

OPHI and UNDP Regional MPI Brief

Multidimensional poverty in
Voluntary National Reviews, 2016–2021

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Acknowledgements

This brief was written by Felipe Roa-Clavijo, Johanna Andrango, Jakob Dirksen and Alexandra Fortacz, all of the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative at the University of Oxford. The authors would like to thank Corinne Mitchell and Sabina Alkire for their feedback and suggestions. The authors also gratefully acknowledge support from the United Nations Development Programme in commissioning, reviewing and contributing to this brief. Special thanks to Mansour Ndiaye and Nathalie Bouche of the Inclusive Growth team at the UNDP Bureau for Programme and Policy Support (BPPS).

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Introduction

In 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recognized eradicating poverty as the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. The first goal of the SDGs seeks to “end poverty in all its forms and dimensions.” The SDGs extended the definition of poverty used by the Millennium Development Goals to include multidimensional poverty. Its targets are to eradicate extreme (monetary) poverty and to “reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women, and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions.” This means that evaluating and monitoring progress needs to go beyond unidimensional monetary approaches and measures.

The Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) are the mechanism for UN Member States to voluntarily report on progress towards the SDG targets. They are annually submitted to the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and are available via the Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform. Besides showcasing national progress, VNRs are an important tool for sharing experiences internationally, including successes, challenges and lessons learned.

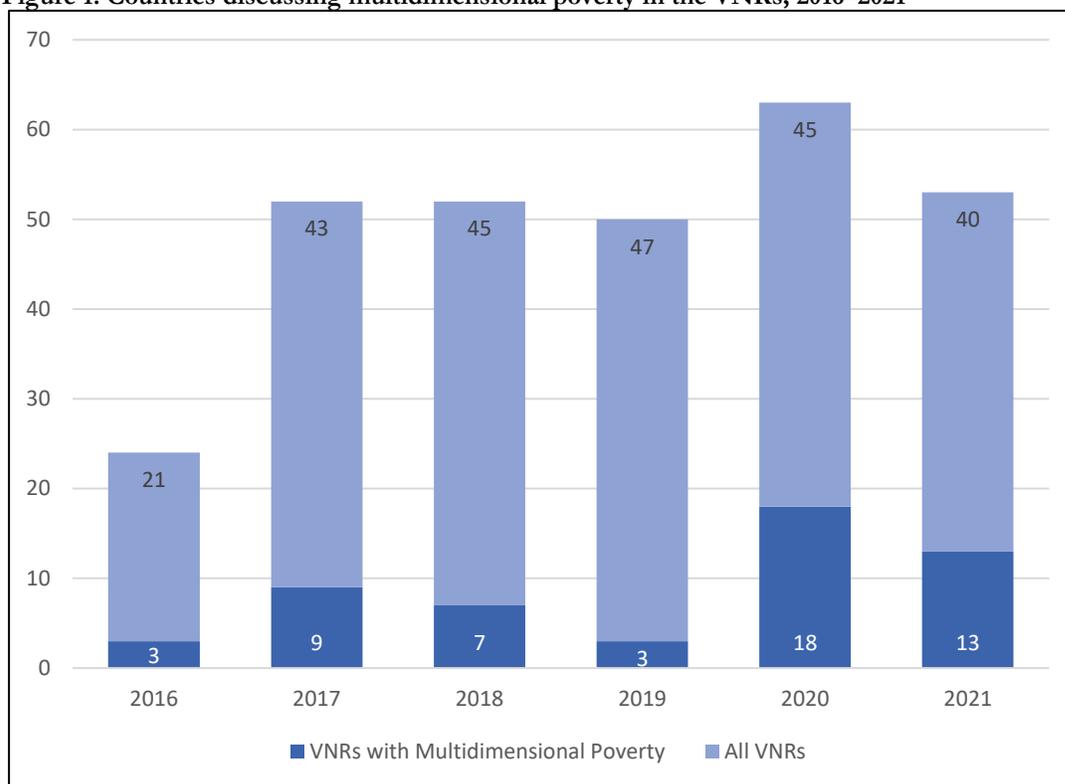
This policy brief reviews the 240 publicly available VNR documents to explore the main ways in which countries have approached, discussed and reported on multidimensional poverty, using a multidimensional poverty measure, since the launch of the SDGs (see Methodological note at the end of this report).¹ A great number of countries endorse and support a multidimensional understanding of poverty. Additionally, many countries are not only reporting national poverty levels, but are also analysing multidimensional poverty reduction by gender, age, geographic areas and region and ethnicity. Some countries are also emphasising the importance of the MPI for policy and sharing experiences of policy uses of the data and measures.

