The African Report on Child Wellbeing 2023

JUSTICE NOT CHARITY: AFRICAN GOVERNMENTS MUST END CHILD POVERTY

Country brief: RWANDA

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.

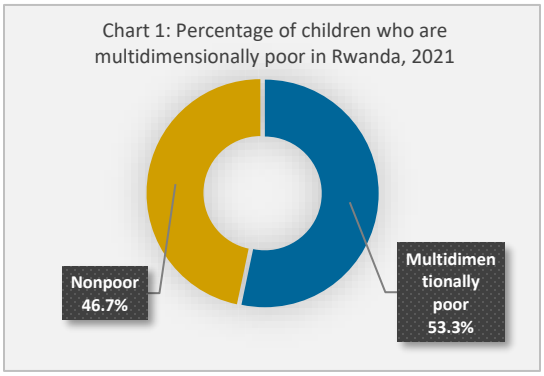
Child poverty has also long-term negative effects on children. It causes lasting loss of ability and productivity later in life and contributes to the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Poverty in early childhood leads to lifelong destitution. For girls, living in poverty exacerbates the 'triple 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 Rwanda, government's efforts to combat it and actions required to alleviate and/or eradicate child poverty.

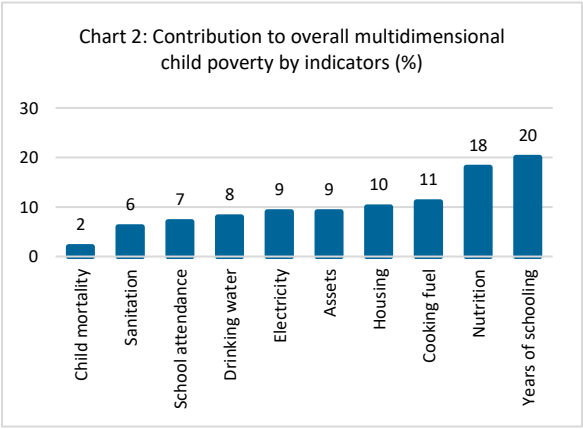
STATE OF CHILD POVERTY IN RWANDA

Multidimensional child poverty

Child poverty is an issue of concern in Rwanda. About 53.3% or 3.4 million children are living in multidimensional poverty (see Chart 1).



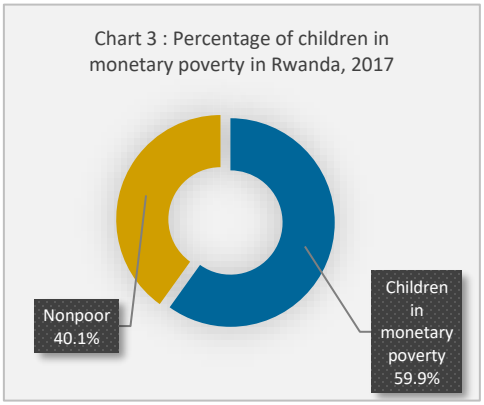
Several factors contributed to the overall multidimensional poverty in Rwanda. Deprivation in years of schooling is the major contributor with 20%. Lack of adequate nutrition is another important contributor with 18%. See Chart 2 for details.



Moreover, out of the 3.4 million multidimensionally poor children, about one million are living in severe poverty. An additional one million children are also at higher risk of falling into multidimensional 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 poverty is also prevalent in Rwanda. About two in three (59.9%) or around 4 million children in Rwanda 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.

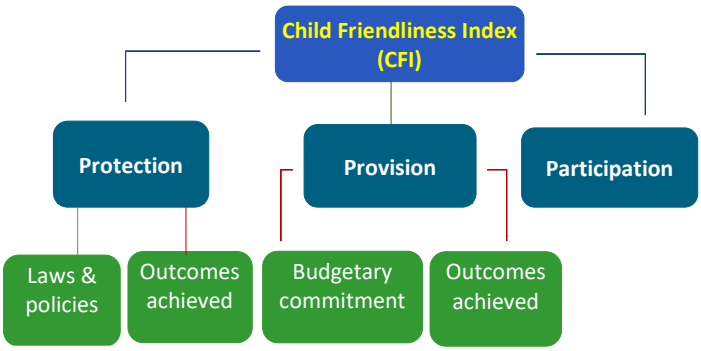


Figure 1: CFI Framework

Rwanda ranked 21st out of the 52 countries covered in the 2023 Provision Index, improving 6 places from 2018 (see Table 1). Notwithstanding the rise, government efforts towards addressing child deprivations are inadequate and still significant number of children are impoverished in many aspects of their lives.

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: despite the improvement, government spending on sectors benefiting children is still insufficient in Rwanda. Rwanda has also failed to meet some regional and international commitments.

- Social protection expenditure stands at 4.1% of GDP in Rwanda. The current African average is a little higher at 4.3% of GDP.

- Education spending is only 3.8% of GDP, far below the Dakar commitment target of at least 10% of GDP.
- Public spending on health is 8.9% of total government budget, much lower than the 15% that the government of Rwanda pledged in the 2001 Abuja declaration.

Provision outcomes: Still significant numbers of children in Rwanda continue to experience multiple deprivations in many aspects of their lives:

- In spite of the decline, child malnutrition continues to be a major challenge in Rwanda. Most recent data shows that about 33.1% of the children under 5 years of age are chronically malnourished or stunted.
- Under-five mortality has declined considerably over the past and currently stands at 40 deaths per 1000 livebirths in Rwanda. The median rate for Africa is higher at 55 deaths per 1000 livebirths.
- Access to pre-primary and secondary education is relatively low in Rwanda – gross enrolment ratio is 27.6% for pre-primary and 44.3% for secondary.
- Still around 36% and 40% of the population including children in Rwanda have no access to basic sanitation facilities and drinking water services, respectively.

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 Rwanda 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

Child poverty remains widespread in Rwanda. More than half of the children are living in multidimensional poverty. A million more are also at risk of falling into poverty. Thus, the government of Rwanda must act urgently to tackle this persistent challenge. For this, the following six priority areas of action are recommended:

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 Rwanda 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)

ACPF (2023). *African Governments Child-friendliness: The 2023 Scoreboard. Companion to the African Report on Child Wellbeing 2023.* Addis Ababa: African Child Policy Forum (ACPF)

ACPF
P.O. Box 1179, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Telephone: + 251 116 62 81 92/96/97/99
Fax: +251 116 62 82 00
E-mail: info@africanchildforum.org
Website: www.africanchildforum.org