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HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY: A CROSS-COUNTRY ANALYSIS (AFGHANISTAN AND SAARC COUNTRIES)

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Abstract: This paper examines the relationship between human development and multidimensional poverty in South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries, with particular focus on Afghanistan. The Human Development Index (HDI) captures national achievements in health, education, and income, while the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) reflects household-level deprivations across similar dimensions. Due to data availability constraints, MPI values are reported for different years between 2016 and 2022; therefore, the most recent national estimate for each country was used as a proxy for its current state of multidimensional poverty. the study applies descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analysis to assess the degree of alignment between the two indices.

Findings reveal a strong and statistically significant negative association between HDI and MPI ($r = –0.91$). Regression results show that a one-unit increase in HDI corresponds to a 1.15-unit reduction in MPI, with the model explaining 83% of variation across countries. While Sri Lanka and the Maldives combine high HDI with near-zero MPI, Afghanistan records the lowest HDI and highest MPI, underscoring the effects of conflict and inequality. The study highlights the need for integrated development and poverty reduction strategies.

Keywords: Human Development Index (HDI); Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI); SAARC countries; Afghanistan; Poverty and development; Cross-country analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

Multidimensional poverty in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries is a complex and persistent challenge, characterized by simultaneous deprivations in health, education, and living standards. The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) demonstrates that, although poverty levels in the region declined between 2003 and 2019, significant challenges persist particularly in Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh where deprivations in cooking fuel, sanitation, housing, nutrition, and years of schooling remain prevalent (Li et al., 2022). Among SAARC nations, India registers the highest severity of multidimensional poverty, followed by Bangladesh and Pakistan (Rasool et al., n.d.). These patterns reflect broader global trends, where reductions in multidimensional poverty have been observed but vary considerably in pace and scope (Alkire et al., 2014).

Persistent poverty in the region is further compounded by social and structural inequalities, including those based on ethnicity, caste, and gender, which exacerbate the experience of deprivation for marginalized groups (Alkire et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified these challenges, disrupting livelihoods, school attendance, and access to social protection, thereby reversing gains in poverty reduction (Alkire et al., 2021). In response, recent scholarship advocates for methodological innovations such as the Fuzzy Set approach that capture nuanced poverty dimensions and better inform policy (Deepawansa et al., 2022).

Afghanistan, in particular, faces acute and multidimensional poverty exacerbated by decades of armed conflict, political instability, and environmental crises such as droughts. The MPI for Afghanistan shows pervasive deprivation across income and non-income dimensions, including health, education, and living standards (Sundar, 2024). Studies on child poverty highlight the severe vulnerability of younger children, girls, and rural populations, often overlooked in standard poverty surveys (Trani et al., 2013; Biggeri et al., 2010). Rural regions, such as Kunduz province, record significantly higher MPI scores than urban areas (Shaiq et al., 2022), and the National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA) underscores the heterogeneity and multidimensionality of poverty (Jolliffe, 2010).

Within this context, the relationship between human development and multidimensional poverty is of particular interest. While the Human Development Index (HDI) aggregates health, education, and income measures, the MPI captures acute deprivation across similar but more granular indicators. Comparative studies reveal that, despite economic growth, several SAARC countries continue to underperform in both indices India, for example, records a high per capita income but remains poor in MPI rankings due to deficits in health and living standards (Kumar & Kumar, 2015; Li et al., 2022). The observed disparity between HDI and MPI scores highlights the need to jointly examine these measures to better understand the multidimensional nature of poverty and development in SAARC nations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The analysis of multidimensional poverty in Afghanistan and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries reveals significant insights into the complexities of poverty beyond mere income measures. The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) is a crucial tool in this context, as it incorporates various dimensions such as education, health, and living standards, offering a more comprehensive understanding of poverty (Sundar, 2024) (Putri et al., 2024). In Afghanistan, studies have highlighted the severe impact of prolonged conflict, political instability, and natural disasters on poverty levels, with rural populations, ethnic minorities, women, and disabled individuals being the most affected (Trani et al., 2016). The capability approach, particularly in the context of child poverty, emphasizes the deprivation of basic capabilities and functioning's, with younger children, girls, and those in rural areas being the most deprived (Trani et al., 2013) (Biggeri et al., 2010). The Alkire-Foster method, widely used in these analyses, underscores the importance of considering multiple dimensions of deprivation to inform more effective poverty eradication policies (Putri et al., 2024) (Trani et al., 2013). The findings from Afghanistan suggest that addressing multidimensional poverty requires targeted interventions that consider the unique vulnerabilities of different demographic groups, which can be extrapolated to other SAARC countries facing similar challenges. This approach not only aids in better policy formulation but also aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals aimed at eradicating poverty in all its forms (Trani et al., 2016) (Trani et al., 2013). Taken together, the existing studies can could not establishes a strong foundation for understanding multidimensional poverty and Human development comparatively, therefore some important gaps remain in integrating these insights with broader human development indicators at the regional level.

