

REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: IJAR-53956

Date: 20/09/2025

Title: Human Development Disparities in South Asia: A Panel Data Investigation of Afghanistan and SAARC Countries

Recommendation:

✓ Accept as it is
 Accept after minor revision.....
 Accept after major revision
 Do not accept (*Reasons below*)

Rating	Excel.	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality	✓			
Techn. Quality	✓			
Clarity	✓			
Significance	✓			

Reviewer Name: Mr. VISHAL SHARMA

Date: 20/09/2025

Reviewer's Comment for Publication.

This paper, "Human Development Disparities in South Asia: A Panel Data Investigation of Afghanistan and SAARC Countries," examines SAARC countries. It will help the Indian government, particularly the Ministry of External Affairs, in formulating international and regional policies. This is truly an excellent research paper.

Recommendation : Accept as it is

Detailed Reviewer's Report

Strengths:

- 1. Relevance:** The document investigates human development disparities in South Asia, focusing on Afghanistan's structural obstacles and the influence of socioeconomic factors on the Human Development Index across SAARC countries from 2000 to 2023.
- 2. Clarity of Objective:** The research question is clearly defined and effectively addressed.

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Significance:

1. Human Development Disparities in South Asia

This research investigates the persistent human development disparities among SAARC countries, with a focus on Afghanistan's unique challenges.

- The study utilizes a balanced panel dataset from 2000 to 2023, covering seven SAARC nations.
- Key socioeconomic factors analyzed include life expectancy, average years of schooling, expected years of schooling, and gross national income (GNI) per capita.
- Panel econometric techniques, including Fixed Effects and Pooled OLS models, were employed to assess the impact of these factors on the Human Development Index (HDI).
- Findings indicate that all four factors positively influence HDI, emphasizing the importance of health, education, and income.
- Afghanistan consistently lags behind other SAARC countries, suggesting additional structural barriers to development.
- The study calls for policy prioritization in health, education, and equitable income growth to address these disparities.

2. Socioeconomic Challenges in Afghanistan

This section highlights the specific socioeconomic challenges faced by Afghanistan, particularly in health and education.

- Wealth-related inequalities in healthcare access are significant, with wealthier households more likely to seek care for under-five children.
- Factors contributing to these disparities include household income, rural residency, and access to education and technology.
- Afghanistan's child health is critically poor, with malnutrition linked to maternal education and household economic status.
- Recent restrictions on girls' education threaten to perpetuate poverty and gender inequality, hindering societal advancement.
- Targeted nutrition services and educational interventions are essential to combat child malnutrition and improve long-term outcomes.