### HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX: A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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#### **Abstract**

Taking development as a multi-dimensional concept invariably justifies the argument of adopting the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Index (HDI) as a measure of development. Thus, being an attempt thereof to undertake a cross-country comparative study of the trend of Human Development progress in selected countries between 1990 and 2013 and following the UNDP regional classification, a total of 35 countries inclusive of the industrial countries were evaluated. Factors such as continual social unrest, engendered socio-political crisis, adverse income distribution, high depth of food deficit, lack of education and health services amidst others were evident as limiting factors for human development. However based on the progress made in selected economies, it is recommended that priority attention especially by Developing Economies be given to enabling necessary institutional and structural changes in view to foster human development, synonymous to economic development.

**Keywords:** Human Development Index (HDI), Human Development, Development. The author appreciates the support and comments from the anonymous review.

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### Introduction

Over time countries have wrestled with the purpose of advancing their economic prosperity, and which ultimately is intended to enrich (and or uplift) the living standard(s) of her inhabitants (or citizens or population). Growth in industrial productivity or amount of national output had been a worthy (macroeconomic) goal. Scholars have supported as a notable measure of such envisaged economic progress, the use of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or Gross National Product (GNP) computation (Goldstone, 2002; Eslava, 2019; Aremu and Uddin, 2022; Frankema, 2023).

Meanwhile, the experience of world economies even in recent times had argued otherwise, that an economy's attainment of growth in national output (or industrial productivity) may not guarantee for a non-impoverished population (or inhabitants). Critiques of the GDP or GNP measure of economic progress had restated or reiterated with emphasis the inadequate consideration of the level of a country's population participation in the so-generated output or the silence to the magnitude (or level(s)) of sectoral contribution for same so-generated output ascertained through the GDP or GNP computation. It is thereof upon such level of participation or sectoral contribution to national output generation that the 'trickling down' of economic progress

for the raising (or upliftment) of inhabitants' living standard(s) is thus anchored upon (McKinsey Global Institute, 2014; Oserei and Uddin, 2019; Aremu and Uddin, 2022; Oserei and Uddin, 2022). In a bid to proffer alternative measure(s) of economic progress, given the inadequacy to the GDP or GNP computation, some scholars had also over time considered some other measures such as GDP per capita, GNP per capita, etc., all popular still as income-based measures which attributable are renowned to have not greatly addressed the recounted or observed inadequacy. Then, among some later scholars' contribution to literature of economic measures of economic progress with consideration of the level of inhabitants participation and or the level of advancement in economic wellbeing, and these measures including poverty headcount ratio, GINI coefficient index, etc., a renowned contribution from Amartya Sen on the capabilities approach to development led the way for the novel Human Development Index (HDI). The HDI which now known as a widely accepted measure of world economies economic progress, is regarded as such that clearly bring to centre stage the multifaceted consideration to economic progress, economic prosperity or economic development, and this promoted and duly adopted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (UNDP, 1990; Anand and Sen, 1994; Goldstone, 2002; Brandt, Ma and Rawski, 2014; Frankema, 2023).

Thus, taking development as a multidimensional concept invariably, justifies the argument of adopting the UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) as a measure of development. Therefore, it is opined that development is more than GNP growth, more than income and wealth and more than producing commodities and accumulating capital. Hence, development is viewed to be measured not just by the yardstick of income alone, but by a more comprehensive indexcalled the human development index – reflecting life expectancy, literacy and command over the resources to enjoy a decent standard of living (UNDP, 1990; Lindman and Sellin, 2011; Liu, Tu and He, 2023).

The motivation of this study focuses to account for years since the release of the HDI in 1990 and before the eventual adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, relative to the experience of world economies. Also, this article put forth a documentary re-statement of the experience of world economies, for especially learnings to be taken by Developing Economies, for continued appreciation by all stakeholders for the future, as well as to offer some succinct suggestions in bid to inform current perspective(s) and prevalent policy directions. More so, this work offers a unique cross-country comparative perspective utilizing the novel/original HDI dataset, unlike some previous studies (Anand and Sen, 1994; Li, 2007; Liu et al., 2023, etc.).

## **Conceptual Issues**

## **Economic development**

Economic development would usually refer to the process of improved overall economic wellbeing or quality of life of a country's citizens (or inhabitants). However, such may be attested to include the realization of key objectives in same economy including increase in overall production of goods and services (popularly known as economic growth), poverty reduction, provision and development of both physical and social infrastructures, improved international

trade participation, pursuant of environmental sustainability, and integrated rural-urban development. Still, economic development could be considered as a complex and or multifaceted process attainable in a country by efforts not only by the national, sub-national and or municipal governments, but also or somewhat in collaboration with international (or bilateral or multilateral) organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector (Frankema, 2023).

