



Understanding and Responding to Poverty

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Understanding Poverty

What is poverty?

Poverty is hunger. Poverty is lack of shelter. Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty is not being able to go to school, not knowing how to read, not being able to speak properly. Poverty is not having a job, is fear for the future, living one day at a time. Poverty is losing a child to illness brought about by unclean water. Poverty is powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom.

■ What is poverty?

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Poverty has many faces, changing from place to place and across time, and has been described in many ways (for a collection of readings, see the [Literature of Poverty](#)). Most often, poverty is a situation people want to escape. So poverty is a call to action -- for the poor and the wealthy alike -- a call to change the world so that

many more may have enough to eat, adequate shelter, access to education and health, protection from violence, and a voice in what happens in their communities.

Dimensions of Poverty

To know what helps to alleviate poverty, what works and what does not, what changes over time, poverty has to be defined, measured, and studied -- and even lived. As poverty has many dimensions, it has to be looked at through a variety of indicators -- levels of income and consumption, social indicators, and now increasingly indicators of vulnerability to risks and of socio/political access.

So far, much more work has been done using consumption or income-based measures of poverty. But some work has been done on

non-income dimensions of poverty, most notably in the [Human Development Report](#) prepared annually by the United Nations Development Programme, and new work is underway in preparation for the World Development Report on Poverty and Development. See New Directions in [Measuring Poverty](#) below.

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Measuring poverty

Measuring poverty at the country level

The most commonly used way to measure poverty is based on incomes or consumption levels. A person is considered poor if his or her consumption or income level falls below some minimum level necessary to meet basic needs. This minimum level is usually called the "poverty line". What is necessary to satisfy basic needs varies across time and societies. Therefore, poverty lines vary in time and place, and each country uses lines which are appropriate to its level of development, societal norms and values.

Information on consumption and income is obtained through sample surveys, during which households are asked to answer detailed questions on their spending habits and sources of income. Such surveys are conducted more or less regularly in most countries. These sample survey data collection methods are increasingly being complemented by participatory methods, where people are asked what their basic needs are and what poverty means for them. Interestingly, new research shows a high degree of concordance between poverty lines based on objective and subjective assessments of needs.

Measuring poverty at the global level

When estimating poverty world-wide, the same reference poverty line has to be used, and expressed in a common unit across countries. Therefore, for the purpose of global aggregation and comparison, the World Bank uses reference lines set at \$1 and \$2 per day in 1993 Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) terms (where PPPs measure the relative purchasing power of currencies across countries). It has been estimated that in 1998 1.2 billion people world-wide had consumption levels

■ [Measuring poverty at the country level](#)

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below \$1 a day -- 24 percent of the population of the developing world and 2.8 billion lived on less than \$2 a day. These figures are lower than earlier estimates, indicating that some progress has taken place, but they still remain too high in terms of human suffering, and much more remains to be done. And it should be emphasized that for analysis of poverty in a particular country, the World Bank always uses poverty line(s) based on norms for that society.

Because of the time involved in collecting and processing the household survey data upon which these figures are based, and because of the complexities of the estimation exercise, these figures appear with a lag, and are updated only every three years.

New directions in poverty measurement

While much progress has been made in measuring and analyzing income poverty, efforts are needed to measure and study the many other dimensions of poverty. Work on non-income dimensions of poverty -- defining indicators where needed, gathering data, assessing trends -- is underway in preparation for the World Development Report on Poverty and Development, which will be published in September 2000. The agenda includes assembling comparable and high-quality social indicators for education, health, access to services and infrastructure. It also includes developing new indicators to track other dimensions -- for example risk, vulnerability, social exclusion, access to social capital -- as well as ways to compare a multi-dimensional conception of poverty, when it may not make sense to aggregate the various dimensions into one index.



In addition to expanding the range of indicators of poverty, work is needed to integrate data coming from sample surveys with information obtained through more participatory techniques, which usually offer rich insights into why programs work or do not. Participatory approaches illustrate the nature of risk and vulnerability, how cultural factors and ethnicity interact and affect poverty, how social exclusion sets limits to people's participation in development, and how barriers to such participation can be removed. Again, work on integrating analyses of poverty based on sample surveys and on participatory techniques is underway in preparation for the WDR. To learn more about this work,

see the draft work program for the [WDR on Poverty and Development](#)

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Trends in poverty over time

[Latest Trends in Poverty update](#)

Living standards have improved...

Living standards have risen dramatically over the last 25 years. Per capita income growth in developing countries has averaged about 1.3 percent a year. So millions have left behind the yoke of poverty and despair. But population has grown rapidly -- from 2.9 billion people in 1970 to 4.8 billion in 1996 -- and many have been born into poverty.

