

High-level Side Event at the UN General Assembly

Measuring and Tackling Poverty in All Its Dimensions

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Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. First, let me thank our host, his Excellency Minister Radebe of the Republic of South Africa and the Multidimensional Poverty Peer Network for inviting me to participate in this session, representing the World Bank and our president Jim Kim. It is a pleasure and an honor to be here.

The World Bank has been engaged in the multidimensional poverty agenda for many years now. The World Development Report “Attacking Poverty” already raised the issue to the forefront of the global debate in 2000, pointing at the multiplicity of deprivations affecting many across the globe as different dimensions of poverty.

The focus on poverty in all of its dimensions has since acquired a greater role in our work. Most recently, it has been at the core of several initiatives across the Bank, including last year’s Global Monitoring Report and this year’s forthcoming Poverty and Shared Prosperity Flagship, to be launched on October 3..

The multidimensional poverty agenda is part of a broader conversation we are holding at the World Bank on finding better ways of defining and measuring poverty. This is the mandate we entrusted to the Global Poverty Commission, led by Sir Tony Atkinson and including some of the most distinguished global names in the study of poverty. The Commission was asked to put forth recommendations on two key questions.

- I. What should be the interpretation going forward of the World Bank’s definition of extreme poverty, set in 2015 at 1.90 Purchasing Power Parity (PPP)-adjusted dollars a day per person?
- II. What choices should the World Bank make regarding complementary poverty measures to be tracked globally and made available to policy-makers?

The Atkinson report will be released on 25 September, and it will be made available on our website, where it will be accompanied by some reflections from our Chief Economist Kaushik Basu on how the Bank plans to implement the recommendations.

I do not want to anticipate the Report, which is an extremely comprehensive and excellent piece, but I do want to highlight that it clearly recommends that global monetary poverty measures be accompanied by a set of Complementary Indicators, which should include a dashboard of non-monetary indicators and a multidimensional poverty indicator based on the counting approach.

So we are likely to see an increased involvement of the Bank in its global monitoring on multidimensional poverty measures as a complement to monetary measures, so as to allow for richer and more policy relevant discussions on poverty and deprivation.

At the country level, the WB has long been providing support to governments and national statistical offices in collecting and analyzing welfare data. And we have more recently become also a natural counterpart to assist them in their development of MPI or MPI-like measures.

For instance, in Bolivia and Armenia, the Bank provided training, close technical support, and support for survey instrument design and data collection. Armenia's MPI was done solely with World Bank support and is to be launched shortly

We have also been working closely with or alongside Sabine and her team (the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative – OPHI) on providing technical assistance in a number of other countries, like Senegal, Peru, Colombia and the Dominican Republic.

There is clearly a strong and growing demand for these types of activities across the world, especially in the regions and countries where the process is less advanced. We have opened initial conversations on MPIs or MPI-like measures in countries in Central Asia, such as Tajikistan and the Kyrgyz Republic, in Africa and elsewhere.

So I expect to see more and more of these initiatives by the Bank going forward, as the value of looking at poverty more broadly –where monetary measures are only one part of a larger story of deprivations— reaches more countries.

Thank you.