## **Human development**

Human development is deemed associated to improved wellbeing, capabilities and opportunities of inhabitants (or citizens) of a country. It is regarded synonymous to economic development, and understood as a worthy goal envisaged in an economy which transcend (or go beyond) economic growth. The concept of human development thus account for all aspects related to health, education, and income, thereby providing a comprehensive measure of a country's overall development. Thence, human development as a multidimensional concept had been posited measurable by the Human Development Index (HDI), a composite measure developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to assess and compare the levels of development of countries of the world (Frankema, 2023).

## **Measuring human development**

The Human Development Index (HDI) notably combines indicators related to income, education, and health to produce a comprehensive measure of an economy's overall development, economic development, or human development. According to the maiden UNDP (1990) Human Development Report, each component of the HDI is measured in the following way:

- Health measured by life expectancy at birth.
- Education measured as a combination of **adult literacy** (with two-thirds weight) and **gross enrollment** (with one-third weight).
- Wealth measured by **GDP per capita**.

Although, arguments had been postulated over time that the UNDP (1990) HDI measure somewhat remain deficient (Liu et al., 2023), as it fails to account for possible instances of adverse income distribution / income inequality (Anand and Sen, 1994) as well as environmental degradation (Li, 2007), amidst others.

## Methodology

This work therefore is an attempt to undertake a cross-country comparative study of the trend of Human Development progress as measured using the HDI and recorded as data across selected countries following the UNDP regional classification between 1990 and 2013.

In line thereof with the UNDP 2014 Report classification, the human development aggregates which are as follows: Low Human Development (HDI below 0.550), Medium Human

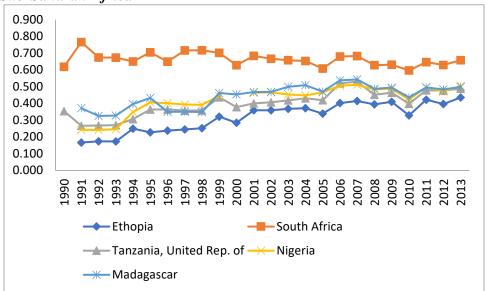
Development (HDI 0.550 to 0.699), High Human Development (HDI 0.700 to 0.799) and Very High Human Development (HDI 0.800 and above) would be adopted in examining the trend.

Also, following the UNDP 2014 Report classification of countries into six regional aggregates, beside its list of industrial countries, a group of five countries to be examined from each region, include: Sub Saharan Africa (Ethiopia, South Africa, United Republic of Tanzania, Nigeria, Madagascar), Arab States (Egypt, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Sudan), Europe and Central Asia (Albania, Turkey, Belarus, Ukraine, Republic of Moldova), South Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan), East Asia and the Pacific (China, Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Viet Nam), and Latin America and the Caribbean (Argentina, Brazil, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Dominican Republic, Trinidad and Tobago). The selected Industrial Countries, for purpose of comparative perspective in milestone of development, are as follows: Australia, Greece, USA, United Kingdom and Hungary.

## **Results and Discussions**

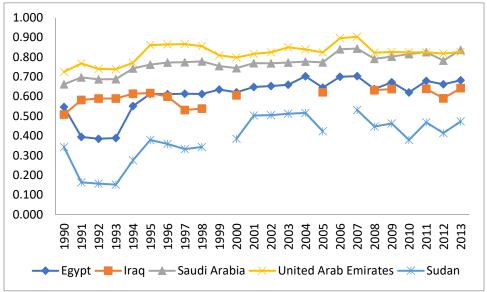
Amidst selected countries for Sub-Saharan Africa (see figure 1), South Africa evidently advances over the years, particularly more than the other countries examined within the period, between medium and high levels of human development with its height in 1991 and maintaining a high level of human development in 1995 and between 1997 and 1999 but had never attained such a high level ever since. The progress made by South Africa could be attributed to the late apartheid period and early post-apartheid period (i.e. post 1994) which envisaged various institutional and structural changes, whereby initially the government segregated education, medical care, beaches, and other public services, and provided black people with services that were often inferior to those of white people. Other countries on the other hand, even Nigeria, though maintained an upward progress in their level of human development over the period but still within the low human development category.