Countries are reporting multidimensional poverty in their VNRs

Multidimensional poverty has been reported every year and has gained increased attention in recent years. Between 2016 and 2021, a total of 41 countries across all regions of the world have submitted 53 VNRs discussing multidimensional poverty. From 6 to 40 percent of VNRs each year reported on multidimensional poverty.

¹ Please note that on the VNR website, 247 countries are listed. See <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=30022&nr=2625&menu=3170>, last accessed: 2022-03-15. However, seven of these – (Samoa (2016), Kiribati (2018), Nauru (2019), Barbados (2020), Saint Vincent (2020), Bahamas (2021) and Guatemala (2021) – were not available.

Figure 1. Countries discussing multidimensional poverty in the VNRs, 2016–2021



In 2016, three countries belonging to the Arab States and Latin America and the Caribbean region (LAC) reported multidimensional poverty in their VNRs (Table 1). In 2017, there was an increase, with more countries participating from LAC, as well as Central Asia and Europe, South Asia and Africa. In 2018 and 2019, coverage further expanded in Asia and the Pacific and to sub-Saharan Africa. Reflecting the growing importance of multidimensional poverty, 2020 marks a significant moment as 18 countries across the world reported progress on multidimensional poverty from sub-Saharan Africa (9), followed by Latin America (4), Asia and the Pacific (3), Central Asia and Europe (1) and Arab States (1). In 2021, this was followed by 13 countries from Latin America (6), Asia & the Pacific (4) and sub-Saharan Africa (4), reporting on multidimensional poverty in their VNRs.

Year	Arab States	Central Asia and Europe	Latin America and the Caribbean	Asia & the Pacific	Sub-Saharan Africa
2021			Colombia Cuba Dominican Republic Mexico Paraguay	Bhutan Lao PDR Malaysia Thailand	Angola Chad Madagascar Sierra Leone

2020	Morocco	Kyrgyzstan	Costa Rica Ecuador Honduras Panama	Bangladesh India Nepal	Burundi Democratic Republic of the Congo Kenya Liberia Malawi Mozambique Nigeria Seychelles Zambia
2019				Tonga	Rwanda Sierra Leone
2018			Colombia Dominican Republic Ecuador Mexico	Bhutan Sri Lanka Viet Nam	
2017		Tajikistan	Chile Costa Rica El Salvador Guatemala Honduras Panama	Nepal	Zimbabwe
2016	Egypt		Colombia Mexico		

Most of the 41 countries have reported on multidimensional poverty once, but eight countries have reported on multidimensional poverty twice,² and two countries, Colombia (2016, 2018, 2021) and Mexico (2016, 2018, 2021), have done so three times.

What types of measurement are countries using?

There are three different categories of measures with which countries are reporting multidimensional poverty: (1) national Multidimensional Poverty Indices (MPIs) which are official nationally developed measures tailored to country-specific contexts, definitions of poverty and policy goals; where countries do not yet have their own national MPI, they may report on progress towards developing such a measure; (2) The global Multidimensional Poverty Index,³ an internationally comparable index which provides multidimensional poverty analysis for more than 100 countries; and (3) other multidimensional poverty measures (please see methodological note for more details).

Of the 53 VNRs reporting on multidimensional poverty, 35 used a national MPI, 11 used the global MPI and 15 used alternative measures. Table 2 shows that eight countries reported more than one type of measure.

² Bhutan (2018, 2021), Costa Rica (2017, 2020), Dominican Republic (2018, 2021), Ecuador (2018, 2020), Honduras (2017, 2020), Nepal (2017, 2020), Panama (2017, 2020), and Zimbabwe (2019, 2021).

