The African Report on Child Wellbeing 2023

JUSTICE NOT CHARITY: AFRICAN GOVERNMENTS MUST END CHILD POVERTY

Country brief: MUARITANIA

INTRODUCTION

Child poverty is a violation of children's rights. It is a failure on the part of governments to fulfil their obligations to children set forth in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Child poverty is about children going to bed hungry and being unable to get the nutritious food they need. It is about children living and begging on the streets, or engaging in hazardous work to support their families and themselves instead of going to school. Child poverty is about children not being able to receive health care, drink clean water or access hygiene and sanitation facilities.

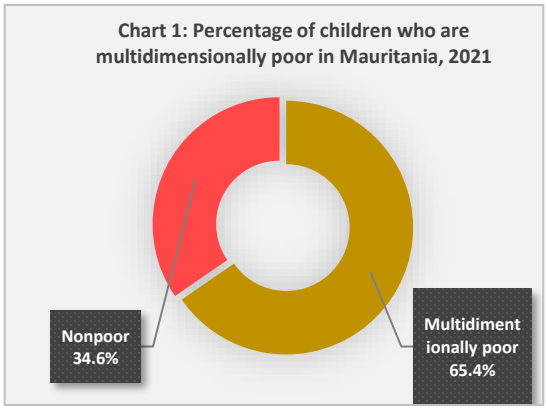
Child poverty has also long-term negative effects on children. It causes lasting loss of ability and productivity later in life and contributes to the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Poverty in early childhood leads to lifelong destitution. For girls, living in poverty exacerbates the 'triple burden' of school, work and household chores, which increases their risk of falling behind in school and makes them more vulnerable to poverty and deprivation. Poverty also predisposes girls to child marriage, sexual abuse and exploitation, and teenage pregnancy.

This brief presents the state of child poverty in Mauritania, government's efforts to combat it and actions required to alleviate and/or eradicate child poverty.

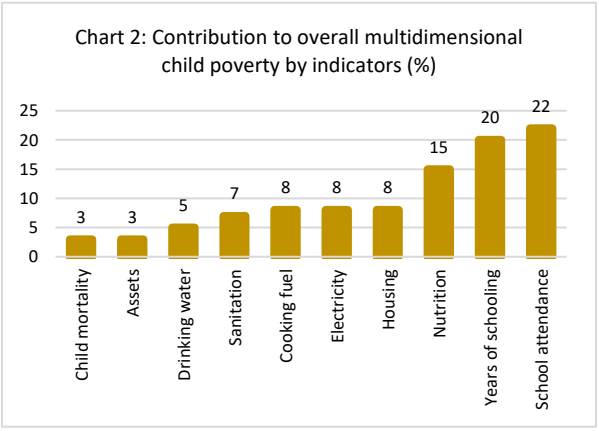
STATE OF CHILD POVERTY IN MAURITANIA

Multidimensional child poverty

Child poverty is prevalent in Mauritania. Almost two-thirds – about two million – of the children in Mauritania live in multidimensional poverty (see Chart 1).



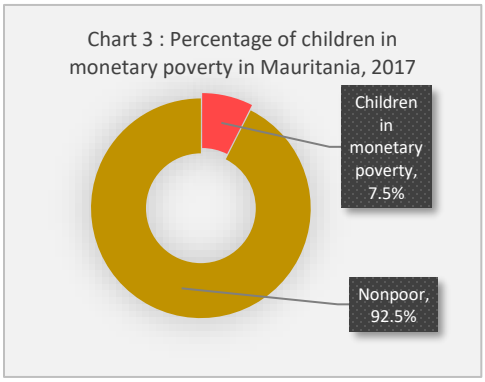
Several factors contributed to the overall multidimensional poverty. Deprivation in education (school attendance and years of schooling) contributed the most (about 42%) followed by inadequate nutrition (15%). See Chart 2.



Extreme poverty among children is also prevalent in Mauritania. Out of the two million multidimensionally poor children, nearly half (45%) are living in severe poverty. An additional 300 thousand children are also on the brink of falling into poverty.

Monetary child poverty

Monetary poverty among children refers to those living in households that live below $1.90 PPP a day (Silwal et al. 2020).



Monetary child poverty is relatively low in Mauritania - only 7.5% of the children are living in monetary poor households (see Chart 3).

