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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# A review of the use of multidimensional poverty measures

Informing advocacy, policy and accountability to address child poverty

**Prepared by**

UNICEF

3 United Nations Plaza  
New York, NY, 10017, USA

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Visual Communication Design:

Benussi & the Fish

Copy editing: Laura Evans

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Research and writing led by Sólrún (Sola) Engilbertsdóttir, David Stewart and Enkhzul Altangerel.  
Qualitative assessment led by Justyna Bandola-Gill, independent consultant. Review of key documents and multidimensional poverty methodologies and select country case examples led by Paola Ballon, independent consultant. For full list of acknowledgement refer to the [full report](#).



## Introduction

With its inclusion in the SDGs, multidimensional poverty measurement, including multidimensional child poverty, is now firmly established as a fundamental approach to understanding the situation of children in poverty as well as holding governments to account to respond to it. Work on multidimensional poverty had been growing significantly before its inclusion in the SDGs; to date, UNICEF has supported governments in producing over 100 national child poverty reports and continues to support measurement, analysis and policy design in many more countries.

Despite the increased prominence and adoption of multidimensional poverty measures both globally and nationally, there have been few, if any, comprehensive assessments analyzing the ways that measurement and analysis can impact on national policies, programmes

and accountability mechanisms and ultimately lead to the reduction of multidimensional child poverty.

This review aims to fill this gap. It is based on an extensive review of the literature, complimented by qualitative interviews with key stakeholders working in the area. Its focus has been on actual examples and use rather than prospective or possible avenues in which multidimensional poverty measures could influence policies and programmes. While UNICEF's focus is on children, there is much to be learned from broader multidimensional poverty measures and how they have changed policies and programmes that pertain to children as well as impact children directly. As such, the focus of the review was multidimensional poverty analysis in general, with specific attention on multidimensional child poverty where possible.

## Methodology

Over 90 reports and papers on the topic of multidimensional poverty were reviewed, followed by an in-depth analysis of 25 reports, zooming specifically in on the policy recommendations included in multidimensional poverty analytical reports. Key informant interviews were conducted with 24 stakeholders involved in both the measurement and the use of multidimensional poverty measures, including academics, researchers, and policymakers in government and international organizations. Country case studies were gathered from key literature as well through recommendations from key stakeholders. The review provides documentation of 33 country examples documenting experiences from six regions, featuring diverse political and economic contexts.

While the relationship between evidence generation and policy and programme change is complex, it is clear from the review that multidimensional poverty measures have led to an array of impacts. However, behind this, the review found significant nuance in the pathways leading to these impacts and limitations on what can be expected

of multidimensional poverty and child poverty measures. To organise and evaluate these impacts, this review builds on the milestones of the [SDG Guide to End Child Poverty](#), and is organized by three key areas or 'impact pathways' (see Figure 1):

1. Child poverty advocacy – raising awareness and changing the language and concept of poverty (aligned with [Milestone 3](#) in the SDG Guide to End Child Poverty);
2. Using multidimensional poverty measures to identify policies and programmes to reduce child poverty (aligned with [Milestone 4](#) in the SDG Guide to End Child Poverty); and
3. Embedding multidimensional poverty in government agendas and strengthening accountability (aligned with [Milestone 5](#) in the SDG Guide to End Child Poverty).

All three impact pathways are outlined in more detail below.

**Figure 1: Milestones on a pathway to address child poverty and the corresponding review organizing framework**



### **Impact pathway 1: Child poverty advocacy – raising awareness and changing the language and concept of poverty.**

#### **Country snapshot**

##### ***Thailand: Taking progressive steps towards redefining the concept of poverty.***

Thailand has predominantly used monetary measures to assess poverty, including for children but is increasingly exploring and applying multiple dimensions of poverty, and have adopted a child multidimensional poverty index (c-MPI) as the official measure to assess progress towards SDG 1. Thailand's c-MPI has also been instrumental in strengthening advocacy efforts for children, by providing rich information about poor children: the extent, geography, and experience of multidimensional child poverty.