■ Living standards have improved...

■ [...but wide regional disparities persist.](#)

The proportion of the world's population living in extreme economic poverty -- defined as living on less than \$1 per day (in 1993 dollars, adjusted to account for differences in purchasing power across countries) -- has fallen from 28 percent in 1987 to 24 percent in 1998 (see [latest data on income poverty](#)).

Substantial improvements in social indicators have accompanied growth in average incomes, as shown in Table 1b of the 1999 WDI. (Click here to view [Table 1b](#)) Infant mortality rates have fallen from 104 per 1,000 live births in 1970–75 to 59 in 1996. On average, life expectancy has risen by four months each year since 1970 (see also [trends in life expectancy](#)). Growth in food production has substantially outpaced that of population. Governments report rapid progress in primary school enrollment (see also [trends in education](#)). Adult literacy has also risen, from 46 to 70 percent. And gender disparities have narrowed, with the average ratio of girls to boys in secondary schools rising from 70 to 100 in 1980 to 82 to 100 in 1993. The developing world today is healthier, wealthier, better fed, and better educated.

...but wide regional disparities persist.

While there has been great progress in alleviating poverty, it has been far from even, and the global picture masks large regional differences.

Poverty is rising rapidly in Europe and Central Asia, and continuing to rise in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa. In Asia, where most of

the world's poor live, the proportion in poverty has declined dramatically over the past two decades, but the recent crisis will slow progress (for more information, see the [Social Crisis in East Asia](#)). And more than 4 in 10 households (over 500 million people) still remain in poverty in South Asia.

There are sharp regional differences also in a number of social indicators (see [Table 1b](#)).



All developing regions have seen **infant and child mortality rates** decline sharply. But South Asia's infant mortality rates today are about the same as East Asia's in the early 1970s, reflecting both poor progress in South Asia and favorable initial social conditions in East Asia. Sub-Saharan Africa's infant mortality rates are well above those in East Asia some 25 years ago. On average, 147 of every 1,000 African children die before the age of 5, and 91 in 1,000 before the age of 1. Ten African countries have under-five mortality rates in excess of 200 (Angola, Guinea,

Guinea-Bissau, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Zambia). (For more information, see [trends in infant mortality](#)).

Gross primary school enrollment rates have risen in all regions. But Sub-Saharan Africa's rates, having risen from 50 percent of the eligible population to 80 percent by 1980, fell back to 72 in 1993, reflecting larger problems. Again, averages disguise wide country disparities. Six countries in Africa have fewer than half their children enrolled in primary school (Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Guinea, Mali, Niger, and Sierra Leone). (Click here for [Findings and Infobrief Best Practices from the World Bank's Africa Region](#).)

Reducing **gender disparities in education**, as measured by female enrollment in secondary schools, is one area where Sub-Saharan Africa is doing relatively well. Progress is slower in South Asia, where the ratio of 66 girls to 100 boys is well below the developing world average (see also [trends in education of girls](#)).

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Goals for the 21st century

The Strategy 21 goals

The uneven progress of development is worrying. The flows of trade and capital that integrate the global economy may bring benefits to millions, but poverty and suffering persist. In an integrated world, disease, environmental degradation, civil strife, and criminal activity are also global concerns.

Responding to concerns about global poverty, international development agencies have begun to reexamine the way they do business. They are looking at impacts more than inputs by establishing performance targets, and they are enhancing their accountability and transparency by measuring progress towards these goals.

In May 1996 the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD published *Shaping the 21st Century*, a policy paper calling for a global partnership to pursue a new development strategy focused on six key goals:

For economic well being:

- Reducing by half the proportion of people in extreme poverty by 2015.

For social development:

- Achieving universal primary education in all countries by 2015.
- Demonstrating progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women by eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005.
- Reducing by two-thirds the mortality rates for infants and children under 5 and by three-fourths the mortality rates for mothers by 2015.
- Providing access to reproductive health services for all individuals of appropriate age no later than 2015.

For environmental sustainability and regeneration:

- Implementing national strategies for sustainable development by 2005 to ensure that the current loss of environmental resources is reversed globally and nationally by 2015.

These goals are expressed in global terms but must be pursued country by country. Achieving them will also require building capacity for effective, democratic, and accountable governance, protection of human rights, and respect for the rule of law. The World Bank will systematically monitor progress in achieving these goals in the countries it assists. (See [OECD](#) for more detail on the Strategy 21 indicators.)

Achieving the goals

The **poverty goal** calls for reducing by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day by 2015. A reduction from 30 to 15 percent would reduce the number of poor people from 1.3 billion in 1993 to 900 million in 2015.



