multidimensional poverty. Further, with the sustained economic growth of the region, more jobs and investment opportunities are emerged which in turn increased the prosperity of the region, but the growing prosperity has not been shared equally across the region. For example, despite an overall reduction in the number of absolute poor, disparities in wealth within and between countries are increasing.

Furthermore, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh have invested heavily on the public delivery of basic social goods in order to target poverty and inequality and accordingly have done much better than India and Pakistan which have pinned their hopes on the high growth rate. However, as per Human Development Report, 2013, rapid human development progress in India, Bangladesh and other South Asian nations is helping drive a historic shift in global dynamics, with hundreds of millions of people rising from poverty and billions more poised to join a new global middle class. It attributed their achievements to some strong national commitments: better public health and education services, innovative poverty eradication programs and strategic engagement with the world economy.

In above background, an attempt is made to analyse the human development status of South Asia countries particularly SAARC countries-Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka for the period from 1990 to 2012 by undertaking values of HDI and other human development indicators including Inequality-adjusted HDI (IHDI), Gender Inequality Index (GII) and Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) for each country.

In order to examine the human development status of South Asian countries, the data are taken from the Human Development Report -2013, which presents Human Development Index (HDI) values and ranks for 187 countries and UN-recognized territories, the Inequality-adjusted HDI for 132 countries, the Gender Inequality Index for 148 countries, and the Multidimensional Poverty Index for 104 countries. The data of HDR-2013 are based on consistent indicators, new methodology and time-series data and thus shows real changes in values and ranks over time

reflecting the actual progress countries have made. Further, the HDI values and ranks given in HDR-2013 are not comparable to those in past reports (including the 2011 HDR) because of a number of revisions done to the component indicators by the mandated agencies. To allow for assessment of progress in HDIs, the 2013 report includes recalculated HDIs from 1980 to 2012.

## II. Results and Discussion

### Human Development Index (HDI) Values and Ranks

The HDI is a summary measure for assessing long-term progress in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living. A long and healthy life is measured by life expectancy. Access to knowledge is measured by: i) mean years of schooling for the adult population, which is the average number of years of education received in a life-time by people aged 25 years and older; and ii) expected years of schooling for children of school-entrance age, which is the total number of years of schooling a child of school-entrance age can expect to receive if prevailing patterns of age-specific enrolment rates stay the same throughout the child's life. Standard of living is measured by Gross National Income (GNI) per capita expressed in constant 2005 international dollars converted using purchasing power parity (PPP) rates.

South Asia are categorized as Low HDI, Medium HDI and High HDI countries on the basis of HDI values of selected countries. As shown in table-1 and 2 of Appendix, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan come under Low HDI categories due to their low HDI values. HDI values of Afghanistan and Nepal for the year 2012 are 0.374 and 0.463 respectively below the average of 0.466 for countries in the low human development group and below the average of 0.558 for countries in South Asia. Whereas, Bangladesh and Pakistan have the same HDI value of 0.515 for the year 2012 which is above the average of 0.466 for countries in the low human development group and below the average of 0.558 for countries in South Asia. From South Asia, country which is close to Afghanistan (175) in 2012 HDI rank is Nepal which has HDI rank 157, followed by, both Bangladesh and Pakistan with the same rank of 146 in 2012. However, between 1990 and 2012, Afghanistan (52%) has achieved highest percentage progress in HDI value followed by Bangladesh (43%), Nepal (36%) and Pakistan (35%) in Low HDI countries.

India along with Bhutan and Maldives lies under the Medium HDI countries. For the year, 2012, the HDI value for India and Bhutan are measured 0.554 and 0.538 respectively which are below the average of 0.64 for countries in the medium human development group and below the average of 0.558 for countries in South Asia. While, Maldives's HDI value for the same year is measured 0.688, which is above the average of 0.64 for countries in the medium human development group and above the average of 0.558 for countries in South Asia. In terms of percentage progress in HDI, India accounted highest progress with 35 % followed by Maldives with 30 % and Bhutan with about 3 % percent during the period

1990 to 2012. Among Medium HDI countries, Maldives(104) has highest HDI rank followed by India(136) and Bhutan(140).