The most common, bordering on universal, use of multidimensional poverty measures has been for advocacy, both to engage with policymakers and the public. Of all the impact pathways assessed in this report, this was the one area where it was beyond our capacity to undertake a comprehensive review and assessment of the extent of practice and examples.

- ✓ Through advocacy, multidimensional poverty measurements, including those focusing on children, have consistently played a critical role in changing the understanding of poverty to go beyond income and to encompass the multiple dimensions of poverty, including the specific deprivations faced by children.
- ✓ Child poverty reports have highlighted the importance of addressing child multidimensional poverty, including – almost universally – its higher prevalence compared to adult poverty.
- ✓ Multidimensional poverty measures have a strong ability to generate media attention and have been used effectively to reach wide and diverse audiences, gaining the attention of both the public and policymakers, and mobilizing support for comprehensive policy actions to tackle multidimensional poverty and child poverty.
- ✓ Where advocacy has been combined with clear policy actions and requests, the pathways to changes in

policies can be seen clearly. This is considered in detail in the following section on the foundations needed to successfully impact poverty policies and programmes.

- ~ The pathways through which advocacy leads to policy and programme change are often indirect. They lay important groundwork, but it is often difficult to directly attribute changes to their influence. These are considered in more detail below.

Considerations: Multidimensional poverty measurement is commonly and effectively used for advocacy. Depending on advocacy areas of focus and the audience in question, some measures may be more effective for advocacy. For example, comparing adults and children might be useful to highlight that children are more likely to be in poverty than adults and connect to overall poverty debates, which has been done with disaggregated measures such as the MPI. At the same time, advocacy focused specifically on children and more connected to rights-based approaches have been conducted effectively with both the MODA and Bristol methodologies.

### **Impact pathway 2: Using multidimensional poverty measures to identify policies and programmes to reduce child poverty.**

Examples show a common set of policy recommendations emerging from multidimensional poverty analysis in general and multidimensional child poverty analysis specifically. The four most common key policy recommendations emerging from multidimensional poverty analysis are:

#### **Country snapshot**

##### ***Panama: Using national and child-specific MPI to inform national poverty reduction plan.***

In Panama, the national MPI and child-specific MPI were used to select 63 priority districts and 300 townships for the national poverty reduction plan (Plan Colmena), complementing income-based measures and other assessments.

1. **The broad targeting of geographic areas and groups in poverty based on a multidimensional poverty measure.**
  - ✓ Reports frequently highlight disparities in multidimensional poverty rates across geographic areas and particular groups (for example by ethnicity and gender) where data is available and recommend broad shifts in policy in response.
  - X However, due to limitations in the surveys from which multidimensional poverty measures are developed, national multidimensional poverty measures are generally not used to target programmes at household or individual level.
  
2. **The importance of multidimensional poverty measures in guiding multisectoral investment and coordination.**
  - ✓ Corresponding to the multisectoral nature of multidimensional poverty, reports frequently point to the need for investment across sectors and better coordination, often pointing to areas of deprivation overlap.
  - ~ Multidimensional poverty measures have occasionally been used to direct focus for the implementation of multisectoral programmes, for example identifying priority geographical areas for multisectoral interventions.
  - X There have been some efforts to analyse multidimensional poverty to identify an overall optimal policy package to respond, but they are complex and have not been used in practice.
  
3. **The use of multidimensional poverty measures to guide and influence national and sub-national budgets.**
  - ✓ Recommendations include the importance of increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of budgeting to reduce multidimensional poverty.
  - ~ There are some limited examples of multidimensional poverty measures being used to directly guide internal budget allocation formulas (Nepal and Bhutan). But these are currently rare.

### Country snapshot

***Sierra Leone: Targeting pro-poor initiatives to certain locations based on vulnerability profiles.***

In Sierra Leone, vulnerability and equity profiles were developed for all districts, enabling the government and UNICEF to better target multisectoral pro-poor initiatives particularly focused on addressing geographic disparities in poverty distribution.

***Mexico: Using a multidimensional poverty measure to design and coordinate multisectoral policies***

developed national strategies and design to coordinate multisectoral policies, with a reduction in the MPI as the main goal. Convening different sectors to discuss how to collectively reduce multidimensional poverty. Multidimensional poverty reduction a common framework for the different actors to coordinate, prioritize and plan.