3. RESEARCH GAP

Although HDI and MPI are both widely recognized as vital tools for assessing development, existing literature rarely integrates them into a single analytical framework for the SAARC region. Studies that do examine both indicators tend to focus on global comparisons or subsets of countries, overlooking regional specificities and the distinct structural constraints faced by individual members. Afghanistan, in particular, has received limited attention in such comparative analyses despite being an outlier in both human development and poverty metrics. The absence of a focused SAARC-level comparison that evaluates whether improvements in HDI correspond with reductions in multidimensional poverty leaves a critical empirical and policy gap.

This study fills that void by conducting a comparative analysis of HDI and MPI for SAARC countries, with special emphasis on Afghanistan. Using cross-sectional data for a benchmark year, the research evaluates the relationship between the two indicators, identifies discrepancies in their rankings, and examines the implications for targeted policy interventions. By integrating both macro-level and household-level perspectives, this paper aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of development disparities in South Asia.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative cross-sectional design to examine the relationship between multidimensional poverty and human development in SAARC countries. Due to data availability constraints, MPI values are reported for different years between 2016 and 2022; therefore, the most recent national estimate for each country was used as a proxy for its current state of multidimensional poverty. This approach allows for comparability across the region while reflecting the most updated measures of deprivation.

The analysis focuses on seven SAARC countries for which consistent data are available. The key variables are the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), drawn from the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) and comparable national statistics, and the Human Development Index (HDI), obtained from the United Nations Development Program's Human Development Reports. By combining these indicators, the study integrates macro-level and household-level perspectives on development.

Descriptive statistics were first computed to provide an overview of the dataset, including measures of central tendency (mean, median), dispersion (standard deviation, range), and distributional shape (skewness, kurtosis). These summaries help identify variability and potential anomalies in the cross-country data. The core analysis then applies correlation and regression techniques to assess the relationship between HDI and MPI.

The strength and direction of association were initially evaluated using the Pearson correlation coefficient, which quantifies the linear relationship between the two indices. To further assess causality, a simple linear regression model was specified as follows:

The regression model is specified as $\text{MPI}_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{HDI}_i + \varepsilon_i$

where β0 represents the intercept, β1 denotes the marginal effect of HDI on MPI, and εi is the error term. The model was estimated using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS). Model fit was evaluated using the coefficient of determination (R^2), residual standard error, and the F-statistic. These diagnostics ensure the reliability of the regression results and allow for meaningful interpretation of the empirical relationship between human development and multidimensional poverty.

5 - RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD	Median	Min	Max	Range	Skew	Kurtosis	SE
MPI	0.12	0.12	0.09	0.00	0.36	0.36	0.86	-0.78	0.05
HDI	0.64	0.10	0.65	0.50	0.77	0.28	-0.04	-1.64	0.04
Year of MPI	2018.71	2.56	2019	2016	2022	6	0.22	-1.84	0.97
Year of HDI	2018.71	2.56	2019	2016	2022	6	0.22	-1.84	0.97
Country (Index variable)	4.00	2.16	4.00	1	7	6	0.00	-1.71	0.82

Source: author calculation

Interpretation:

The average Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) among the seven countries is 0.12, ranging from 0 to 0.36, indicating significant variability in poverty levels. The average Human Development Index (HDI) is 0.64, with a standard deviation of 0.10, suggesting moderate variability. MPI shows a positive skew, implying that most countries have lower poverty scores, while HDI is nearly symmetric.

Table 2. Correlation Between MPI and HDI

Variables	Correlation (r)
MPI ~ HDI	**-0.91**

Source: author calculation

Interpretation:

There is a **strong and negative correlation** (r = -0.91) between MPI and HDI. This implies that countries with higher human development tend to have significantly lower multidimensional poverty levels.

