Theme 7.1.1 How is social development measured?

Measuring social development

Social development differs to economic development since it focuses primarily upon social indicators, such as:

- life expectancy
- birth and death rates
- infant mortality rate (IMR)
- literacy rates.

This data is easily quantifiable and therefore useful as a measure of development.

However, data can be misleading and there can be variations between regions, social classes and genders.

For example, there are differences in literacy rates in India depending on location.

There can be multiple reasons for these variations including:

- wealth
- gender
- religion
- social class.

Changing life expectancy

Since 1980, average life expectancy has increased globally. There are large variations in life expectancy between different parts of the world, mainly caused by differences in public health, medical care and diet.

Using health data as a measure of development

Infant mortality rate (IMR) and life expectancy can be used to measure the health of a population.

A number of factors contribute to improved life expectancy and lower infant mortality.

Infant mortality rate	Life expectancy
Clean water	Improved medical care
Vaccinations	Healthier diet
Improved sanitation	Vaccination programmes (flu)
Improved maternal healthcare	Lifestyle improvement (safer and less physically demanding employment)

Social development continuum

Development can be seen as a continuum, similar to the concept of classifying high-income countries (HICs), newly-industrialised countries (NICs) and low-income countries (LICs), which focus on wealth.

The easiest way to plot social development is by using the HDI (Human Development Index).

The HDI provides countries with a score between 0–1; the closer to 1, the more developed the country. This is calculated using the following:

- GNI $ (Gross National Income)
- life expectancy
- ducation – literacy rate
- education – number of years in school.

Countries may then be ranked by their level of development, using social indicators primarily.