Is this achievable? Income poverty is a function of growth -- if the incomes of all grow at the rate of growth of the economy, then fewer people will have incomes below the poverty line every year -- and of the extent to which the incomes of the poor grow as an economy expands. Thus, the answer depends on prospects for growth and for the distribution of income. (Read more on this: [Prospects for poverty reduction](#), [Two scenarios for the next decade](#) and [Can the international development target for reducing income poverty be achieved?](#))

If countries were to continue to grow as they did over the period 1990-95, and all benefited equally, then the global poverty targets will be met. Some countries did not grow fast enough, but the countries with the highest number of poor people -- India and China -- did; if this continues, the goals will be met.

But past trends may not be a good predictor of growth -- and the global economy is slowing down as a result of the East Asian crisis. Predictions made in January 1998 indicated that most regions were expected to reach the goals. The exception is Sub-Saharan Africa, where growth is expected to fall short.

Income distribution also matters. Increasing inequality in income distribution will reduce the numbers who benefit from the same average rate of growth. While the distribution of income tends to be

stable over time, there is some evidence that inequality was deteriorating in East Asia before the crisis, and inequality remains very high in Sub-Saharan Africa (particularly in South Africa) and Latin America. (For more information, see [Trends in inequality](#).)

Achieving the **social goals** will not be easy. If infant mortality rates were to remain at 1990 levels, the number of infant deaths would total some 8.8 million in 2015. Reaching the target of reducing infant mortality by two-thirds would require bringing this number down to about 3 million (more on [trends in infant mortality](#)). Similarly, attaining the primary school enrollment goal would require enrolling some 200 million more children in primary school than there are today, and increase of 41 percent over current levels (more on [trends in primary enrollments](#)). Read more about the [Strategy 21 Indicators](#). For a detailed analysis of whether the goals are attainable, see L. Demery and M. Walton (1998), [Are Poverty Reduction and Other 21st Century Social Goals Attainable?](#)

Reaching these targets will not be easy. But sufficient political will, improvements in female education, health programs, and income growth for all could bring infant mortality and education targets within reach. Otherwise, the costs would be enormous.

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The Literature of Poverty: A Collection

The Literature of Poverty: A Collection

We present this collection of writings about poverty in order to promote an understanding of its very real effects on human lives. Our hope is it develop a greater sensitivity to the tragedy, the challenges, and the urgency of poverty.

The works collected here are from writers and poets of many cultures and many eras. Some emphasize the tragedy of poverty in striking the most vulnerable of society. Some describe long-perpetrated social and political injustices as contributors to poverty. Others write that poverty is a noble existence which shows the human potential for strength and spirituality in the face of hardship.

Help us add further insights and works to this collection. Send us citations for additional writings at [feedback](#).

A special thanks goes to Lorna Israel, who was editor for the Literature of Poverty from November 1999 until July 2000.

The works included here do not reflect an endorsement or commentary by the World Bank Group of any author or opinion.

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[Samuel Johnson, James Boswell's Life of Johnson](#)

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Pieces with pending copyright permission:

George Lamming, In the Castle of My Skin

Lao-tzu, Tao Te Ching

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Pablo Neruda, "To the Dead Poor Man"

Leslie Marmon Silko, Ceremony

Primo Levi, "Shma"

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Responding to Poverty:

How to move forward in achieving the goals laid out for the 21st century?

First, developing countries must embark on strategies that help them attain these goals. In the areas of poverty and social development, this implies particular attention by policymakers to:

- **Accelerating economic growth.** Growth is the most powerful weapon in the fight for higher living standards. Faster growth will require policies that encourage macroeconomic stability, shift resources to more efficient sectors, and integrate with the global economy.
- **Improving the distribution of income and wealth.** The benefits of growth for the poor may be eroded if the distribution of income worsens. But policies that promote better income distribution are not well understood; learning more about the impact of policies on distribution should be high on the agenda. (To learn more, read about [Inequality](#))
- **Accelerating social development.** Social indicators will benefit from improvements in economic growth and income and wealth distribution, but there is still room for policies that

If Sub-Saharan Africa is to make a serious dent in its rising number of poor, it must improve its growth performance over the early 1990s by as much as 3 percentage points.

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target interventions that appear to have a large impact on health and educational outcomes. At the top of the list are female education, safe water and sanitation, and child immunization, as well as safety nets to protect the most vulnerable. (To learn more, read about [Safety Nets and Transfers](#).)

Attention is also needed to the social structures and institutions which affect development (read about [Social Capital](#)).

Second, donors and international agencies must support countries that show a determination to take up the challenges of the goals for the 21st century.