GOVERNMENT'S PERFORMANCE IN PROVIDING FOR THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN

The Provision Index: The Provision Index is one of the three components of the Child-Friendliness Index (CFI) used to measure the relative performance of governments in addressing child poverty (see Figure 1 below). It is based on two sets of indicators directly related to child poverty. These include children's access to health care, nutrition and education, as well as budgetary commitment to sectors benefiting children. The results of this measurement give insights into the areas where governments have performed relatively well or fallen short in addressing child deprivations.

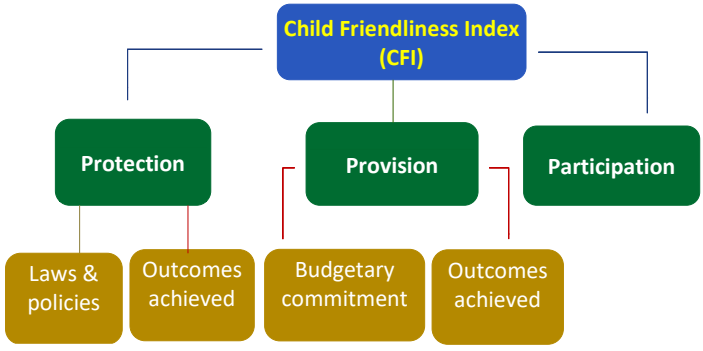


Figure 1: CFI Framework

Mauritania ranked 27th out of the 52 countries analysed in the 2023 Provision Index, climbing eight places from its position in 2018 (see Table 1). Despite the rise, however, Mauritania remains among the low performing countries in Africa. And this low performance is the combined effect of the following:

Table 1: The Provision Index scores and rankings, 2023

Country	Provision Index	Rank	Rank change from 2018
Tunisia	0.8731	1	0
Algeria	0.8370	2	2
Cabo Verde	0.7980	3	2
Seychelles	0.7936	4	7
South Africa	0.7887	5	-2
Mauritius	0.7785	6	-4
Namibia	0.7412	7	-1
Botswana	0.7377	8	-1
Morocco	0.7144	9	1
Egypt	0.6764	10	-2
Lesotho	0.6630	11	1
eSwatini	0.6041	12	-3
Gabon	0.5638	13	0
São Tomé & Principe	0.5370	14	3
Ghana	0.4924	15	1
Zimbabwe	0.4868	16	2
Kenya	0.4722	17	-2
Angola	0.4431	18	-4
Senegal	0.4406	19	1
Sierra Leone	0.4382	20	19
Rwanda	0.4363	21	6
Burkina Faso	0.4339	22	6
Malawi	0.4316	23	-4
Burundi	0.4255	24	-3
Tanzania	0.4193	25	0
Mozambique	0.4003	26	5
Mauritania	**0.3945**	**27**	**8**
Mali	0.3866	28	15
Congo	0.3853	29	5
Zambia	0.3851	30	6
Equatorial Guinea	0.3709	31	-8
Madagascar	0.3705	32	1
Côte d'Ivoire	0.3673	33	-1
Niger	0.3588	34	7
Gambia	0.3535	35	-13
Benin	0.3392	36	1
Togo	0.3392	37	-7
Comoros	0.3354	38	2
Djibouti	0.3352	39	-10
Liberia	0.3323	40	5
Ethiopia	0.3191	41	1
Nigeria	0.3144	42	-16
Guinea-Bissau	0.3116	43	-5
Guinea	0.2967	44	6
DRC	0.2854	45	2
Sudan	0.2846	46	-22
Uganda	0.2831	47	-3
Chad	0.2789	48	1
Cameroon	0.2569	49	-3
CAR	0.2312	50	1
Eritrea	0.1933	51	-3
South Sudan	0.1479	52	0

Source: ACPF 2023

Budgetary commitment: Public investment in some of the sectors benefiting children is generally inadequate in Mauritania.

- Government education expenditure is only 1.9% of GDP, among the lowest in Africa and far below the Dakar commitment target of 10% of GDP.
- Health spending stands at only 7% of total government budget, much lower than the 15% that the government pledged in the Abuja declaration.
- In contrast, current social protection spending is 5.3% of GDP, far better than many African countries.