³ The global MPI was launched in 2010 and was developed by OPHI in collaboration with the UNDP's Human Development Report Office. It includes 10 indicators grouped within three dimensions of education, health and living standards, and is estimated every year. See <https://ophi.org.uk/multidimensional-poverty-index/global-mpi-2020>

Table 2. Types of measurement reported in VNRs 2016–2021				
Country	Year	National MPI	Global MPI	Other
Angola	2021	X		
Bangladesh	2020	X		
Bhutan ⁴	2018	X		X
Bhutan	2021	X		
Burundi ⁵	2020			X
Chad	2021		X	
Chile	2017	X		
Colombia	2016	X		
Colombia	2018	X		
Colombia	2021	X		
Costa Rica	2017	X		
Costa Rica	2020	X		
Cuba	2021	X		
Democratic Republic of Congo ⁶	2020			X
Dominican Republic ⁷	2018			X
Dominican Republic	2021	X		
Ecuador	2018	X		
Ecuador	2020	X		
Egypt	2016		X	
El Salvador	2017	X		
Guatemala ⁸	2017			X
Honduras	2017	X		
Honduras	2020	X		
India	2020		X	
Kenya ⁸	2020		X	X
Kyrgyzstan	2020	X		
Lao PDR	2021		X	
Liberia	2020		X	X
Madagascar ⁸⁹	2021		X	X
Malawi ⁸	2020			X
Malaysia	2021	X		
Mexico	2016	X		
Mexico	2018	X		
Mexico	2021	X		
Morocco	2020	X		
Mozambique ⁸	2020			X
Nepal	2017		X	
Nepal	2020	X		
Nigeria	2020		X	
Panama	2017	X		

⁴ Bhutan (2018) and Panama (2020) also included a national child MPI.

⁵ Burundi (2020), Kenya (2020), Madagascar (2021), Malawi (2020), Mozambique (2020), and Rwanda (2019) included a Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (MODA) to measure child multidimensional poverty.

⁶ Authors were unable to identify the method used in DRC (2020) or Madagascar (2021).

⁷ Dominican Republic (2018) used a regional Latin American MPI developed by UN-ECLAC.

⁸ Guatemala (2017) used an MPI developed by UNDP for their National Human Development Report 2015/2016.

Panama ⁷	2020	X		X
Paraguay	2021	X		
Rwanda ⁸	2019	X		X
Seychelles	2020	X		
Sierra Leone	2019	X		X
Sierra Leone ⁹	2021	X		X
Sri Lanka	2018	X		
Tajikistan	2017		X	
Thailand	2021	X		
Tonga	2019			X
Viet Nam	2018	X		
Zambia	2020	X		
Zimbabwe	2019		X	

There also seems to be recognition of the importance of moving beyond simply reporting the incidence, or percentage of people, living in multidimensional poverty. Of the VNRs reporting figures using the MPI, eight (Bangladesh 2020, Chad 2021, Madagascar 2021, Panama 2017 and 2020, Seychelles 2020, Thailand 2021, and Zimbabwe 2017) also report the average intensity of poverty among the poor, and nine (Cuba 2021, Bangladesh 2020, DRC 2020, Guatemala 2017, Malaysia 2021, Panama 2020, Seychelles 2020, Thailand 2021 and Zimbabwe 2017) report the MPI value (which is the product of incidence and intensity). In 19 reports, there is analysis of the poverty measure by indicator, most commonly analysing the percentage contribution of the indicators to the MPI.¹⁰

Leaving No One Behind: countries are reporting on multidimensional poverty at subnational levels and for specific groups

Countries are also reporting on the poverty of potentially vulnerable population groups to ensure that no one is left behind. These may be a disaggregation of the national level measure or separate measures tailored to a particular group.

Since 2016, 37 VNRs from 33 countries have reported at least one type of **subnational or group-specific analysis**. The most common type is an analysis of urban versus rural poverty, followed by analyses of different age group, in particular children – at times using a tailored measure of child multidimensional poverty. A number of VNRs reported poverty levels of subnational regions. Some reports also included a gendered analysis. Five reports included an analysis by ethnicity, including a focus on indigenous groups. Furthermore, two countries, Chad (2021) and Cuba (2021), also report data on people vulnerable to poverty, with Cuba (2021) also discussing severe poverty.

“According to a survey conducted by CEMA in 2015, **the multi-dimensional poverty rate among ethnic minorities was 35.7 per-cent, 3.5 times higher than the national multi-dimensional poverty rate (9.8 per-cent)**. This results in a risk that girls get married early, have difficulty accessing educational opportunities, have a greater burden of housework, and have fewer livelihood options. Therefore, more attention should be paid to supporting vulnerable groups such as ethnic minorities, especially women and girls, to escape from poverty in a sustainable manner and, at the same time, reduce the poverty disparity between different regions of the country.”
 - Viet Nam’s Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, 2018

⁹ Sierra Leone (2021) used a multidimensional child poverty measure using the Bristol Approach.