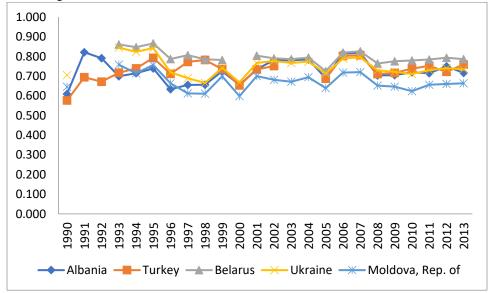
In relation to the Arab States, all selected countries examined except Sudan which remained at low level of human development attributable to her continual social unrest, had progressed through the later three categories of human development (i.e from medium to high and then to very high) with United Arab Emirates having the lead and attaining its height in 2007 and such could be attributed to its maintaining of a liberalist approach to development, despite her religious inclinations (see figure 2). In 2007 however, The United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.) unveiled its National Development Strategy recognizing the need to develop an infrastructure that was not based on oil revenues, and underlying this was a purposeful drive towards education investment and knowledge development in the Arab world, and also working extensively with the United Nations to meet the UN Millennium Development Goals. A notable delimiting factor for Egypt, Iraq and Sudan is the engendered socio-political crisis capable of hindering the already attained progress. It is of note that Iraq vividly lacks data on GNI, so much the reason why HDI was not computed for some years.





Observing the selected countries of Europe and Central Asia, the development trend path seem interwoven which attest to their similarity in their level of human development (see figure 3). All the countries are notable of the developed world, particularly Turkey while Belarus, Ukraine and Republic of Moldova are off-shoot of the defunct communist state – the USSR- whom as at 1991 and 1992 had HDI values of 0.908 and 0.873 respectively (UNDP, 1993). Albania, also a post-socialist republic, seems notable with a high level of human development as she provides a universal health care system and free primary and secondary education.

Figure 3: Europe and Central Asia



Source: UNDP Human Development Report (Several Issues); Author's Analytics

Following is the South Asian region with the Islamic Republic of Iran surpassing all other countries and maintaining a high level of human development since the mid-1990s, after advancing from a medium human development level attained in the early 1990s (see figure 4). Such progress is attributable to her central planning and state ownership framework, aligned with specialised system of education focused to science and technology. India comes next in line but surprisingly though as an emerging economy and almost for all years within the period of study, did not surpass a medium human development level of 0.600 after having a decade of low human development. Underlying other respective countries are issues of political instability accounting for their synonymous low level of human development, unlike Bangladesh (a former part of Pakistan) whom also experiences an adverse income distribution, less women education, lack of healthcare services and high depth of food deficit and environmental degradation while Afghanistan has as well for long being a war-torn zone. In Pakistan however due to accompanying macroeconomic instability since 2007 and limited economic progress, investment in education and health had remained challenging.

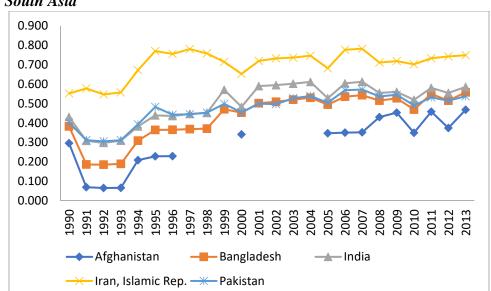


Figure 4: South Asia

Source: UNDP Human Development Report (Several Issues); Author's Analytics

Surprisingly as well, China whom is renowned to lead the East Asia and the Pacific region and as a prominent emerging world power could not sustain a high human development level but maintains a medium human development level most of the years of the study (see figure 5), while evidently is surpassed by Malaysia whom as an emerging economy in attempt to path a specialised economic progress is pioneered by a long term economic development plan launched in 1991 to help her achieve her vision 2020 and such has enabled her maintain a high human development level. Indonesia, Philippines and Viet Nam on the other hand had notably maintained a sustainable medium human development level over the years in view.