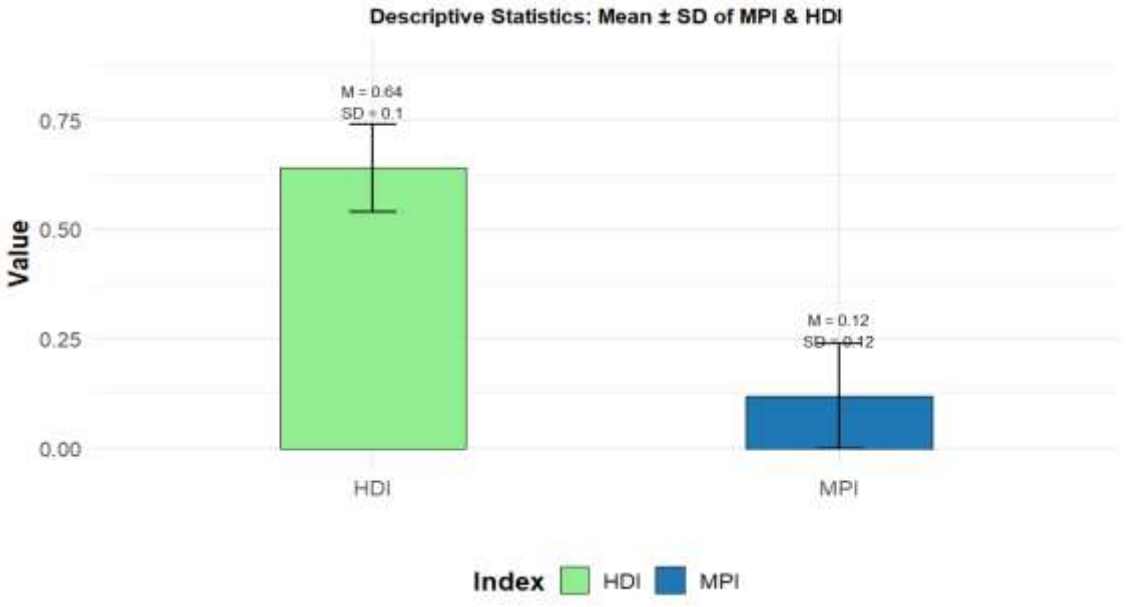

Figure 1. Descriptive Statistics — Mean ± SD of MPI and HDI

Figure 1 summarizes the descriptive statistics of the Human Development Index (HDI) and the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) across seven SAARC countries, namely Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, and Maldives. The results indicate that the average HDI is **0.64 (SD = 0.10)**, reflecting a moderate level of human development with relatively low variation among these countries. In contrast, the average MPI is **0.12 (SD = 0.12),** suggesting that multidimensional poverty is comparatively lower in magnitude but demonstrates greater variability across the region. The error bars highlight this disparity, showing that while HDI values are more consistent among the seven countries, MPI levels fluctuate considerably.

A closer inspection reveals that **Sri Lanka (HDI = 0.77, MPI = 0.01) and Maldives (HDI = 0.73, MPI = 0.00)** perform significantly better, with high human development and minimal multidimensional poverty. In contrast, **Afghanistan (HDI = 0.50, MPI = 0.36)** emerges as an outlier on the opposite end, reflecting both the lowest development outcomes and the highest poverty burden. This divergence underscores the heterogeneity within the region and highlights the uneven progress of human development and poverty reduction across SAARC countries.

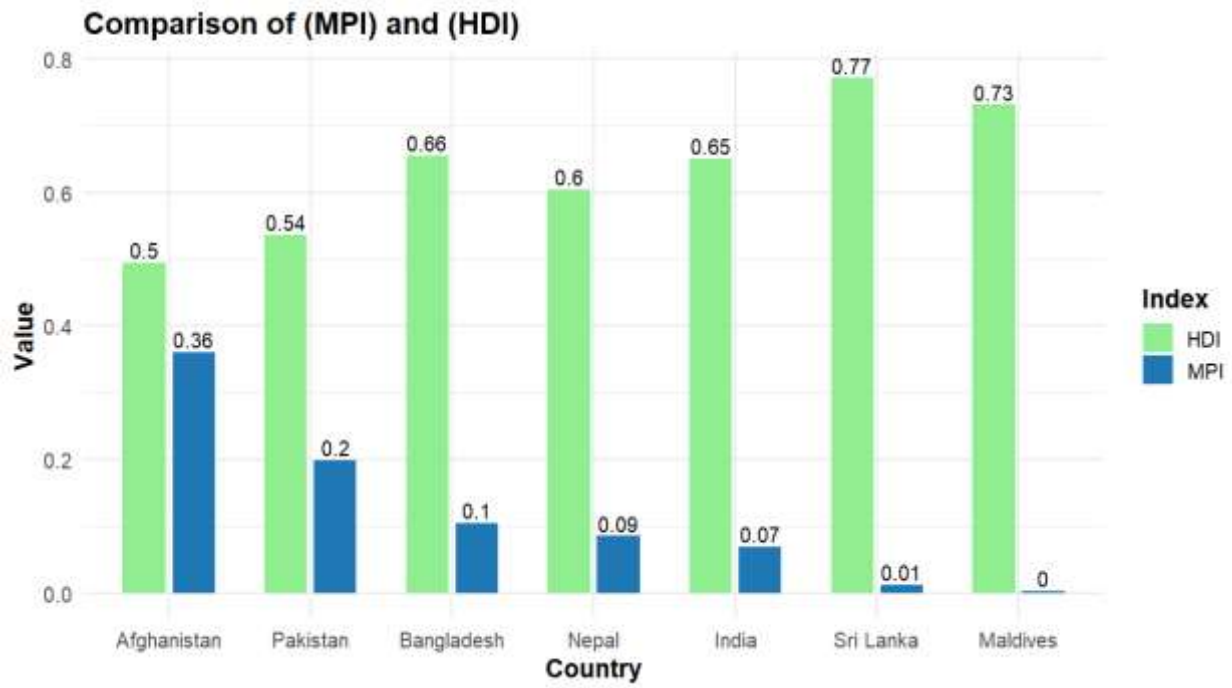

Figure 2. Average Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) and Human Development Index (HDI) across SAARC Countries

Figure 2 compares the Human Development Index (HDI) and the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) across seven South Asian countries. HDI values (green bars) represent composite achievements in health, education, and income, with higher values indicating greater human development. MPI values (blue bars) measure the extent of multidimensional poverty, where higher values signify greater deprivation.