Third, international agencies must work with developing countries to strengthen country capacity to monitor progress on outcomes. This will involve ensuring that the statistical infrastructure in key countries is adequate to mount periodic surveys and analyze the data, and that there is capacity to conduct participatory studies and hear the voices of the poor.

From measuring progress to action

Changes over time and differences across areas in poverty measures and social indicators reveal whether poverty reduction policies are working or not, both at the country and at the global level. Project-level indicators indicate whether a project has worked or not. This knowledge on whether, and where, progress is being made in reaching the Strategy 21 goals has to be used to influence the design of policies and projects. (Read more about the [Strategy 21 Goals](#).)

Knowledge about what works in reducing poverty has to inform, first and foremost, a country's policies and programs. This is why it is essential that there exist in each country capacity to monitor poverty and analyze the impact of policies and projects. The World Bank is continuing to work in a number of countries to strengthen in-country capacity to assess what works and what does not.

The same knowledge must also influence decisions about the kind of support the World Bank offers to client countries. This is why much emphasis is being placed upon grounding the formulation of Country Assistance Strategies on recent poverty analysis and upon ensuring that the policies and projects we support are those which promise the largest

impact in terms of poverty reduction.

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Building Poverty Reduction Strategies

A new framework for action has been developed to enhance the poverty impact of country actions and development assistance. This approach centers around the preparation by countries of poverty reduction strategies, which would then be a basis for external assistance and debt relief. The [sourcebook](#) is a resource to assist countries in developing poverty reduction strategies. This web site contains an [overview](#) of the framework, [sourcebook chapters](#), learning [events](#), and [key documents](#).

Overview

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- [Principles](#) underlying Poverty Reduction Strategies
- [Background](#) and [Question and Answers](#) on Poverty Reduction Strategies
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- [How to use](#) the Sourcebook

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- [Internal Guidance Note](#) (Dec 1999)
- [Poverty Reduction Strategies: Status and Next Steps](#) (Oct 1999)

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Voices of the Poor

Voices of the Poor

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- [Crying Out for Change](#)
- Bank launches brainstorming on [Global Coalition for Voices of the Poor](#)

Multiple Dimensions of Poverty
Rising Insecurity
Gender Relations Stressed
Governments Often Rate Low
Mixed Views on NGOs
Informal Institutions Constrained



Poverty is like heat;
you cannot see it;
so to know poverty
you have to go through it.
--Adaboya, Ghana.

What is Voices?

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WDR 2000/2001: Attacking Poverty

- What is the World Development Report on poverty and development?
[Read about the WDR.](#)

What's New



Full Text of the [World Development Report 2000/2001: Attacking](#)

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[Presentations on the WDR 2000/2001](#)
(10/2000)

[A Critical Review of the WDR](#) by the Comparative Research Programme on Poverty (10/2000)

[WDR 2000/2001 Urges Broader Approach To Reducing Poverty.](#)

Read the full text of the [Press Conference](#) (09/2000)

Watch the [Interview with World Bank Chief Economist Nicholas H. Stern](#) and an [Overview video](#) on the WDR 2000/2001 (09/2000)

Read overviews of the WDR 2000/2001 in [Arabic](#) (852kb PDF), [Czech](#) (816kb PDF), [French](#) (748kb PDF), [German](#) (861kb PDF), [Spanish](#) (845kb PDF), [Portuguese](#) (822kb PDF) and [Russian](#) (589kb PDF)

See [ordering information](#) to purchase the WDR 2000/2001 from the World Bank Publications

Key Documents

World Development Report 2000/2001: [Background Documents](#)



[Voices of the Poor](#): the struggles and aspirations of poor people for a life of dignity. New reports: [Crying Out for Change](#)

and [Can Anyone Hear Us?](#)

- [Consultation Draft](#), January 2000: read the [Final Summary of the Electronic Discussion on the Draft](#) held between February 21st and March 31st, 2000 and a [Response to the Final Summary](#) by Ravi Kanbur.
- View messages from the June 1999 online discussion: [Attacking Poverty: A Public Discussion of WDR2000/2001.](#)
- Read [Papers from Conferences and Workshops](#) in preparation for the WDR 2000/2001

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Key Stages

[The WDR Workplan](#) outlines the main stages in the development of the Report

Who's Who

[Organization and staff](#) for the WDR 2000/01

[Calendar of events](#) covers conferences, workshops, etc.