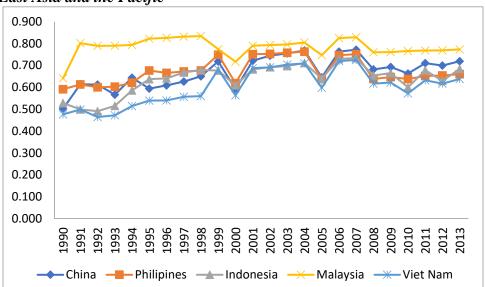


Figure 5: East Asia and the Pacific

Amidst the selected countries for the Latin America and the Caribbean region (see figure 6), all countries except Dominican Republic, seem evident to have a varying but sustainable level of human development ranging within high and very high levels. Progress made in Argentina (a highly developing emerging economy) and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (of the developed world) respectively could be attributed to their relative economic successes – seemingly stable political environment and fair living standard due to her huge participation in the world market. Trinidad and Tobago as a continental country enjoys high industrial productivity with relatively less population – partly due to immigration, an evidence for her progress while Brazil though having to deal with certain socio-economic and socio-political issues had priority to ensure giant strides in macroeconomic stability. Dominican Republic as an island nation is marked with high population turnover, structural inefficiencies and income inequality, but still has been able to ensure an at least varying high level of human development.

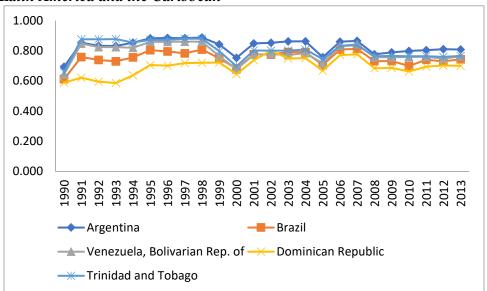


Figure 6: Latin America and the Caribbean

The selected industrial countries, Australia, USA, United Kingdom, Greece and followed by Hungary exhibiting an almost same development path (see figure 7) project an underlying similar approach to pioneering human development by these countries.

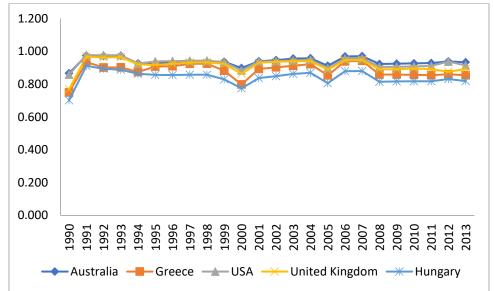


Figure 7: Industrial Countries

Source: UNDP Human Development Report (Several Issues); Author's Analytics

#### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

An overview of selected countries for the regions enlisted had showed that enabling necessary institutional and structural changes, having liberalist approach to development despite religious inclinations as evident in the Arab world, pioneering a National Development Strategy, encouraging education investment and knowledge development, availability of health care system and pre-tertiary education, maintaining a stable political environment and fair living standard, providing structures for high industrial productivity, and ensuring macroeconomic stability are factors among many others that could help foster or advance human development and synonymously economic development while continual social unrest, engendered socio-political crisis, adverse income distribution, less women education, lack of healthcare services and high depth of food deficit and environmental degradation, prevalence of war, macroeconomic instability, non-prioritised investment in education and health, structural inefficiencies and income inequality in the form of underemployment could be limiting factors to human development.

It is of this note that Developing Economies have to build on appropriate key success factors, learn from development success stories, and in every extent recede to the background all forms of militating factors that could impede the presupposed level of development.

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### **APPENDIX**

**Table 1**Countries/Regio

Human Development Index Trends

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Sub-Saharan Africa	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Ethiopia		0.16 6	0.17	0.17	0.24 9	0.22 7	0.23 7	0.24	0.25	0.32
South Africa	0.61 9	0.76 6	0.67 4	0.67	0.65	0.70 5	0.64 9	0.71 6	0.71 7	0.70 2
Tanzania, United Rep. of	0.35 4	0.26 6	0.26 8	0.27	0.30 6	0.36 4	0.36 4	0.35 7	0.35 8	0.43 6
Nigeria		0.24	0.24	0.24 6	0.34	0.40 6	0.40	0.39	0.39	0.44 5
Madagascar		0.37	0.32	0.32 7	0.39 6	0.43	0.34 9	0.35	0.34 8	0.46

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2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
0.284	0.359	0.359	0.367	0.371	0.339	0.402	0.414	0.394	0.409	0.328	0.422	0.396	0.435
0.628	0.684	0.666	0.658	0.653	0.608	0.680	0.683	0.628	0.631	0.597	0.646	0.629	0.658
0.378	0.400	0.407	0.418	0.430	0.419	0.519	0.530	0.451	0.464	0.398	0.478	0.476	0.488
	0.463	0.466	0.453	0.448	0.466	0.506	0.511	0.483	0.488	0.423	0.496	0.471	0.504
0.453	0.468	0.469	0.499	0.509	0.470	0.537	0.543	0.487	0.494	0.435	0.495	0.483	0.498