The chart reveals a distinct inverse pattern between the two indices. Sri Lanka and the Maldives register the highest HDI scores (0.77 and 0.73, respectively) alongside minimal MPI values (0.01 and 0.00, respectively). India (HDI = 0.65, MPI = 0.07) and Bangladesh (HDI = 0.66, MPI = 0.10) occupy middle positions, demonstrating relatively high human development with low to moderate poverty levels. Nepal (HDI = 0.60, MPI = 0.09) shows slightly lower HDI and comparable MPI to Bangladesh and India. Pakistan and Afghanistan exhibit the lowest HDI values (0.54 and 0.50) and the highest MPI scores (0.20 and 0.36), indicating comparatively poor development outcomes and high deprivation levels.

This visual comparison reinforces the negative association between HDI and MPI in the region, suggesting that advancements in human development are accompanied by significant reductions in multidimensional poverty.

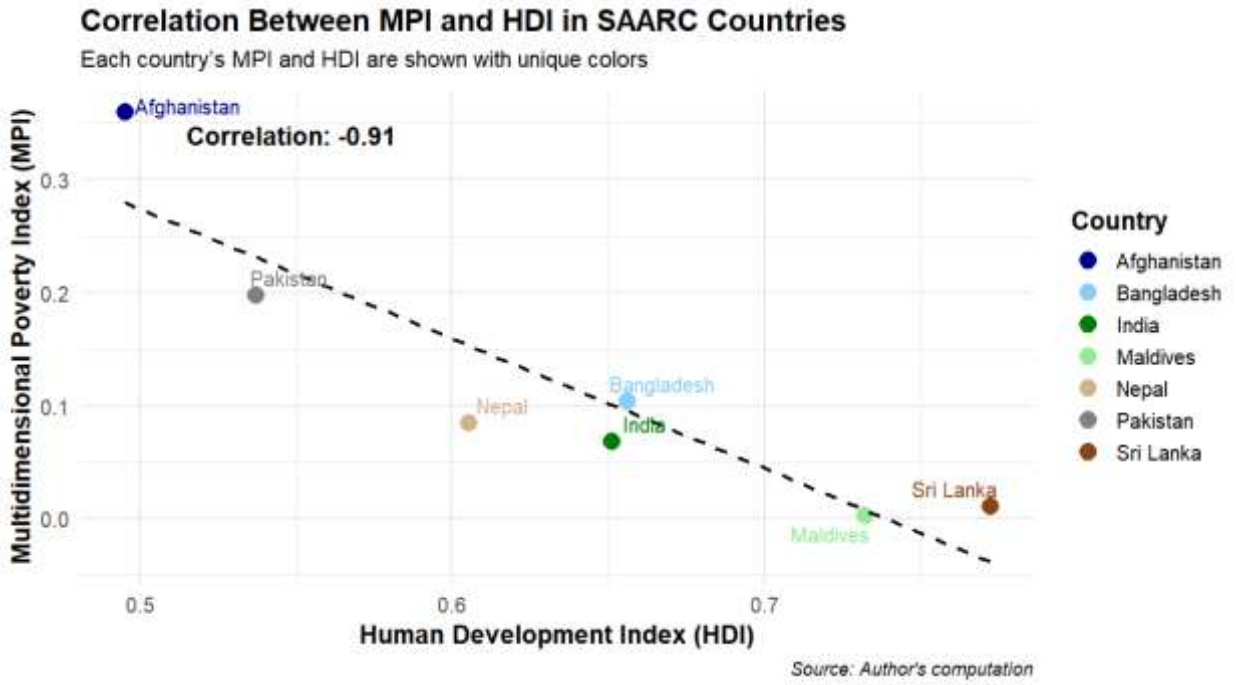

Figure 3. **Correlation between MPI and HDI for SAARC Countries**

Figure 3 presents a scatter plot illustrating the relationship between the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) and the Human Development Index (HDI) for South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) member countries. Each country is represented by a distinct color, and the fitted regression line depicts the overall linear association between the two indices. The computed Pearson correlation coefficient is **–0.91**, indicating a very strong negative correlation.

The distribution of observations clearly reflects this inverse relationship: countries with higher HDI values consistently exhibit lower MPI scores. Sri Lanka and the Maldives are located at the lower-right of the plot, combining high human development (HDI ≈ 0.77 and 0.73) with minimal multidimensional poverty (MPI ≈ 0.01 and 0.00, respectively). Conversely, Afghanistan and Pakistan are positioned at the upper-left extreme, registering the lowest HDI (≈ 0.50) and the highest MPI (≈ 0.36). Intermediate positions along the trend line are occupied by Bangladesh, India, Nepal which reflect moderate levels of both indices.

The magnitude and direction of the correlation coefficient confirm the theoretical expectation that advancements in human development are strongly associated with reductions in multidimensional poverty. This finding underscores the mutual interdependence of these two development indicators within the SAARC context.