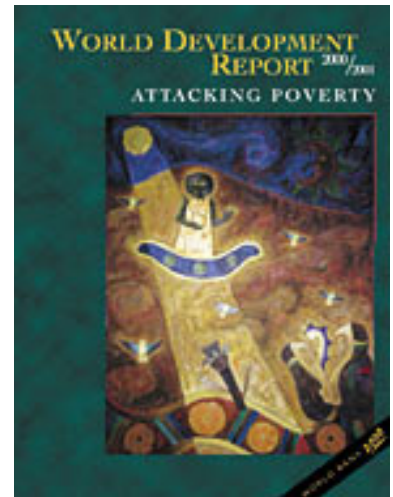
- [European Launch of the World Development Report: Attacking Poverty.](#)
Amsterdam, October 3-4 2000.

Newsletter

Read the [WDR Newsletters](#) issued between January 1999 and January 2000

About the World Development Report 2000/2001: Attacking Poverty

At the start of a new century, poverty remains a global problem of huge proportions. Of the world's 6 billion people, 2.8 billion live on less than \$2 a day and 1.2 billion on less than \$1 a day. Eight out of every 100 infants do not live to see their fifth birthday. Nine of every 100 boys and 14 of every 100 girls who reach school age do not attend school. Poverty is also evident in poor people's lack of political power and voice and in their extreme vulnerability to ill health, economic dislocation, personal violence and natural disasters. And the scourge of HIV/AIDS, the frequency and brutality of civil conflicts, and rising disparities between rich countries and the developing world have increased the sense of deprivation and injustice for many.



[World Development Report 2000/2001: Attacking Poverty](#) (which follows two other World Development Reports on poverty, in 1980 and 1990) argues nevertheless that major reductions in all these dimensions of poverty are indeed possible - that the interaction of markets, state institutions, and civil societies can harness the forces of economic integration and technological change to serve the interests of poor people and increase their share of society's prosperity.

Actions are needed in three complementary areas: promoting economic opportunities for poor people through equitable growth, better access to markets, and expanded assets; facilitating empowerment by making state institutions more responsive to poor people and removing social barriers that exclude women, ethnic and racial groups, and the socially disadvantaged; and enhancing security by preventing and managing economywide shocks and providing mechanisms to reduce the sources of vulnerability that poor people face. But actions by countries and communities will not be enough. Global actions need to complement national and local initiatives to achieve maximum benefit for poor people throughout the world.

[Read the full report](#)

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Welcome to the site on Inequality, Poverty, and Socio-economic Performance!

This site aims to be a resource on: (a) the relationship between distributional dynamics, economic growth, and poverty reduction; (b) the effect inequality might have on social outcomes and behaviors; and (c) current discussions and methodologies that might be useful for operational and research work.

What is Inequality?

- [What exactly is Inequality?](#)
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Resources and Information

Inequality and Economic Performance

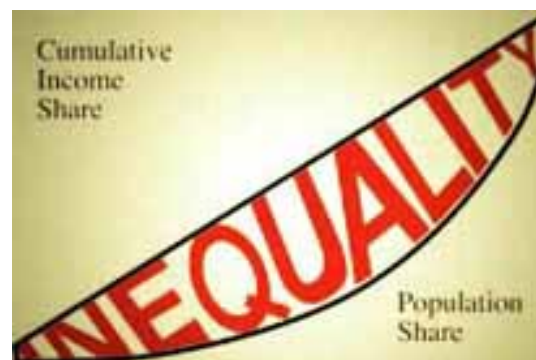
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Methods and Tools

- [Poverty and Inequality Mapping: Spatial Aspects](#)
- [Inequality Measurement and Decomposition](#)

Data

- [World Bank Data Sources](#)
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- [Thematic Group on Inequality, Poverty, and Socio-economic Performance](#)

A group of researchers and practitioners engaged in work on inequality

- Web Guide to Inequality
 - [Research Groups](#)
 - [Organizations](#)
 - [World Bank Web Sites](#)

This graph depicts a Lorenz curve, which plots the cumulative share of income against the cumulative population share. The diagonal represents perfect income equality. The further away it is from the diagonal, the more unequal the society. Powerful theorems associated with Lorenz dominance have made this curve something of a symbol of inequality measurement and analysis.

Send us your [Feedback](#) about this web site!

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Poverty and Health

Welcome to the World Bank's home page on Poverty, Health, Nutrition, and Population. Its purpose is to introduce work in these areas recently undertaken or currently under way at the World Bank, in the hope that the information will prove useful to policy makers and analysts outside as well as within the Bank.

Comments, suggestions, and requests for further information are welcome. They may be addressed to the Bank's [health and population advisory service](#) or to its [nutrition advisory service](#).