¹⁰ VNRs with analysis by indicators: Angola (2021), Bangladesh (2020), Bhutan (2018, 2021), Chile (2017), Colombia (2016), Cuba (2021), El Salvador (2017), India (2020), Malaysia (2021), Morocco (2020), Panama (2017, 2020), Seychelles (2020), Sierra Leone (2019, 2021), Tonga (2019), Viet Nam (2018) and Zambia (2020).

Urban/Rural	Age/Children	Region	Gender	Ethnicity
Angola (2021)	Angola (2021)	Angola (2021)	Angola (2021)	Chile (2017)
Bhutan (2018, 2021)	Bangladesh (2020)	Chile (2017)	Bangladesh (2020)	Dominican Republic (2021)
Chile (2017)	Bhutan (2018, 2021)	Colombia (2016, 2018)	Chile (2017)	Guatemala (2017)
Colombia (2016)	Burundi (2020)	Dominican Republic (2018, 2021)	Colombia (2016)	Panama (2020)
Cuba (2021)	Chile (2017)	Guatemala (2017)	Dominican Republic (2018)	Viet Nam (2018)
Dominican Republic (2018, 2021)	Colombia (2016)	Malaysia (2021)	Mexico (2021)	
Ecuador (2020)	Dominican Republic (2020)	Mexico (2021)	Panama (2020)	
El Salvador (2019)	Kenya (2020)	Morocco (2020)	Paraguay (2021)	
Guatemala (2017)	Lao PDR (2021)	Nigeria (2020)	Sri Lanka (2018)	
India (2020)	Liberia (2020)	Panama (2017, 2020)		
Kenya (2020)	Madagascar (2021)	Viet Nam (2018)		
Malawi (2020)	Malawi (2020)	Zambia (2020)		
Malaysia (2021)	Malaysia (2021)			
Morocco (2020)	Mexico (2021)			
Nigeria (2020)	Mozambique (2020)			
Panama (2020)	Panama (2020)			
Sierra Leone (2021)	Paraguay (2021)			
Tajikistan (2017)	Rwanda (2019)			
Viet Nam (2018)	Sierra Leone (2019, 2021)			
Zambia (2020)	Tonga (2019)			

Countries are also reporting on the use of multidimensional poverty measures for policy-making

Many countries are reporting current or anticipated uses of their multidimensional poverty measures in policy-making, such as for policy evaluation, budgeting or targeting. Some examples:

- Angola (2021, p.14) states that it introduced its national MPI to monitor and evaluate progress “to guide policy decisions to improve people’s living conditions and promote human development.” Regular updates shall ensure that “the IPM-A becomes a key public policy tool,” particularly in light of the COVID-19 crisis.
- In general, but also with the COVID-19 pandemic in mind, Paraguay (2021, p. 14) notes that the establishment of the National Statistics Institute and the MPI “will allow to make visible a part of the population that until today has been invisible to public policies,” and is essential for realizing evidence-based policy-making.
- The Dominican Republic (2021, p.94) identifies low levels of multidimensional poverty as the first of five accelerators that impact multiple SDGs, and one of only two for which a national strategy has already been developed, with medium- and long-term Action Plans.
- Bhutan (2018, p.27) discusses how its national MPI is included in the resource allocation formula under the 11th National Plan, with a larger weight (45 percent) than any other indicator. In its 2021 VNR, Bhutan (2021, p.25) traces progress back to targeted poverty reduction programmes

and looks forward to the next Poverty Analysis Report in 2022–2023 which will give a clearer understanding of it as well as of the consequences of COVID-19.

- Mozambique (2020, p.85) describes how its provincial and district-level resource allocations are informed by its MPI.
- Costa Rica (2020, p.128) describes how its national MPI “provided an opportunity to define a poverty reduction strategy integrating public policy based on the population’s particular needs.” That strategy, Puente al Desarrollo (Bridge to Development) brings together different social section institutions to coordinate social policies. This strategy also uses the MPI in the preparation of investment budgets for public policy. Costa Rica (2020, p.59) notes that the MPI has been adapted for use in the private sector, with 61 companies using this tool to better understand the situations of their employees and develop strategies for bridging the gaps.
- Panama (2017, p.69) explains that its national MPI was reflected in the ‘Panamá: Country for All – Zero Poverty’ national policy strategy plan to coordinate targeting and integration of social services and programmes to help the poorest areas of the country.