Provision outcomes: Still significant number of children are deprived in many aspects of their lives in Mauritania.

- One in every four (25.8%) children under 5 years of age are chronically malnourished/stunted.
- Despite a marked decline over the past decades, under-five mortality is still high at 71 deaths per 1000 livebirths. The current median rate for Africa stands at 55 deaths per 1000 livebirths.
- Access to pre-primary and secondary education is very low in Mauritania - gross enrolment ratio is only 10.5% for pre-primary and 39.4% for secondary.
- More than half (50.2%) of the population including children in Mauritania are deprived of basic sanitation facilities while three in ten lack basic drinking water sources.

CHILDREN MOST AT RISK OF POVERTY

Children in rural areas and urban slums; children living in conflict zones, fragile states and areas affected by humanitarian crises; girls; children with disabilities; and children in large families and households headed by people with low levels of education are at greater risk of living in poverty. These groups of children are frequently absent from monetary and multidimensional poverty estimates, and their situation is often ignored in policies and programme development.

DRIVERS OF CHILD POVERTY

Generally, child poverty in Africa including Mauritania is a result of multiple factors. These include:

- Lack of good governance, gross inefficiency and corruption
- Poor accountability at all levels
- Non-inclusive budgeting processes, and
- Absence of financial and economic policies that are pro-poor and sensitive to children.

CONCLUSION AND PRIORITY AREAS FOR ACTION

As shown above, child poverty is rampant in Mauritania – two-thirds or about two million of the children are multidimensionally poor. Of these, one in every two are living in severe poverty. Therefore, the government of Mauritania needs to take action to combat and turn around this extensive problem. For this, six priority areas of action are identified:

Action 1: Declare child hunger and undernutrition as a national emergency: child hunger is not showing any sign of decline. It is rather increasing. The government must take the lead to ensure that no child goes hungry or malnourished.

Action 2: Integrate child poverty in national development planning: government's commitment to ending child poverty is demonstrated, among others, by efforts made to incorporate it into national development plans. It is, therefore, important for the government of Mauritania to elevate child poverty as a priority national agenda.

Action 3: Invest in quality pre- and primary education: access to pre-primary education enhances learning at subsequent levels and addresses inequality of opportunity at an early stage. So, investing in early childhood education is very critical.

Action 4: Improve access and quality of maternal and child health services: improving maternal health helps to give children a strong start and benefits both the mother and child in terms of child birth, breast feeding and establishing positive child feeding practices.

Action 5: Enact universal social protection programmes to ensure protection for poor families and their children: the programmes can include cash and in-kind transfers such as take-home rations that complement the nutritional needs of children or providing basic income to poor households with children.

Action 6: Strengthen governance and accountability: combat corruption, stealing and wastage of public resources through building and enforcing accountability systems.

Six priority areas of action to eradicate child poverty

1. **Declare child hunger and undernutrition as a national emergency**
2. **Integrate child poverty in national development planning**
3. **Invest in quality pre- and primary education**
4. **Improve access and quality of maternal and child health services**
5. **Enact universal social protection programmes to ensure protection for poor families and their children**
6. **Strengthen governance and accountability.**

Definitions

In this brief, child poverty is considered in the context of both multidimensional and monetary poverty measures.

Multidimensional child poverty, as developed by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) and the Human Development Report Office of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), is measured based on three dimensions and 10 indicators that capture deprivation in various aspects of children's lives. These are: health (measured through child mortality and nutrition), education (measured using years of schooling and enrolment), and living standards (measured by indicators on access to water and sanitation as well as household amenities such as electricity, cooking fuel, floor and assets).

Incidence or prevalence of multidimensional child poverty: refers to the proportion of children who are multidimensionally poor out of the total child population. A child is identified as a multidimensionally poor if he or she is deprived in one-third or more of these ten deprivation indicators across the three dimensions

Source: Alkire et al., 2022

Monetary poverty in relation to children refers to those living in households where members live below a poverty line of USD 1.90 a day based on 2011 purchasing power parity (PPP).

Source: Silwal et al. 2020

Main references

ACPF (2023). *The African Report on Child Wellbeing 2023: Justice Not Charity: African Governments Must End Child Poverty*. Addis Ababa: African Child Policy Forum (ACPF)

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