Country Data

- [Country information sheets](#): intra-country differences between rich and poor
- [Guide to additional country information](#)

Library

- [Recent papers](#) by World Bank staff members and consultants
- World Bank [Poverty Reduction Strategy Sourcebook](#)
- Reports from [World Bank seminars](#)

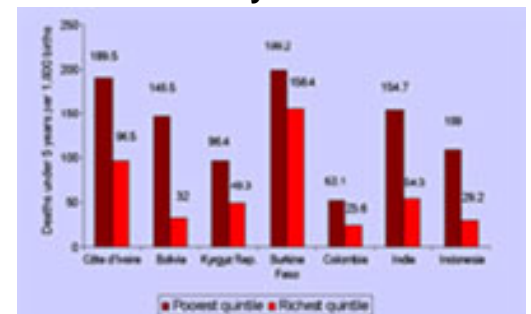
Distance Learning

- [Short-term training programs](#) on benefit- and outcome-incidence analysis, beneficiary assessments, and targeting procedures

World Bank Activities

- [Summary](#) of Bank activities
- Activities of the Bank's [Thematic Group on Health, Nutrition, Population and Poverty](#)
- [Demonstration projects](#)

Wealth Inequalities in Under-5 Mortality: Select Countries



Côte d'Ivoire DHS, 1994; Bolivia DHS, 1998; Kyrgyz Rep. DHS 1997; Burkina Faso DHS 1992/3; Colombia DHS, 1995; India National Family Health Survey 1992/3; Indonesia DHS 1997

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Increasing evidence shows that social cohesion -- social capital -- is critical for poverty alleviation and sustainable human and economic development...

This web site is the World Bank's link with external partners, researchers, institutions, governments and others interested in understanding and applying social capital for sustainable social and economic development.

This site includes [hundreds of abstracts](#) of articles and papers on social capital -- available from our library. An overview of the site follows:

Social capital is defined as the norms and social relations embedded in the social structures of societies that enable people to coordinate action to achieve desired goals.

About Social Capital

- [What is Social Capital?](#)
- [How is Social Capital Measured?](#)
- [Why is it Relevant to Development?](#)
- [Social Capital & World Bank Projects](#)

Sources of Social Capital

Social capital is borne out of affiliations in various groups. They are the [sources](#) of social capital.

Topics in Social Capital

Features

- [Social capital surveys and other measurement tools](#)
- [Let's Talk:](#) Join our ongoing e-mail discussion group. Searchable archives now available.
- [Papers in Progress](#)
- [The Social Capital Initiative](#)
- [Tell Us!](#) Send us suggestions about Social Capital news, papers, resources and upcoming events.

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People Involved in Social Capital

There are a number of issues that interact with social capital. This section describes some of these [topics](#), and how they are affected by social capital.

Library

- [Database](#) of hundreds of abstracts of papers and articles on social capital.
- List of [key readings](#) on social capital
- [Papers in Progress](#)
- [Web Guide on Social Capital](#)

Site Map

And, a [site map](#) to help you find your way around the site.

Send us your [Feedback!](#) about this web site!

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Safety Nets

Welcome to the **Safety Net and Transfers Website**. This site focuses specifically on safety net programs that are [Cash Transfers](#), [In-kind Transfers](#), and [Public Works](#). Additional information on universal social insurance, labor and vocational training programs, and social funds are available at the [Social Protection Website](#).

Safety Nets are programs that protect a person or household against the adverse outcomes of chronic incapacity to work (chronic poverty); and a decline in this capacity from a marginal situation that provides minimal means of survival with few reserves (transient poverty).

About This Site

- [Audience and Objectives](#)
- [Who We Are](#)
- [How the World Bank is Involved with Safety Nets](#)
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Basic Issues

- [What are Safety Net programs?](#)
- [Why are Safety Nets needed?](#)
- [Who needs Safety Nets?](#)
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- [Safety Nets in Crisis and Post-Conflict](#)
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Types of Safety Nets

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- [Private Transfers](#)
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Viewpoints on Safety Nets

Safety nets exist in a complex political and economic context, and viewpoints on them may differ, even within the same organizations and groups:

- [World Bank](#)
- [UNRISD](#)
- [IMF](#)
- [IDB](#)
- [Brookings Institute](#)
- [IFPRI](#)

Resources

- [Cash Transfers](#)
 - [In-kind Transfers](#)
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World Bank Poverty-focused Activities

The World Bank's Mission is to reduce poverty and improve living standards through sustainable growth and investment in people

Virtually all World Bank activities have a bearing of poverty. This page focuses on Poverty Assessments, investment operations which are part of the Program of Targeted Interventions, Poverty-focused adjustment operations and Lending to selected sectors.

Read [Poverty Reduction and the World Bank: Progress in Fiscal 1999](#) (08/2000)

[World Bank Lending Instruments](#): the World Bank's lending instruments for development support--Download the [World Bank Lending Instruments booklet](#) (83kb PDF)

Poverty Assessments

[Poverty Assessments](#) are one the World Bank's key instruments to conduct analytical work on poverty. They help define an effective and responsive program for poverty reduction, and enable better targeting of interventions to the poor.