Among selected South Asia countries of the present study, only Sri Lanka stands in the category of High HDI category. Sri Lanka's HDI value for 2012 is 0.715 positioning the country at 92 out of 187 countries and territories. Between 1990 and 2012, Sri Lanka's HDI value increased from 0.608 to 0.715 and accounted an increase of about 18 percent. However, Sri Lanka's 2012 HDI of 0.715 is below the average of 0.758 for countries in the high human development group and above the average of 0.558 for countries in South Asia. Further, the average HDI value for the South Asian region is registered 0.558, which is below the world average of 0.693. During the period from 1990 to 2012, the region registered 33.49 percentage increase in HDI value, which is the highest compared to other regions of the world. Further, as shown in the table-2, the region's average life expectancy at birth and average years of schooling are 66.2 years and 4.7 years respectively, however, these are significantly below to the world averages. The average gross national income (GNI) per capita of \$3,343 is only one-third of the world average of \$10,184.

Thus, the HDI analysis of the selected countries of South Asia shows that Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka experienced different degrees of tremendous progress toward increasing their HDIs during the period from 1990 to 2012.

#### **Inequality-adjusted HDI (IHDI)**

The HDI is an average measure of basic human development achievements in a country. Like all averages, the HDI marks inequality in the distribution of human development across the population at the country level. The HDR-2010 introduced the Inequality Adjusted HDI (IHDI), which takes into account inequality in all three dimensions of the HDI by 'discounting' each dimension's average value according to its level of inequality. The HDI can be viewed as an index of 'potential' human development and the IHDI as an index of actual human development. The 'loss' in potential human development due to inequality is given by the difference between the HDI and the IHDI, and can be expressed as a percentage. Table -3 of Appendix presents values of Inequality-adjusted HDI and losses in HDI for different countries. As shown in the table-3, the loss in HDI due to inequality is 27.4% for Bangladesh, 20 % for Bhutan, 29.3 % for India, 25.2 % for Maldives, 34.2 % for Nepal, 30.9 % for Pakistan and 15.1 % for Sri Lanka. As shown in table- 3, the loss is attributed to the inequalities in life expectancy at birth, education and income. The analysis revealed that Nepal has highest average loss due to inequality followed by Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, while, Sri Lanka has lowest average loss due to inequality followed by Bhutan and Maldives.

#### **Gender Inequality Index (GII)**

The Gender Inequality Index (GII) reflects gender-based inequalities in three dimensions – reproductive health, empowerment, and economic activity. Reproductive health is measured by maternal mortality and adolescent fertility rates; empowerment

is measured by the share of parliamentary seats held by each gender and attainment at secondary and higher education by each gender; and economic activity is measured by the labour market participation rate for each gender. The GII replaced the previous Gender-related Development Index and Gender Empowerment Index. The GII shows the loss in human development due to inequality between female and male achievements in the three GII dimensions.

As shown in table-4 of appendix, Afghanistan has a GII value of 0.712; ranking it 147 out of 148 countries in the 2012 index whereas, the value of GII is measured 0.518 for Bangladesh with ranked 111 and 0.464 for Bhutan with ranked 92. India, Maldives and Nepal has GII value of 0.61, 0.357 and 0.485 respectively with corresponding ranking 132 , 64 and 102 out of 148 countries in the 2012 index. Further, Pakistan has a GII value of 0.567 with ranking 123 and Sri Lanka has a GII value of 0.402, ranking it 75 out of 148 countries in the 2012 index.

The the GII value for different countries implies that Afghanistan has highest Gender inequality followed by India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Further, both Afghanistan and India has higher gender inequality compared to South Asia while, both Pakistan and Bangladesh has lower gender inequality compared to South Asia. The lowest gender inequality in the South Asia has found in Maldives followed by Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Nepal. It is also evident from the table-4 that the average Gender Inequality Index value for the South Asia region is registered 0.568 represents a relatively high gender inequality.

