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ASEAN's Improvements in Human Development Level

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DATA AT A GLANCE

ASEAN's Improvements in Human Development Level

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Since 1990, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (<http://hdr.undp.org/>) has been ranking the world's countries annually according to the level of human development (HD). The rank score, from 0.0 to 1.0, suggests that the higher the score, the higher the level of HD. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) appears to take pride in the HD level of their member-countries as the rank implies, among others, regional and global competitiveness. Understandably, some researchers would like to know—in a cursory manner—the prevailing HD level of the member-countries of the ASEAN as well as the improvements in their HD levels over the years, if any. Human development should be very relevant to the bloc, given its stature as a global powerhouse (and said to be the world's largest economy by 2030).

The results of our re-analysis of the UNDP's human development index data in 2009 and in 2015 are shown in Table 1. In 2015, of the 10 member-countries, two had a very high HD level (i.e., Singapore and Brunei), two had a high HD level (i.e., Malaysia and Thailand), while the rest had a medium HD level. The absolute positive changes in the HD scores of these countries (range: 0.096-0.207 in Column 3), which were obtained by subtracting the 1990 HD scores from the 2015 HD scores, indicate that all member-countries had improved their HD levels over 15 years.

Closer scrutiny of the % changes in the HD scores among these countries suggests, however, that while the improvements are dramatic for the most part, they are not uniform. Four countries had a particularly high level of improvement in their HD level ($\geq 43.2\%$ for Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam), four countries had a medium level of improvement (22.7%-30.5% for Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia), and two countries, with glaringly contrasting socioeconomic conditions, had a low

level of improvement ($\leq 16.4\%$ for Brunei and the Philippines). These data are instructive, as they tend to reflect the intensity and strength of the political will and competitiveness of the member countries.

Table 1
Changes in the Level of Human Development (HD) of ASEAN Member-Countries, 1990-2015

Countries/2015 HD Rank/Level Score	1990 HD Rank/Level Score	HD Level Score: Absolute Change, 1990-2015	HD Level Score: % Change, 1990-2015
Singapore (5/very high, 0.925)	0.718	0.207	28.8
Brunei (30/very high, 0.865)	0.782	0.083	10.6
Malaysia (59/high, 0.789)	0.643	0.146	22.7
Thailand (87/high, 0.740)	0.574	0.166	28.9
Indonesia (113/medium, 0.689)	0.528	0.161	30.5
Vietnam (115/medium, 0.683)	0.477	0.206	43.2
Philippines (116/medium, 0.682)	0.586	0.096	16.4
Laos (138/medium, 0.586)	0.397	0.189	47.6
Cambodia (143/medium, 0.563)	0.357	0.206	57.7
Myanmar (145/medium, 0.556)	0.353	0.203	57.5

Source: United Nations Development Program (2016)

Reference

United Nations Development Program. (2016). *Human development index*. Retrieved from <http://hdr.undp.org/>

DATA AT A GLANCE

ASEAN's Sex Differences in Education Versus Labor

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Having formal education and paid work in modern societies are indispensable goals for adult persons (i.e., those aged 15 and older). Age-old social structures, however, such as sex, are constraining many individuals from aiming, let alone attaining, the said goals. Sex does not only neatly categorize individuals into males and females, but also bestows them (males) with, or deprives them (females) of, the attendant rights, privileges, and resources.

Throughout the ASEAN where equality between the sexes is fostered as a national development goal, it would be interesting to discover how far member-countries have gone in terms of closing the gaps in the number of their males and females who have completed secondary education and participated in the labor force. What is the prevailing extent of sex-based differences in these respects? Table 1 presents the computed results from 10 ASEAN member-countries.

Data reveal that, across the ASEAN, there are more males than females with secondary education and who are in the labor force. However, this difference is narrower in education (range: -7.13%-12.9%) than in the labor force (range: -0.68%-32.9%). Considerable sex differences (>10.0%) in education are found in three countries (i.e., Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam), while parallel differences in the labor force are found in seven countries. In a few countries, females outnumber males in education (i.e., in Myanmar and the Philippines) or labor (i.e., in Laos). The ASEAN appears to have succeeded more in bridging the sex gaps in education than in labor. Structural, institutional, and sociocultural influences could be some potential explanations for these gaps.

Table 1

ASEAN's Percentages of Males and Females Aged 15 and Older, With At Least Secondary Education and in the Labor Force, and Sex Differences

Country	Education			Labor		
	Male	Female	Difference	Male	Female	Difference
Brunei	69.6	67.7	1.90	75.3	51.0	24.4
Cambodia	26.1	13.2	12.9	86.7	75.5	11.2
Indonesia	51.7	42.9	8.81	83.9	50.9	32.9
Laos	42.8	30.4	12.4	77.0	77.7	-0.68
Malaysia	79.1	75.4	3.65	77.6	49.3	28.3
Myanmar	20.0	27.1	-7.13	81.1	75.1	5.93
Philippines	70.3	72.8	-2.57	78.8	50.5	28.3
Thailand	45.8	40.9	4.89	80.2	62.9	17.2
Singapore	81.9	75.5	6.39	76.4	58.2	18.2
Vietnam	76.7	64.0	12.8	83.2	73.8	9.39

Source: United Nations Development Program (2016)

Reference

United Nations Development Program. (2016). *Human development index*. Retrieved from <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/GII>