### Country snapshot

***Bhutan: Multidimensional poverty as the key criteria for allocation of resources to local governments.***

As a budgeting tool, the MPI has been used in Bhutan as one of the five criteria for allocation of national resources to local government since 2013. A resource allocation formula (RAF), which was updated during the 11th five-year plan (2013-2018), considers multidimensional poverty as a crucial factor by putting 45 per cent weight in its calculations.



4. **Social protection is commonly included as a policy recommendation for addressing multidimensional poverty.**

- ✓ As a programme with multisectoral impacts, social protection frequently emerges as an important policy direction. Within UNICEF, this may also reflect the dual child poverty and social protection role of teams.
- ~ However, there are not examples of multidimensional poverty measures being used to specifically target social protection programmes to households/individuals. This has been done, but with secondary data collection efforts and applying multidimensional poverty index which differs from the national multidimensional poverty index.

Considerations: As multidimensional poverty measures most commonly identify broad policy conclusions, the choice of measure will generally not differentiate policy conclusions. Accordingly, advocacy and ownership considerations might best drive choice of measure, and those working on multidimensional poverty should be prepared for extra research and analysis beyond the multidimensional poverty measure to derive policy

### Country snapshot

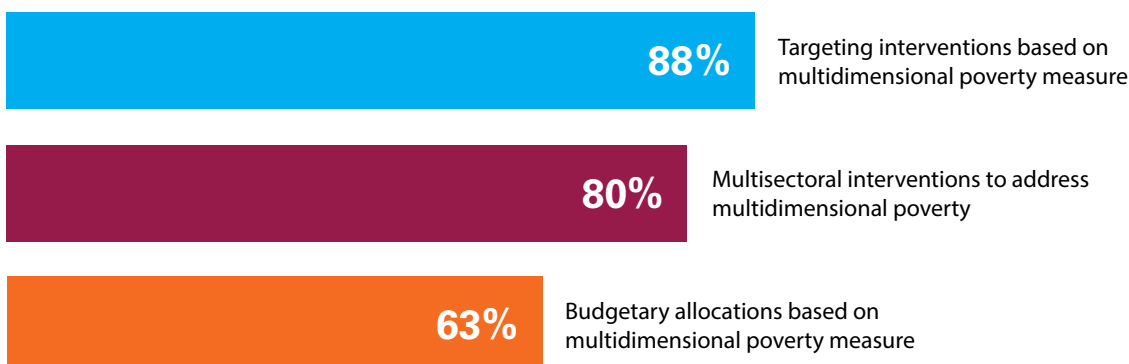
***Kenya: Addressing multidimensional child poverty at the local level through integrated planning.***

The data and evidence generated by Kenya's multidimensional child poverty measurement was instrumental in the formulation of sub-national development plans (County Integrated Development Plans or CIDP), many of which now prioritize key issues in WASH, child protection, HIV and AIDS as highlighted in the disaggregated multidimensional child poverty measurement.

conclusions. Some important exceptions to this are the guiding of budget allocation formulas in two countries (Bhutan and Nepal), and the example of Mexico, where the national multidimensional poverty indicator is linked directly to progress in sectors and triggers shifts in government focus to reduce multidimensional poverty.

**Figure 2: Common policy recommendations to address child poverty**

Proportion of reports



### ***Impact pathway 3: Embedding multidimensional poverty in government agendas and strengthening accountability.***

Including multidimensional poverty in key national development plans or poverty reduction strategies can contribute to the creation of high-level political commitment at the national level, laying the foundation for increased and more coordinated actions to combat child poverty, as well as funding to ensure implementation. They can also provide a mechanisms for accountability through monitoring progress towards agreed child poverty targets.