#### **Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)**

The HDR-2010 introduced the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), which identifies multiple deprivations in the same households in education, health and standard of living. The education and health dimensions are based on two indicators each while the standard of living dimension is based on six indicators. The indicators are weighted, and the deprivation scores are computed for each household. A cut-off of 33.3 percent, which is the equivalent of one-third of the weighted indicators, is used to distinguish between the poor and non - poor. If the household deprivation score is 33.3 percent or greater, the household (and everyone in it) is multidimensionally poor. Households with a deprivation score greater than or equal to 20 percent but less than 33.3 percent are vulnerable to or at risk of becoming multidimensionally poor.

As shown in table-5 of Appendix, 57.8 percent of the population lived in multidimensional poverty (the MPI 'head count') while an additional 21.2 percent were vulnerable to multiple deprivations in Bangladesh. The intensity of deprivation – that is, the average percentage of deprivation experienced by people living in multidimensional poverty in Bangladesh was 50.4 percent. The country's MPI value, which is the share of the population that is multi-dimensionally poor adjusted by the intensity of the deprivations, was 0.292. Further, living standard has highest contribution followed by health and education in multidimensional poverty. Wherease, in Bhutan 27.2 percent of the population lived in multidimensional poverty, while an additional 17.2

percent were vulnerable to multiple deprivations. The intensity of deprivation and MPI value were found 43.9 percent and 0.119 respectively. The most recent survey data available for estimating MPI figures for India were collected in 2005/2006 which tells that 53.7 percent of the population lived in multidimensional poverty and an additional 16.4 percent were vulnerable to multiple deprivations. The intensity of deprivation in India was found 52.7 percent while MPI value was measured 0.283. Particularly in India, the multidimensional poverty headcount is 21 percentage points higher than income poverty. This implies that individuals living above the income poverty line still suffer from deprivations in education, health and other living conditions. Table-4 also shows that living standards followed by health and education has highest contribution in the multidimensional poverty in India. In Maldives 5.2 percent of the population lived in multidimensional poverty while an additional 4.8 percent were vulnerable to multiple deprivations. The intensity of deprivation and MPI value in Maldives was 35.6 percent and 0.018 respectively. The most recent survey data available for estimating MPI figures for Nepal were collected in 2011. In Nepal, 44.2 percent of the population lived in multidimensional poverty, while, an additional 17.4 percent were vulnerable to multiple deprivations. The intensity of deprivation in Nepal was 49 percent and the country's MPI value was calculated 0.217.

As per 2006/2007 survey, 49.4 percent of the population lived in multidimensional poverty and an additional 11 percent were vulnerable to multiple deprivations in Pakistan. The intensity of deprivation in Pakistan was 53.4 percent, while, country's MPI value was 0.264. As far as Sri Lanka is concerned, 5.3 percent of the population lived in multidimensional poverty and an additional 14.4 percent were vulnerable to multiple deprivations. Whereas, the intensity of deprivation and MPI value in Sri Lanka was found 38.7 percent and 0.021 respectively.

The analysis suggests that Bangladesh has highest percentage of the population lived in multidimensional poverty and this is followed by India, Pakistan and Nepal. Whereas, highest percentage of the intensity of deprivation – that is, the average percentage of deprivation experienced by people living in multidimensional poverty is found in Pakistan followed by India, Bangladesh and Nepal. In contrary, the lowest percentage of the population lived in multidimensional poverty and the intensity of deprivation are prevailed in Maldives followed by Sri Lanka and Bhutan. Further, the analysis revealed that the multidimensional poverty headcount percentage points higher than income poverty in each country implies that individuals living above the income poverty line still suffer deprivations in education, health and other living conditions.