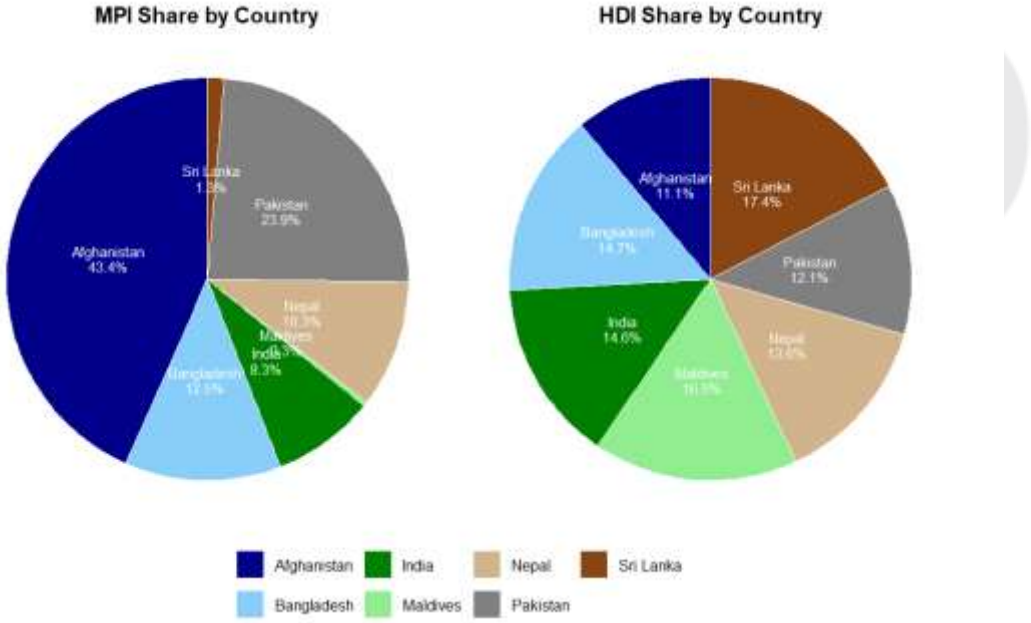

Figure 4. proportional distribution of the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) and Human Development Index (HDI) across seven SARCC countries

Figure 4 illustrates the proportional distribution of the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) and Human Development Index (HDI) across seven South Asian countries. The left pie chart depicts each country's relative contribution to the total MPI value, while the right pie chart presents each country's share of the aggregate HDI score.

In terms of MPI share, Afghanistan accounts for the largest proportion (43.4%), followed by Pakistan (23.9%) and Bangladesh (12.5%). Moderate shares are recorded for Nepal (10.3%) and India (8.3%), whereas the Maldives contributes minimally (0.3%) and Sri Lanka reports the lowest share (1.3%). These proportions indicate a substantial concentration of multidimensional poverty in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Conversely, the HDI share distribution demonstrates a more balanced pattern across countries. Sri Lanka holds the highest share of the total HDI (17.4%), followed by the Maldives (16.5%), Bangladesh (14.7%), and India (14.6%). Nepal (13.6%), Pakistan (12.1%), and Afghanistan (11.1%) represent smaller yet significant shares.

The comparative analysis of MPI and HDI shares underscores an inverse relationship between poverty and development outcomes: countries with larger MPI shares tend to have smaller HDI shares, and vice versa. This reinforces the observation that reducing multidimensional poverty is intrinsically linked to improvements in overall human development.

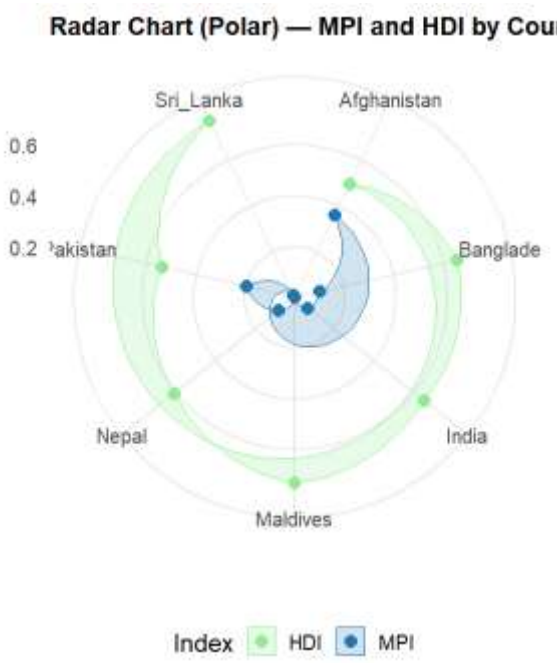

Figure 5. Radar Chart (Polar) — MPI and HDI by Country

gure 5 displays a polar radar chart comparing the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) and the Human Development Index (HDI) across seven South Asian countries. The chart facilitates a simultaneous visual assessment of both indices for each country, enabling the identification of patterns and disparities.

The HDI values (depicted in light green) form an outer band, with the highest magnitude observed for Sri Lanka, followed closely by the Maldives, Bangladesh, and India. Nepal, Pakistan, and Afghanistan occupy comparatively lower positions on the HDI scale. Conversely, the MPI values (depicted in blue) form a smaller, inner polygon, indicating lower absolute magnitudes relative to HDI. Afghanistan registers the largest MPI value, followed by Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal, whereas India, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives record minimal MPI levels.

