

Lakner, Christoph, World Bank
clakner@worldbank.org
Authors: Jolliffe, Dean Serajuddin, Umar

Title: Measurement of Poverty Around the World in the age of Global Goals



National Governments, international development agencies and non-governmental organizations are committed to reducing, and ultimately eradicating, poverty in all its multiple forms and dimensions. Thus, monitoring the number of people who live in poverty has become increasingly important area of statistics, also for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). But there is great variation of how poverty is defined and measured around the world. National household surveys and poverty measurements are the foundation for the production of all official poverty statistics, national and international, but there is substantial heterogeneity exhibited in terms of how poverty is measured and in the resulting indicators, not only between countries but also within countries over time. This paper expands on a review of poverty measurement methodologies and data availability around the world, conducted by the World Bank for the United Nations Statistical Commission. We survey common poverty measurement concepts, definitions, and methods used in national poverty measurement around the world, including the use of income, consumption, subjective and multidimensional approaches. We further review how international poverty measures, including those tracked by SDG 1, relate to and rely on national definitions, methods, and data. We critically assess how methodological and data differences can lead to different understandings of the state of national and global poverty. Our study finds that while the availability of international poverty statistics is greater, and their quality better, than ever before, the data gaps and the complexity of ensuring comparability suggest that more and better data is needed. Comparability of poverty indicators across countries and across time remain a challenge to both understanding who are the poor today and how much progress has been made. Even the most basic poverty data remain sparse in some parts of the world and substantial investments in statistical efforts are needed to better understand progress against poverty. The paper illustrates important challenges in defining and tracking indicators for global development goals, relevant to other SDGs, beyond those related to poverty.