Access the [Summaries of all Poverty Assessments](#) conducted by the World Bank since 1993 from the [Poverty Monitoring Database](#).

Program of Targeted Interventions

Poverty-Focused Adjustment Operations

PFs include [Adjustment](#) and [Emergency Operations](#) that contain specific poverty reduction measures:

- [Criteria](#)
- [Trends](#)

Structural/ Sector Adjustment Loans:

- New! [Overview: FY 1999](#)
- New! [List of Projects: FY 1999](#) (download 81kb PDF file)

Emergency Recovery Loans:

- New! [Overview: FY 1999](#)
- New! [List of Projects: FY 1999](#) (download 12kb PDF file)

The [Program of Targeted Interventions](#) is made of projects that the World Bank expects to have a significant direct impact on the poor:

- [Criteria](#)
- [Trends](#)
- New! [Overview: Fiscal Year 1999](#)
- New! [List of Projects: Fiscal Year 1999](#) (download 128kb PDF file)

Lending to Selected Sectors

While all World Bank lending is intended to reduce poverty, [Lending to Selected Sectors](#) supports the efforts of governments to reduce poverty more directly.

[The Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative \(SAPRI\)](#): A participatory evaluation of adjustment with NGOs, citizen groups, The World Bank, and governments.



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The financial crisis which started in East Asia in mid-1997 provided a wake-up call on the need to fully integrate social factors into macroeconomic and structural responses to crises.

- [An Overview](#)
- [How would the good practices be used?](#)

In response to concerns over the social effects of the crisis, the World Bank was requested to prepare a note on Managing the Social Dimensions of Crises. This web site describes how this work has evolved (see [An Overview](#)); posts relevant documents (see [Key Documents](#)); and provides a forum to discuss good practices in managing the social dimensions of crises.

For more detail on the social impact of the crisis in East Asia see the [Social Policy and Governance in East Asia](#) site.

An Overview

At the October 1998 joint World Bank- International Monetary Fund Annual Meetings, the World Bank received a request to prepare a note on Principles and Good Practices in Social Policy for the Spring 1999 meetings of the Development Committee. This request emerged from a recognition that social factors needed to be fully integrated into macroeconomic and structural policies, especially in responding to a crisis, and that the emerging new principles of conduct (the "international architecture") needed to encompass social dimensions as well as financial and corporate dimensions. See an extract from the [Communiqué of the Development Committee meeting of October 1998](#).

In March and April 1999, consultations were held with various development partners on the structure and content of the document.

At the Spring 1999 meetings of the Development Committee, the World Bank presented a note on [Principles and Good Practices in Social Policy](#). This document distilled a set of principles from agreed United Nations declarations, drawing especially from the 1995 Social Summit in four areas: achieving universal access to basic social services; enabling all men and women to attain secure and sustainable livelihoods, and decent working conditions; promoting systems of social protection; and fostering social integration. It also outlined general issues in implementation of these principles in the diverse economic and social conditions of developing countries. It argued that further work should proceed along two tracks:

- Work on reviewing or refining principles would continue under UN auspices (with World Bank inputs) in the process of preparation for the [World Summit for Social Development](#) plus five to be held in June 2000;
- The review and documentation of good practices in managing the social dimensions of crises would be pursued by the World Bank in consultation with all the relevant partners.

The Development Committee endorsed the approach proposed and requested that the World Bank actively follow up on the second track, with a primary focus on practical advice for design of responses to crises, and report back at the next meeting, at the time of the Fall 1999 Fund-Bank Annual Meetings (see [Spring 1999 Development Committee Communiqué](#)).

Following the Spring 1999 meeting, the World Bank prepared a note outlining good practices in protecting the poor and vulnerable when a crisis hits. Work is ongoing to review and document good practices in the areas of poverty and distributional effects of macroeconomic developments, labor conditions, distributional effects of spending on social and economic services and revenue generation, design of safety nets, institutions, transparency and accountability, effects on the social fabric, information, diagnosis and public debate, in consultation with partners. The Bank reported back to the Development Committee at the time of the Fall 1999 Bank- Fund Annual Meetings. The Ministers encouraged the Bank to continue to accumulate and disseminate good practices to help protect the most vulnerable (see [Fall 1999 Development Committee Communiqué](#)). This work is not being carried out in conjunction with the work to develop toolkits to support [Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers](#).

How would the good practices be used?

Good practices in managing the social dimensions of crises are intended to provide practical advice to countries going through crises, whether or not they receive external assistance. Good practices would become a standard part of the diagnosis carried out by World Bank teams and an input into joint IMF - World Bank assessments of macroeconomic and structural options for responding to a crisis.