The juxtaposition of the two indices on a single polar plot reveals an inverse relationship: countries with high HDI scores consistently exhibit low MPI values, while those with elevated MPI values correspondingly display lower HDI scores. This visual representation reinforces the negative correlation between multidimensional poverty and human development across the South Asian region.

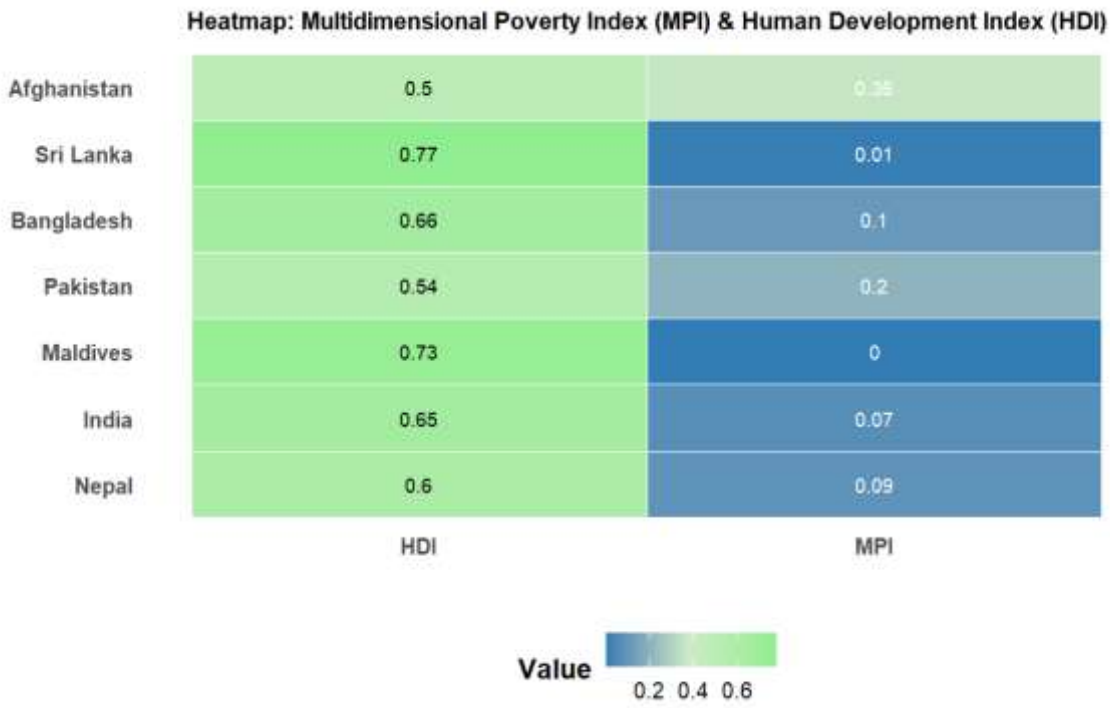

Figure 6. Heatmap — MPI and HDI Values by Country

The heatmap provides a tabular-visual synthesis of HDI and MPI data for the SAARC region, using color intensity to convey value magnitude alongside explicit numeric labels for precision. HDI values are represented in shades of green, with darker tones signifying stronger development performance, while MPI values are shaded in blue, with darker tones representing higher levels of multidimensional poverty.

At one end of the spectrum, Sri Lanka (HDI = 0.77, MPI = 0.01) and Maldives (HDI = 0.73, MPI = 0.00) stand out with strong green shading and minimal blue, signaling both advanced development and near eradication of multidimensional poverty. At the opposite end, Afghanistan (HDI = 0.50, MPI = 0.36) is characterized by a muted green HDI and dark blue MPI, reflecting the lowest development standing and the highest multidimensional poverty in the group. Countries such as India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan occupy intermediate positions, but still display notable contrasts between development progress and poverty persistence. This visual format not only facilitates rapid country-to-country comparisons but also makes it easier to spot anomalies, such as cases where development gains have not translated proportionately into poverty reduction.