Box 1. Global SDG Indicators database for Indicator 1.2.2

To follow up on the 231 Indicators belonging to the 169 Targets of the SDGs, the Inter-Agency Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) developed a Global SDG Indicators Framework that was adopted by the General Assembly in July 2017. To facilitate reporting and to designate who would report on each of the Indicators, the IAEG-SDGs also designated custodian and partner agencies with the mandate to help ensure comparability of country data, compute regional and global aggregates and provide data in the Global SDG Indicators Database.

SDG Indicator 1.2.2 measures the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions. This is the only SDG indicator for which the custodians are national governments. To unify the data collection for countries, the IAEG-SDGs designated UNICEF, World Bank and UNDP as the supporting agencies for this indicator.

During the first half of 2020, the partner agencies announced the launch of a web platform to gather country reports for Indicator 1.2.2. based on official statistics. The platform is designed to accommodate different measures and will evolve over time to fit the needs of countries.

The platform collects information on five indicators: (1) the proportion of the population living in multidimensional poverty, (2) the average proportion of deprivations for people multidimensionally poor, (3) the proportion of households living in multidimensional poverty, (4) the proportion of children living in child-specific multidimensional poverty, and (5) the average share of weighted deprivations of total households. For each of these indicators there are options for reporting national averages, as well as disaggregation by age, location and gender.

The platform currently includes multidimensional poverty measurement data for more than 70 countries for the last 10 years. The data points available for each country are different. The data collected is validated by three stages. First, the poverty economists in the World Bank for each country analyse if the country has an official multidimensional poverty measurement. Based on official documentation, the World Bank staff input the data and metadata available into the SDG 1.2.2 monitoring system. UNICEF and UNDP country officers validate their data. After any modification, the data is emailed to the SDG focal point person in each country for their final approval. The SDG focal point amends any errors of the data, endorses the statistics, and submits them to the UNSD to add to the Global SDG Indicators Database.

The platform can be accessed here: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal>.

Conclusion

Multidimensional poverty measurement has gained prominence in the VNRs as countries report progress towards SDG 1, and specifically Indicator 1.2.2. Countries across the world are now using available national data (through national MPIs or measures) and global data (through the global MPI) to report progress on multidimensional poverty reduction. Countries are reporting both national estimates and subnational analyses by urban and rural areas, regions, age, gender and ethnicity to help identify those at risk of being left behind. Some reports also describe how the MPI is used to design policies and interventions to respond more accurately to multidimensional poverty.

In addition to reporting progress in the VNRs, countries can now use the Global SDG Indicators Database of the UNSD to report progress on SDG 1.2.2. These two reporting mechanisms – the VNRs and the Global SDG Indicators Database – are crucial tools for enabling countries to monitor their progress towards the SDGs and the reduction of multidimensional poverty.

We encourage all countries to use available data (national MPIs or the global MPI) to report their progress and add their voices to the global effort to eradicate poverty in all its forms and dimensions.

Methodological note

In order to analyse the reporting of multidimensional poverty in the VNRs, this brief examined all reports from 2016 to 2021 available on the SDG portal. We performed a keyword search for ‘multidimensional poverty’ or ‘multidimensional poverty index’ or ‘MPI’ (or relevant equivalent terms such as “multi-dimensional”) in each report and tabulated the results. The extracts where these terms were used were then analysed. Our primary focus was on identifying countries that use multidimensional poverty measures for reporting multidimensional poverty data, paying particular attention to SDG1. We categorized the countries reporting multidimensional poverty based on whether they used a national MPI, the global MPI or any alternative measures that reflected a multidimensional understanding, including Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (MODA) and Child Multidimensional Poverty Indices.

For these countries, we also analysed what kind of data they reported, differentiating between the MPI, headcount ratio, intensity, or disaggregated data by urban and rural area, subnational region, age/children, gender and other. The latter includes, for example, data on vulnerability to poverty or severe poverty as well as poverty data disaggregated by ethnicity. Furthermore, we also took note of countries that discussed the policy relevance and uses of the MPI.

It is important to highlight that a VNR analysis of multidimensional poverty measurements is limited since these reports are voluntarily submitted and might not reflect the full breadth of multidimensional poverty measurement and implementation in a country.

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