Country conditions vary, and the application would necessarily be selective and based on country circumstances. As emphasized under the comprehensive development framework, partnerships—with the government, with other actors in a society, and with the range of actors in the international development community—will be crucial both to the ongoing process of documenting and sharing best practice and to the design and implementation of public action and institution-building.

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[Key partners](#) working with the World Bank.

[Guestbook](#): See who else is working on social policy and governance issues and introduce yourself!

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Search the best resources across the web with the [Social Policy Search Engine](#)

Library

Latest Documents: [\[Complete Library\]](#)

View Library by Topic:

Additional Background on the Social Crisis:

- [What is the Social Crisis, who is affected, how are people coping and what is the World Bank response?](#)

Send us your [feedback](#) about this site.

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 [Culture and Poverty](#)
 [HIPC: Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative](#)
 [Social Policy in East Asia](#)

Social Indicators

Education: primary enrollments

Gross primary school enrollment data show an improvement over the last thirty years. Developing countries have made enormous progress in expanding access to schooling. However, regional trends diverged markedly, with Sub-Saharan Africa experiencing a slight decline in enrollment rates between the early 1980s and the mid-1990s (see [table 17](#)).

Although between 1990 to 1997 net enrollment rates have improved in all regions (except in the Middle East and North Africa, see [table 18](#)), today 110 million primary-school-age children in developing countries are not in school. Of these, 60 percent (66 million) are girls.

- In Sub-Saharan Africa nine countries reported net primary enrollment rates of less than 50 percent in the 1990s ([table 19](#)).

The International Development Goals call for universal primary enrollment by 2015: at the present rate of progress this target is not likely to be achieved, and more than 100 million school-age children will not be in school in 2015.

- In Sub-Saharan Africa the number of children out of school would actually *increase* to 50.7 million in 2005 and to 54.6 million in 2015 on present trends.

Table 17. Trends in gross primary enrollment rates, 1970-1996

Region	1970	1982	1990	1993	1996
East Asia and Pacific	90	111	120	115	116

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Education: primary enrollments

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Eastern Europe and Central Asia	n.a.	99	99	97	100 ^b
Latin America and Caribbean	99 ^a	105	105	109	113
Middle East and North Africa	70	87	97	97	95
South Asia	71	77	90	97	100
Sub-Saharan Africa	51	81	76	76	78 ^b
Developing Countries	82	96	103	103	107
OECD	100	102	103	103	104 ^c

Note: Declines in gross enrollment ratios that are over 100 do not necessarily mean a decrease in the proportion of school-age children going to school. They might reflect a reduction in the numbers of over-age children as a result of improvements in quality and increases in efficiency as fewer children start school late or repeat grades.

n.a. Not available.

^a1975 ^b1994, ^c1995. *Source:* World Bank, [World Development Indicators 2001](#).

Table 18. Trends in net primary enrollment rates, 1980-1997

Region	1980	1990	1992	1996	1997	Increase 1990-1997
East Asia and Pacific	86	97	97	99	99	2%
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	92	95	94	99	100	5%
Latin America and Caribbean	86	89	91	94	95	7%
Middle East and North Africa	74	87	87	87	87	0%
South Asia	64	74	76	77	77	4%
Sub-Saharan Africa	54 ^a	56 ^b	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Developing Countries	78	86	86	88	89	3%
OECD	97	100	100	100	100	0%

Note: n.a. Not available. ^a1981 ^b1989. *Source:* World Development Indicators 2000.

Table 19. Countries with Net Primary Enrollment Rates of less than 50 percent in 1997

Country	%	Country	%
Niger	25	Mozambique	40
Eritrea	30	Guinea	42
Burkina Faso	31	Chad	46
Mali	31	Tanzania	48
Ethiopia	32		

Source: World Bank, [World Development Indicators 2001](#).

In 1998, 879 million adults in developing countries (one in four) were illiterate. Of these 64 percent (559 million) were women.

- In South Asia only 40 percent of women are literate compared to 65 percent of men. In Nepal and Afghanistan only about 20 percent of women are literate; in Pakistan 30 percent.

The incidence of adult illiteracy in developing countries has fallen from 47 percent in 1970 to 26 percent in 1998; however, because of population growth and the failure of school systems to prevent children from growing up illiterate, today there are 41 million more illiterate adults than in 1970.

- Almost the entire decrease in illiteracy since 1990 has been achieved in East Asia, while the number of illiterates increased by 21 million in South Asia, 3 million in the Middle East and North Africa, and 2 million in Sub-Saharan Africa.

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