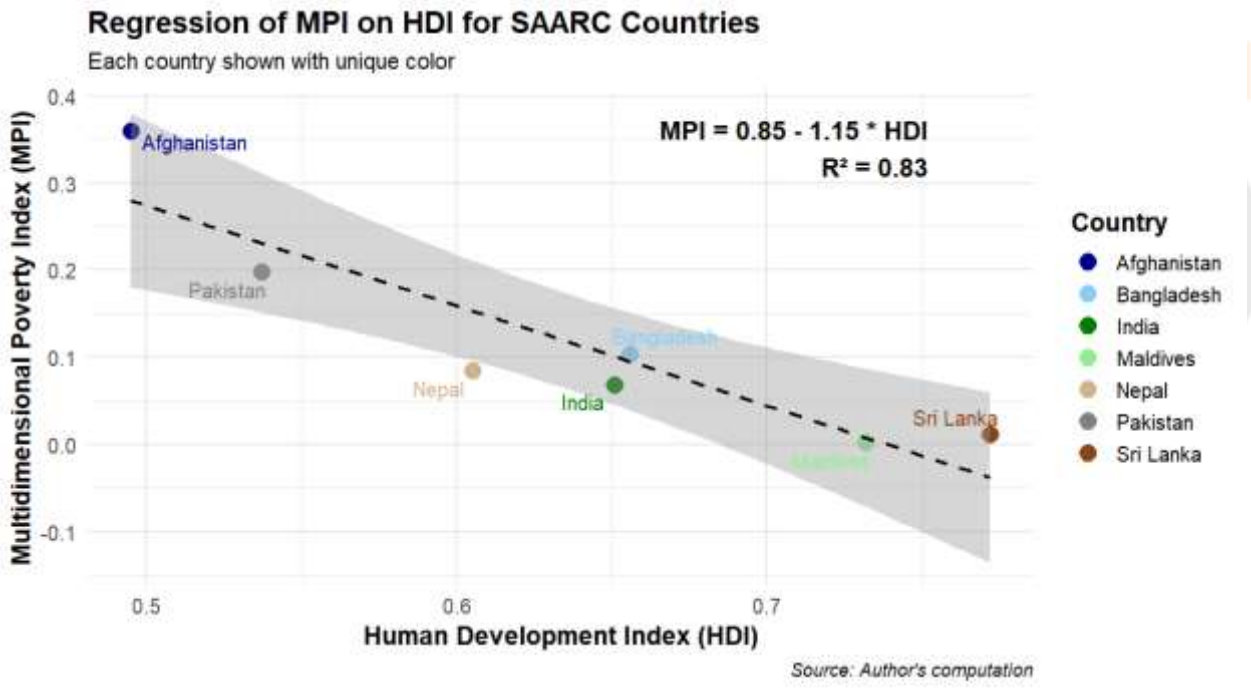

Figure 7. Regression of Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) on Human Development Index (HDI) in SAARC countries

Figure 7. Relationship between the Human Development Index (HDI) and the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) in SAARC countries. This scatter plot illustrates the association between HDI and MPI for seven member states of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Each data point represents one country and is labeled for clarity. The fitted dashed regression line (MPI 0.85 - 1.15 × HDI) captures the general trend, with a shaded band denoting the 95% confidence interval for the predicted

relationship. The high coefficient of determination (R^2 = 0.83) indicates that a substantial proportion of variation in MPI across these countries can be explained by differences in HDI.

The negative slope of the regression line confirms a strong inverse relationship: as human development improves, multidimensional poverty declines. Notably, Afghanistan lies well above the regression line, indicating that its poverty levels are significantly higher than would be expected given its HDI, suggesting structural or conflict-related challenges that hinder poverty reduction despite development gains. Conversely, Sri Lanka and Maldives lie in low part of the the line, implying better-than-expected poverty outcomes, possibly due to effective social welfare programs, targeted poverty alleviation policies, or other non-HDI factors. Countries such as Nepal, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh cluster near the line, though variations in residuals highlight differences in efficiency at translating development into poverty reduction.

Overall, the figure underscores HDI's utility as a predictor of MPI in the SAARC region, while also revealing outliers whose performance whether better or worse than predicted offers important case studies for policy learning.

Table 3. Simple Linear Regression: MPI ~ HDI

Predictor	Estimate	Std. Error	t-value	p-value	Significance
Intercept	0.8481	0.1487	5.703	0.00231	**
HDI	-1.1480	0.2316	-4.956	0.00426	**

Source: author calculation

The regression results demonstrate a statistically significant and negative relationship between HDI and MPI. Specifically, the coefficient for HDI is -1.1480 ($p < 0.01$), indicating that a one-unit increase in HDI is associated with a 1.15 unit decrease in MPI, holding all else constant. The intercept is 0.8481, representing the estimated MPI when HDI is zero though this is a hypothetical point outside the actual HDI range.

The model explains approximately 83.1% of the variance in MPI values across countries (R^2 = 0.831), reflecting a strong explanatory power. The F-statistic (24.56, $p < 0.005$) confirms the overall model is statistically significant. The low residual standard error (0.056) suggests that the model predictions closely match the observed values.

These results support the hypothesis that higher human development (HDI) is associated with lower multidimensional poverty (MPI) across the countries in the sample.

6. Results

The results of the simple linear regression indicate a strong and statistically significant negative relationship between the Human Development Index (HDI) and the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI). The regression coefficient for HDI is -1.148 (p = 0.00426), which implies that for every one-unit increase in HDI, MPI decreases by approximately 1.15 units. This negative relationship is significant at the 1% level. The intercept of the model is 0.848, representing the expected MPI when HDI equals zero, though this is a theoretical value outside the observed range.

The model demonstrates a high explanatory power, with an R-squared of 0.831, indicating that approximately 83.1% of the variation in MPI across countries can be explained by differences in HDI. The residual standard error is 0.056, and the F-statistic (24.56, p = 0.0043) confirms the overall model significance.

7. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study establish a robust and statistically significant negative relationship between the Human Development Index (HDI) and the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) across SAARC countries. The regression analysis revealed that a one-unit increase in HDI is associated with a 1.15-unit reduction in MPI, a result significant at the 1% level. The explanatory power of the model is notably high (R^2 = 0.831), indicating that differences in HDI account for more than 80% of the variation in MPI outcomes. These results strongly validate the hypothesis that improvements in human development are closely linked with reductions in multidimensional poverty.