- ✓ In several countries' multidimensional poverty measures, including for children, have been included in key national development frameworks and plans. This provides long-term commitment for addressing child poverty and gives clear accountability to governments.
- ✓ Increasingly, and supported by the push of the SDGs, multidimensional child poverty (baseline indicators and targets) has been included as a key indicator in

### **Country snapshot**

#### ***Burkina Faso: Piloting an integrated social protection programme based on multidimensional child poverty profiling.***

A multidimensional child poverty study revealed high rates of multidimensional poverty in Burkina Faso. To address this, an integrated child-sensitive social protection intervention was piloted in the four regions with high incidence of multidimensional child poverty.

- national monitoring and evaluation frameworks, again underlining the clear accountability of governments.
- ~ While these approaches increase long-term commitment and government accountability, their ultimate impact on children depends on national commitment and capacity to execute established plans.

## **Foundations for effectively using multidimensional poverty for policy and programme change**

The review also highlighted important foundations in the processes of developing and using multidimensional poverty and child poverty measures to ensure impact. While measurement and analysis are necessary steps leading to policy and programme change on child poverty, there are many important considerations in both the process and the country context that are important to achieving impact. These include:

- ✓ **Coalition building and the importance of leadership**
  - Building relationships with a wide range of partners adds crucial strength and momentum to advocacy work. It enables broader reach of analysis findings, promotes the exchange of knowledge and expertise, builds the capacity of the actors involved, facilitates access to decision makers who can influence policy decisions, and supports resource mobilization.
- Strong leaders or champions to support approaches which address multidimensional poverty have been crucial in many instances. These champions don't have to be high-level political figures, but those who strongly believe in the approach and will support and sustain it over time.
- ✓ **Awareness of the politics in policymaking processes**
  - The politics surrounding social policy formulation and implementation is complex, often involving a number of stakeholders. Understanding and engaging in these political aspects has an impact on the adoption and effectiveness of multidimensional poverty measures.
- ✓ **Considerations regarding which multidimensional poverty approach to select**

- Depending on the dimensions, indicators, approach to aggregation and level of analysis, different measures can produce different results.
- However, based on our review of how multidimensional poverty and child poverty measures influence policies, different measures rarely produce different policy conclusions. Regardless of the approach, multidimensional poverty measurements can have broad indirect impact through bringing together stakeholders, improving coordination among sectors, and building a foundation for broad policy recommendations.
- Accordingly, advocacy and ownership are important considerations in driving the choice of measure for policy and programme change.
- There are some important but limited exceptions where the choice of measure will produce different policy conclusions. For example, in the

rare example where a multidimensional poverty measure has been directly used as criteria for budget formula, the choice of measure may have significantly different conclusions.

✓ **The importance of further analysis – beyond the multidimensional poverty measure**

- Measuring poverty with a multidimensional approach can provide a more nuanced picture of how children experience poverty, identifying who the most vulnerable are and in what ways they are deprived, and providing important insights for designing and implementing anti-poverty policies.
- To determine the specific mix of multisectoral interventions that can reduce child deprivations effectively and sustainably, further analysis, data and evidence need to be conducted and considered.

## Future directions

While the review focused on the existing uses and experiences of multidimensional poverty measures, some important possible avenues for future work also emerged, including better understanding the policy mix to address multidimensional poverty, improving data collection for stronger indicators to capture individual child deprivations, the potential to use multidimensional poverty approaches for more effective targeting of programmes where appropriate, and the potential of adapting multidimensional poverty measures to inform fragile and humanitarian settings, including their use during a crisis.

Finally, the review and interviews conducted during the qualitative assessment also revealed that many powerful examples, including the details of influence and political engagement, have not been documented. While challenging, increasing this documentation would strengthen the knowledge base and help further improve the understanding effectiveness of using multidimensional poverty analysis to reduce child poverty.

Click [here](#) for the full review report.