Source: UNDP Human Development Report (Several Issues)

Table 2

Countries/Regio Human Development Index Trends

Arab States	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
	0.54	0.39	0.38	0.38	0.55	0.61	0.61	0.61	0.61	0.63
Egypt	6	4	5	9	1	3	1	4	2	5
	0.50	0.58	0.58	0.58	0.61	0.61	0.59	0.53	0.53	
Iraq	8	2	9	9	4	7	9	1	8	
	0.66	0.69	0.68	0.68	0.74	0.76	0.77	0.77	0.77	0.75
Saudi Arabia	2	7	7	8	2	2	2	4	8	4
United Arab	0.72	0.76	0.74	0.73	0.77	0.86	0.86	0.86	0.85	0.80
Emirates	5	7	0	8	1	1	4	6	5	9
	0.34	0.16	0.15	0.15	0.27	0.37	0.35	0.33	0.34	
Sudan	2	4	7	2	6	9	9	3	3	

2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
0.621	0.648	0.653	0.659	0.702	0.645	0.700	0.703	0.637	0.672	0.620	0.679	0.662	0.682
0.606					0.621			0.632	0.637		0.639	0.590	0.642
0.744	0.769	0.768	0.772	0.777	0.773	0.840	0.843	0.791	0.802	0.815	0.825	0.782	0.836
0.797	0.816	0.824	0.849	0.839	0.823	0.896	0.903	0.822	0.826	0.824	0.824	0.818	0.827
0.385	0.503	0.505	0.512	0.516	0.423		0.531	0.447	0.463	0.379	0.468	0.414	0.473

Source: UNDP Human Development Report (Several Issues)

**Table 3**Countries/Region

**Human Development Index Trends** 

Europe and Central										
Asia	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Albania	0.609	0.821	0.791	0.699	0.714	0.739	0.633	0.655	0.656	0.725
Turkey	0.576	0.694	0.671	0.717	0.739	0.792	0.711	0.772	0.782	0.735
Belarus				0.861	0.847	0.866	0.787	0.806	0.785	0.782
Ukraine	0.705			0.844	0.823	0.842	0.719	0.689	0.665	0.742
Moldova, Rep. of	0.645			0.758	0.714	0.757	0.663	0.612	0.610	0.699

Source: UNDP Human Development Report (Several Issues)

# Table 3 (Contd.)

2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
0.655	0.735	0.781	0.780	0.784	0.689	0.814	0.818	0.703	0.705	0.719	0.714	0.749	0.716
0.653	0.734	0.751			0.687	0.802	0.806	0.710	0.716	0.738	0.752	0.722	0.759
	0.804	0.790	0.786	0.794	0.725	0.819	0.826	0.764	0.775	0.779	0.784	0.793	0.786
0.668	0.766	0.777	0.766	0.774	0.713	0.789	0.796	0.729	0.722	0.710	0.730	0.740	0.734
0.598	0.700	0.681	0.671	0.694	0.639	0.718	0.720	0.652	0.646	0.623	0.656	0.660	0.663

**Table 4**Countries/Region

## Human Development Index Trends

South Asia	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Afghanistan	0.296	0.069	0.065	0.066	0.208	0.228	0.229			
Bangladesh	0.382	0.186	0.185	0.189	0.309	0.364	0.365	0.368	0.371	0.470
India	0.431	0.308	0.297	0.309	0.382	0.439	0.436	0.446	0.451	0.571
Iran, Islamic Rep.	0.552	0.577	0.547	0.557	0.672	0.770	0.755	0.780	0.758	0.714
Pakistan	0.402	0.311	0.305	0.311	0.393	0.483	0.442	0.445	0.453	0.498

**Source**: UNDP Human Development Report (Several Issues)

Table 4 (Contd.)

2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
0.341					0.347	0.350	0.352	0.430	0.453	0.349	0.458	0.374	0.468
0.453	0.502	0.509	0.520	0.530	0.494	0.535	0.543	0.515	0.527	0.469	0.549	0.515	0.558
0.483	0.590	0.595	0.602	0.611	0.527	0.604	0.612	0.554	0.560	0.519	0.581	0.554	0.586
0.652	0.719	0.732	0.736	0.746	0.681	0.777	0.782	0.711	0.718	0.702	0.733	0.742	0.749
0.454	0.499	0.497	0.527	0.539	0.504	0.568	0.572	0.536	0.545	0.490	0.531	0.515	0.537