At the regional level, the results reveal stark disparities in performance. Sri Lanka and the Maldives demonstrated relatively high HDI scores accompanied by near-zero MPI values, reflecting their success in sustaining inclusive development policies and welfare-oriented governance structures. By contrast, Afghanistan recorded the lowest HDI and highest MPI among the SAARC countries, underscoring the deep-rooted effects of prolonged conflict, institutional fragility, and structural inequalities. These disparities highlight the central role of governance quality, political stability, and social policy frameworks in shaping poverty outcomes.

Beyond the statistical findings, the analysis underscores the importance of using multidimensional approaches to capture the lived realities of poverty. Unlike income-based measures, MPI accounts for deprivations in health, education, and living standards, offering a more holistic lens to assess human well-being. This comprehensive framework is particularly relevant for Afghanistan, where studies (e.g., Trani et al., 2013; Biggeri et al., 2010) have shown that marginalized groups such as children, women, rural households, and people with disabilities face the highest levels of deprivation. The findings suggest that interventions aimed at reducing multidimensional poverty must be context-sensitive and tailored to address specific vulnerabilities within populations.

From a policy perspective, the evidence indicates that broad-based human development strategies focusing on improving education access, healthcare delivery, and equitable resource distribution are essential to combating multidimensional poverty. For countries like Afghanistan, these interventions need to be supported by stronger institutional frameworks and international assistance to offset the destabilizing effects of conflict and aid dependency. For the wider SAARC region, the results reinforce the argument that human development policies are not only desirable but necessary for reducing poverty in its multiple forms.

Overall, the findings contribute to the growing body of literature that emphasizes the intrinsic link between human development and poverty reduction. They also fill an important gap by providing a comparative regional assessment of HDI–MPI dynamics within South Asia. The results highlight that while human development progress substantially reduces poverty, its effectiveness is mediated by national contexts, governance structures, and the inclusiveness of development strategies.

8. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The strong inverse relationship between HDI and MPI carries several important policy lessons for SAARC countries. First, investments in education, healthcare, and income opportunities remain the most effective pathways for reducing multidimensional poverty. Expanding access to quality schooling and healthcare can generate ripple effects across multiple poverty dimensions, as demonstrated by the region's best-performing countries.

Second, while improvements in national development indicators are essential, they must be complemented by targeted poverty alleviation programs that address household-level deprivations in sanitation, nutrition, and housing. The misalignment between HDI and MPI in countries such as Afghanistan and Pakistan suggests that growth and development gains alone are insufficient without inclusive service delivery.

Third, conflict-affected and fragile states require context-specific strategies. In Afghanistan, poverty reduction efforts must address not only human capital deficits but also the structural impacts of insecurity, displacement, and rural disadvantage. Stronger social protection systems and community-based interventions can help mitigate these vulnerabilities.

Finally, the combined use of HDI and MPI should be institutionalized in policy evaluation and monitoring frameworks. Relying on a single indicator risk overlooking critical dimensions of deprivation. A dual approach can provide policymakers with a more accurate and actionable picture of development progress, enabling evidence-based interventions that are both equitable and sustainable.

The strong inverse relationship between HDI and MPI carries important policy implications. Governments and development agencies should prioritize initiatives that enhance educational access, healthcare quality, and income-generating opportunities. Investing in these domains not only improves HDI scores but also directly contributes to reducing multidimensional poverty. Furthermore, the HDI can serve as an effective monitoring and evaluation tool to track the progress of poverty alleviation programs and to inform data-driven policy decisions.

By focusing on inclusive and sustained human development, policymakers can address the root causes of poverty and promote more equitable social outcomes across populations.

7. Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between human development and multidimensional poverty across SAARC countries, with particular emphasis on Afghanistan. Using cross-sectional data from 2016–2022, the analysis demonstrated a strong and statistically significant negative relationship between the Human Development Index (HDI) and the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI). The regression results confirmed that higher levels of human development are strongly associated with reductions in multidimensional poverty, with HDI explaining over 80% of the variance in MPI outcomes.

Country-level comparisons highlighted clear disparities. Sri Lanka and the Maldives emerged as high performers, achieving relatively high HDI values alongside near-zero MPI scores, while Afghanistan registered the lowest HDI and highest MPI, reflecting the profound effects of conflict, weak governance, and structural inequalities. These findings underscore the interdependence of development and poverty reduction, while also revealing the importance of national contexts in shaping outcomes.

By integrating both aggregate development measures (HDI) and household-level deprivation indicators (MPI), the study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of poverty dynamics in South Asia. It also addresses a critical research gap by offering a comparative assessment for the entire SAARC bloc, with a focused analysis of Afghanistan's unique position.

This study provides compelling empirical evidence that higher levels of human development are significantly linked to lower levels of multidimensional poverty across the selected countries. The regression analysis reveals that HDI is not only a statistically significant predictor of MPI but also explains a substantial portion of its variance. These findings highlight the crucial role of comprehensive human development strategies in addressing the multifaceted nature of poverty.

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