# Annex 1: list of country examples included in the full report

## Section 1: Impact pathways from multidimensional poverty and child poverty measurement to policy and programme change

### *Impact pathway 1: Child poverty advocacy - raising awareness and changing the language and concept of poverty*

Global:	Children disproportionately affected by multidimensional poverty
Afghanistan:	Using multidimensional poverty measures for advocacy
Argentina:	Multidimensional poverty analysis for child poverty advocacy
Brazil:	Using multidimensional child poverty analysis for public and political advocacy
Malaysia:	Multidimensional poverty analysis prompting government commitment to address child deprivations
Thailand:	Taking progressive steps towards redefining the concept of poverty

### *Impact pathway 2: Using multidimensional poverty measures to identify policies and programmes to reduce child poverty*

#### **A. Broad prioritization and targeting of geographic areas**

Burkina Faso:	Multidimensional poverty analysis informing cash targeting
Jordan:	Targeting programme clients through two-step multidimensional vulnerability assessment
Oaxaca, Mexico:	Using a multidimensional poverty measure to target municipalities
Panama:	Using national and child-specific MPIs to inform national poverty reduction plan

#### **B. Multisectoral prioritization and coordination to respond to the multidimensional nature of poverty**

Mexico:	Using a multidimensional poverty measure to design and coordinate multisectoral policies
Sierra Leone:	Targeting pro-poor initiatives to certain locations based on vulnerability profiles
Colombia:	Simulating policy packages to address multidimensional poverty
Mexico:	Using multisectoral policies to reduce multidimensional poverty index
UK and USA:	Identifying policy packages to achieve monetary child poverty targets through microsimulations

#### **C. Using a multidimensional poverty measure to guide and influence national budgets**

Cambodia:	Multidimensional child poverty guiding annual budget formulation
Mexico:	Multidimensional poverty progress informing budgetary recommendations
Costa Rica:	Multidimensional poverty guiding budgeting in key sectors
Vietnam:	Using an MPI to target social assistance programmes and monitor progress
Afghanistan:	Using an MPI to inform budgeting
Uganda:	Using multidimensional child poverty metrics to suggest equitable fiscal policy approaches
Bhutan:	Multidimensional poverty as the key criteria for allocation of resources to local governments
Nepal:	Multidimensional poverty criteria for allocation of equalization fund to subnational governments
Puebla, Mexico:	Optimizing the impact of public investments through multidimensional poverty measurement-based targeting

#### ***D. Social protection as a priority response to address multidimensional poverty***

Afghanistan:	Influencing the development of national social protection policies
Burkina Faso:	Piloting an integrated social protection programme based on multidimensional child poverty profiling
Morocco:	Influencing national social protection policies through child poverty measurement
Colombia:	Using a multidimensional poverty measure to target those in poverty
Vietnam:	Using an MPI to target social assistance programmes and monitor progress

#### ***Impact pathway 3: Embedding multidimensional poverty in government agendas and strengthening accountability***

Colombia:	Using an MPI to evaluate national development
Ethiopia:	Integrating multidimensional child poverty indicators into national plans
Ghana:	Informing national and local development plans with insights from multidimensional child poverty measurement
Kenya:	Addressing multidimensional child poverty at the local level through integrated planning
Lao PDR:	Bringing a child-focus into the national development plan with multidimensional child poverty analysis
Mali:	Strengthening ownership and sustainability of the measure through capacity building of national actors
New Zealand:	Institutionalizing child poverty measurement and response
Afghanistan:	National statistics leading the process
Armenia:	Building and institutionalizing routine multidimensional child poverty measurement
Colombia:	Institutionalizing multidimensional poverty measurement
Iceland:	Implementing a children's quality of life dashboard
Mexico:	Monitoring multidimensional poverty under an autonomous entity
Thailand:	Adopting a c-MPI to monitor progress on SDG 1
Uganda:	Multidimensional child poverty measures among national routine indicators
Vietnam:	Using an MPI to target social assistance programmes and monitor progress
Sri Lanka:	Adapting the main national poverty survey to provide data for multidimensional child poverty measurement

## **Section 2: Foundations for effectively using multidimensional poverty measurement for policy and programme change**

### ***Coalition building, national leadership, and the policymaking process***

Chile:	Highest level political commitment to multidimensional poverty measurement
El Salvador:	Technical and Planning Secretariat leading the process
Mexico:	Using an independent multidimensional poverty measure
Morocco:	Institutionalizing multidimensional child poverty measurement through cross-country partnership
Thailand:	Bringing stakeholders together to establish a c-MPI
MPPN:	Supporting countries to design and use multidimensional poverty measures

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