

Chapter 6

Child Poverty in Rural Areas

ABSTRACT

Evidence from around the world suggests that children experience poverty as a condition that is damaging to their mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual development. This chapter sheds light on the ways in which poverty impacts rural children and what poverty reduction means in the lives of African children. While children suffer the worst outcomes overall, children in rural areas are significantly more deprived than urban children. The three deprivations which overlap to impact rural children under two years old the most are water, protection (i.e., security), and housing. For these reasons, there are compelling economic, social, and moral grounds that compel us to evaluate child poverty in rural areas in order to understand its severity and urgently find relevant policy solutions.

INTRODUCTION

The task of separating children in rural areas to determine who is poor and who is not poor is a daunting task. To address this uncertainty, this chapter examines the variety of conditions associated with poor children in rural communities to indicate who is poor and who is not. This determination of *child poverty* is important because, as it has been shown in previous chapters, there is no apparent consensus among scholars on how to measure poverty, whether as a unitary dimension or a multidimensional variable. One needs information on the poverty status of individual children to be able to construct an overall poverty count, depth, or severity indicator.

It is widely acknowledged that a wide gap exists with respect to child-focused poverty definitions and measurements within the academic world as well as in the policy arena (Minujin et al., 2006). However, due to greater recognition of the importance of developing and employing child-specific poverty measures, scholars have developed a range of approaches and methods in the last two decades (Gordon et al. 2003, Minujin et al., 2005); Minujin et al., 2006); Townsend, 1987). These scholars argue that the concepts used to define poverty will ultimately determine the methods employed to measure poverty and thus likely influence the subsequent policy and program packages created to address the dimensions of child poverty (Lok-Dessallien, 2002; Minujin et al., 2006); Townsend, 1987).

Furthermore, scholars have outlined several reasons as justifications for a child-focused approach towards poverty (e.g., Boyden, 2006; Gordon et al. 2003; Harpham et al., 2005, Minujin et al., 2006; Waddington, 2004). These justifications are inspired by the strong belief that poverty denies children their fundamental human rights and the complexity of world of poverty in which children live (Gordon et al, 2003). Questions about the effect of timing, age, and duration of poverty on children's health, school success, and emotional status motivate these scholars to look for answers. Consequently, a child-focused approach to poverty is necessary because children are at a higher risk of poverty regardless of place and time.

The underlying assumption that undergirds these arguments is that poverty has many faces: its causes and manifestations vary from place to place and time to time, and more importantly, the analysis of poverty is also permeated with ideological and political conflict (Alcock 1997). We also know that poverty denies the most basic rights of children and its impact often causes permanent damage (Books, 2000). Because of poverty, it is estimated that over eight million children under the age of five in developing countries die each year, mainly from preventable causes (Black et al., 2010). In approximately half of these deaths, malnutrition (hunger) is a contributory cause (UNICEF, 2002).

Concurrently, children experience poverty not only as a dire condition but also as an environment that is damaging to their mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual development. Consequently, *extreme* poverty can cause children permanent damage mentally, that is becoming stunt and distort their development and completely destroy chances to fulfil lifetime opportunities, including roles they are expected to play successfully as they get older in family, community, and society (Singer, 2010). While there is a broad consensus that poverty is a major obstacle for the survival and development of children, currently there are no consistent estimates of the depth, extent or severity of child poverty in African countries (Twine, et al., 2007).

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the agency charged with promoting international child welfare everywhere, has argued that poverty is one of the greatest obstacles to the survival and development of children (Clark et al., 2020; UNICEF, 2005). Because poverty has been defined vicariously for research analysis and policy purposes, and has been used interchangeably with employment status and several other concepts indicative of cash income or economic well-being, it is expedient and necessary to examine the *dimensions* of child poverty and how to improve actions towards changing their poor environment.

While child poverty is the greatest concern of governments and international organizations (e.g., UNICEF), recent public declarations have exposed the multidimensional nature of the *threats* of poverty to childhood (Townsend, 1987; UNICEF, 2013, UNICEF, 2005). Each *threat or deprivation* caused by child poverty in rural areas exacerbates the effect of the others, and when two or more deprivations coincide, the effects on children can be devastating (Aldous & Hill, 1969; Minujin et al., 2006). For example, material poverty leads to malnutrition, which in turn affects health and education, which eventually may impact a child's long-term development. Furthermore, children from poor households may be engaged in child labor, which may negatively impact a child's cognitive and physical development while depriving the child of school.

The two concepts of *poverty* and *deprivation* are tightly linked. But, there is a general agreement among scholars that on the one hand, the idea of *deprivation*, (i.e., *a lack of material conditions and services generally held to be essential to the development of children's full potential*), covers the various living conditions, independent of income, experienced by people who are poor (Townsend, 1987). On the

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