**Source**: UNDP Human Development Report (Several Issues)

Table 5

Countries/Region

East Asia and the Pacific	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
China	0.502	0.614	0.612	0.566	0.644	0.594	0.609	0.626	0.650	0.718
Philippines	0.591	0.613	0.600	0.603	0.621	0.677	0.666	0.672	0.677	0.749
Indonesia	0.528	0.499	0.491	0.515	0.586	0.637	0.641	0.668	0.679	0.677
Malaysia	0.641	0.802	0.789	0.790	0.794	0.822	0.826	0.832	0.834	0.774
Viet Nam	0.476	0.498	0.464	0.472	0.514	0.539	0.540	0.557	0.560	0.682

Human Development Index Trends

Table 5	Contd.	)
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2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
0.591	0.721	0.745	0.755	0.768	0.645	0.763	0.772	0.682	0.693	0.663	0.710	0.699	0.719
0.619	0.751	0.753	0.758	0.763	0.638	0.747	0.751	0.638	0.647	0.638	0.652	0.654	0.660
0.609	0.682	0.692	0.697	0.711	0.640	0.729	0.734	0.654	0.665	0.600	0.678	0.629	0.684
0.717	0.790	0.793	0.796	0.805	0.747	0.825	0.829	0.760	0.761	0.766	0.768	0.769	0.773
0.563	0.688	0.691	0.704	0.709	0.598	0.720	0.725	0.617	0.622	0.572	0.632	0.617	0.638

**Source**: UNDP Human Development Report (Several Issues).

**Table 6**Countries/Region

Human Development Index Trends

Latin America and the Caribbean	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Argentina	0.694	0.854	0.833	0.832	0.854	0.883	0.885	0.884	0.888	0.842
Brazil	0.612	0.759	0.739	0.730	0.756	0.804	0.796	0.783	0.809	0.750
Venezuela, Bolivarian Rep. of	0.644	0.848	0.824	0.824	0.820	0.859	0.859	0.861	0.860	0.765
Dominican Republic	0.589	0.622	0.595	0.586	0.638	0.705	0.701	0.718	0.720	0.722
Trinidad and Tobago	0.658	0.876	0.876	0.877	0.855	0.872	0.872	0.880	0.880	0.798

Table 6 (Contd.)

2000		2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
0.753	0.849	0.853	0.863	0.863	0.758	0.861	0.866	0.777	0.789	0.799	0.804	0.811	0.808
0.682	0.777	0.775	0.792	0.792	0.705	0.808	0.813	0.731	0.732	0.699	0.740	0.730	0.744
0.677	0.775	0.778	0.772	0.784	0.716	0.833	0.844	0.758	0.757	0.759	0.761	0.748	0.764
0.645	0.737	0.801	0.749	0.751	0.668	0.771	0.777	0.684	0.686	0.663	0.695	0.702	0.700
0.697	0.802	0.801	0.801	0.809	0.745	0.832	0.837	0.764	0.766	0.764	0.764	0.760	0.766

**Source**: UNDP Human Development Report (Several Issues)

Table 7	
Countries	

Human Development Index Trends

Industrial Countries	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Australia	0.866	0.973	0.971	0.972	0.926	0.927	0.929	0.931	0.932	0.936
Greece	0.749	0.934	0.901	0.902	0.874	0.907	0.909	0.923	0.924	0.881
USA	0.858	0.976	0.976	0.976	0.925	0.938	0.940	0.942	0.943	0.934
United Kingdom	0.768	0.967	0.962	0.964	0.919	0.916	0.924	0.931	0.932	0.923
Hungary	0.701	0.911	0.893	0.887	0.863	0.856	0.855	0.857	0.857	0.829

**Source**: UNDP Human Development Report (Several Issues)

Tab	le 7	(Contd.)	)

2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
0.898	0.939	0.946	0.955	0.957	0.912	0.968	0.970	0.922	0.924	0.926	0.928	0.938	0.933
0.798	0.892	0.902	0.912	0.921	0.853	0.938	0.942	0.858	0.858	0.856	0.854	0.860	0.854
0.883	0.937	0.939	0.944	0.948	0.897	0.955	0.956	0.905	0.905	0.908	0.911	0.937	0.914
0.863	0.930	0.936	0.939	0.940	0.888	0.945	0.947	0.890	0.890	0.895	0.891	0.875	0.892
0.774	0.837	0.848	0.862	0.869	0.805	0.878	0.879	0.814	0.816	0.817	0.817	0.831	0.818