#### **Conclusion**

The analysis revealed that Sri Lanka is in the high human development group whereas, Maldives, India and Bhutan are in the medium and the remaining four (Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and Afghanistan) are in the low human development group in the South Asia. Further, the average HDI value for the South Asian region registered 0.558, which is

below the world average of 0.693. During the period from 1990 to 2012, the region registered 33.49 percentage increases in HDI value, which is the highest compared to other regions of the world. Looking at individual countries in the region, Afghanistan (52%) has achieved highest percentage progress in HDI value followed by Bangladesh (43%), Nepal (36%), India (35%), Pakistan (35%) and Maldives (30%), whereas the least percentage progress was registered by Sri Lanka (18%) and Bhutan (about 3 %). The region's average life expectancy at birth and average years of schooling are 66.2 years and 4.7 years respectively, however, these are significantly below to the world averages. The average gross national income (GNI) per capita of \$3,343 is only one-third of the world average of \$10,184. Nepal has highest average loss in potential human development due to inequality followed by Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, while, Sri Lanka has lowest average loss followed by Bhutan and Maldives. The loss to potential HDI value of South Asia is about 6 percentage points higher than the world's average loss of 23.3 percent. The loss is attributed to the prevalence of large inequalities in life expectancy at birth, education and income.

The analysis further suggests that both Afghanistan and India has higher gender inequality in South Asia while, Maldives followed by Sri Lanka has lowest gender inequality. Moreover, average Gender Inequality Index value for the South Asia region is registered 0.568 also represents a relatively high gender inequality.

Moreover, Bangladesh has the highest percentage of the population lived in multidimensional poverty followed by India and Pakistan. In addition to this, the analysis also reveals significantly high percentage of the multidimensional poverty headcount compared to income poverty in each country- implying individuals living above the income poverty line still suffer from deprivations in education, health and other living conditions. Overall, it may be concluded that South Asia region including India has achieved an unprecedented progress particularly at human development front.

#### **Challenges Ahead**

It is revealed from the analysis that South Asia region has made tremendous progress in terms of human development; however, it has still major challenges to overcome the problems of high multidimensional poverty, low per capita income, average years of schooling, average life expectancy at birth, unemployment, child labour and widespread multidimensional inequality etc.

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### Appendix

**Table-1: HDI for South Asian Countries**

Category	Low HDI				Midium HDI			HHDI	South Asia	World
	Country	Afghanistan	Bangladesh	Pakistan	Nepal	Maldives	Bhutan			
2012	0.374	0.515	0.515	0.463	0.688	0.538	0.554	0.715	0.558	0.694
2011	0.371	0.511	0.513	0.460	0.687	0.532	0.551	0.711	0.555	0.692
2010	0.368	0.508	0.512	0.458	0.683	0.525	0.547	0.705	0.552	0.690
2009	0.361	0.502	0.508	0.453	0.676	n.a.	0.540	0.700	0.545	0.685
2008	0.343	0.495	0.502	0.447	0.674	n.a.	0.533	0.697	0.538	0.683
2007	0.346	0.488	0.498	0.440	0.663	n.a.	0.525	0.693	0.531	0.678
2006	0.339	0.481	0.488	0.435	0.653	n.a.	0.515	0.688	0.522	0.672
2005	0.322	0.472	0.485	0.429	0.639	n.a.	0.507	0.683	0.514	0.666
2000	0.236	0.433	0.419	0.401	0.592	n.a.	0.463	0.653	0.470	0.639
1995	0.241	0.397	n.a.	n.a.	0.529	n.a.	0.438	n.a.	0.446	0.618
1990	0.246	0.361	0.383	0.341	n.a.	n.a.	0.410	0.608	0.418	0.600
Average percentage Increase	52.03	42.66	34.5	35.78	30.06	2.5	35.12	17.60	33.49	15.67

**Table-2: HDI indicators for 2012 relative to South Asian Countries**

Country	HDI value	HDI rank	Life expectancy at birth	Expected years of schooling	Mean years of schooling	GNI per capita (PPP US\$)
Afghanistan	0.374	175	49.1	8.1	3.1	1,000
Bangladesh	0.515	146	69.2	8.1	4.8	1,785
Bhutan	0.538	140	67.6	12.4	2.3	5,246
India	0.554	136	65.8	10.7	4.4	3,285
Maldives	0.688	104	77.1	12.5	5.8	7,478
Nepal	0.463	157	69.1	8.9	3.2	1,137
Pakistan	0.515	146	65.7	7.3	4.9	2,566
Sri Lanka	0.715	92	75.1	12.7	9.3	5,170
South Asia	0.558	—	66.2	10.2	4.7	3,343
Low HDI	0.466	—	59.1	8.5	4.2	1,633
Medium HDI	0.64	—	69.9	11.4	6.3	5,428
High HDI	0.758	—	73.4	13.9	8.8	11,501

Source: HDR-2013, UNDP

**Table-3 : Inequality-adjusted HDI (IHDI) for 2012**

Country	IHDI value	Overall Loss (%)	Loss due to inequality in life expectancy at birth (%)	Loss due to inequality in education (%)	Loss due to inequality in income (%)
Afghanistan	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Bangladesh	0.374	27.4	23.2	39.4	17.7
Bhutan	0.43	20	24.1	12.2	23.1
India	0.392	29.3	27.1	42.4	15.8
Maldives	0.515	25.2	7.3	41.2	23.2
Nepal	0.304	34.2	19.5	43.6	37.4
Pakistan	0.356	30.9	32.3	45.2	11
Sri Lanka	0.607	15.1	9.4	14.6	20.8
South Asia	0.395	29.1	27	42	15.9
Low HDI	0.31	33.5	35.7	38.7	25.6
Medium HDI	0.485	24.2	19.3	30.2	22.7
High HDI	0.602	20.6	12.4	19.9	28.6

Source: HDR-2013, UNDP

**Table-4: Gender Inequality Index**

Country	GII Value	GII Rank	Maternal mortality ratio	Adolescent fertility rate	Female seats in parliament (%)	Population with at least secondary education (%)		Labour force participation rate (%)	
						Female	Male	Female	Male
Afghanistan	0.712	147	460	99.6	27.6	5.8	34	15.7	80.3
Bangladesh	0.518	111	240	68.2	19.7	30.8	39.3	57.2	84.3
Bhutan	0.464	92	180	44.9	13.9	34	34.5	65.8	76.5
India	0.61	132	200	74.7	10.9	26.6	50.4	29	80.7
Maldives	0.357	64	60	10.2	6.5	20.7	30.1	55.7	76.8
Nepal	0.485	102	170	86.2	33.2	17.9	39.9	80.4	87.6
Pakistan	0.567	123	260	28.1	21.1	18.3	43.1	22.7	83.3
Sri Lanka	0.402	75	35	22.1	5.8	72.6	75.5	34.7	76.3
South Asia	0.568	-	203	66.9	18.5	28.3	49.7	31.3	81
Low HDI	0.578	-	405	86	19.2	18	32	56.4	79.9
Medium HDI	0.457	-	121	44.7	18.2	42.1	58.8	50.5	79.9
High HDI	0.376	-	47	45.9	18.5	62.9	65.2	46.8	75.3

Source: HDR-2013, UNDP

**Table-5: Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)**

Country	Survey year	Head Count (%)	MPI value	Intensity of deprivation (%)	Population			Contribution to overall poverty of deprivations in		
					Vulnerable to poverty (%)	In severe poverty (%)	Below income poverty line (%)	Health	Education	Living Standards
Afghanistan	NA		NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Bangladesh	2007	57.8	0.292	50.4	21.2	26.2	43.3	34.5	18.7	46.8
Bhutan	2010	27.2	0.119	43.9	17.2	8.5	10.2	21.2	40.4	38.4
India	2005 / 2006	53.7	0.283	52.7	16.4	28.6	32.7	35.7	21.8	42.5
Maldives	2009	5.2	0.018	35.6	4.8	0.3	NA	81.1	13.6	5.3
Nepal	2011	44.2	0.217	49	17.4	20.8	24.8	33.7	21.8	44.4
Pakistan	2006 / 2007	49.4	0.264	53.4	11	27.4	21	37.9	30.8	31.2
Sri Lanka	2003	5.3	0.021	38.7	14.4	0.6	7	35.4	6.3	58.3

Source: HDR-2013, UNDP