1. WHY MEASURE CHILD MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY?

COVID-19 has compounded the situation of children, especially the most deprived. The lockdown measures imposed to prevent its spread have pushed more children deeper into poverty, and families on the cusp of escaping poverty have been pulled back, while others are experiencing levels of deprivation never seen before. The UN Namibia Socio-economic impact analysis of COVID-19 (2020) estimates that the pandemic pushed more than 105,000 people, including some 45,000 children into poverty.

The effects of child poverty are dire. Childhood presents an opportunity and vulnerability at the same time, therefore experiencing poverty in its various dimensions during childhood can be particularly damaging to a child’s development. It is trite to note that children born in poverty tend to grow up in poverty and bear children who will also grow up in poverty. Child poverty is like a life sentence. It becomes a vicious cycle, whose devastating impacts are not only severe and immediate on children, but its harmful consequences can contribute to socioeconomic inequalities, affecting the entire society and slowing down development.

Hence, ending child poverty in all its forms is central in the fight to end global poverty. But first, there is need to ensure that child poverty is credibly measured to better inform policy interventions and responsive programming. Lifting children out of poverty in Namibia (and elsewhere!) is necessary and will make a huge difference in the lives of children, and in their families, their communities, and the world at large. The drive to end child poverty should galvanise governments and partners into action to improve the realisation of their rights to development, health, education, protection, participation, and prospects for better employment, as a way of fighting multidimensional poverty but also, building human capital critical for economic growth and development of societies.

2. HOW IS MULTIDIMENSIONAL CHILD POVERTY MEASURED IN NAMIBIA?

Multidimensional child poverty is measured using the Namibia Multidimensional Poverty Index (NaMPI). The NaMPI was developed from the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative’s Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), which assesses the simultaneous deprivations that are experienced by people based on a set of identified dimensions of poverty. The Index acknowledges that poverty is much more than a monetary value, but the deprivation of human basic capability, covering both monetary and non-monetary poverty. Therefore, understanding the full extent of poverty requires consideration of all potential deprivations, including those pertaining to basic social services.

Accordingly, the NaMPI uses a variety of variables including demographic and social variables that keeps people trapped in poverty. The NaMPI was adjusted and contextualized to reflect the specific Namibian context and development priorities. It focuses on three weighted dimensions, measured across 11 weighted indicators, deemed to be reflective of the Namibian context and informed by available data, from the NHIES (2015/16). (Figure 1). The NaMPI uses a poverty cutoff of 30 percent, which implies that a child is considered to be multidimensionally poor if he or she is deprived in 30 percent or more, of the sum of the weighted indicators.
3. CHILD POVERTY IN NAMIBIA

3.1 Incidence and intensity of multidimensional child poverty
Namibian children experience disproportionately higher levels of multidimensional poverty. On average, 51.3 percent of the children aged 0-17 years are living in multidimensional poverty, compared to 37.4 percent for adults (18+ years) and the national average of 43.3 percent, (Figure 2).

The children living in poverty experience multiple deprivations at the same time. The intensity of multidimensional poverty amongst the child population is 45.1 percent, (Figure 2). This means that each of the multidimensionally poor child in Namibia is deprived in 45.1 percent of the total indicators analyzed, which is about 5 of the 11 indicators.

3.2 Decomposition of the Child Poverty Measure

3.2.1 Child poverty by age
Children in Namibia experience different incidence of multidimensional poverty at the different stages of their life course. The highest headcount poverty ratio is reported for the age group of 2-4 years (57.3%) compared to the 47.9 percent for those within the 15-17-year age group, (Figure 3). However, the intensity of child-based multidimensional poverty is somewhat constant across age groups, which means the poor children are deprived in the same number of indicators, i.e. 5 of the 11 indicators, across their life course.

3.2.2 Child poverty by geography
The proportion of children who are multidimensionally poor is significantly higher in rural than urban areas. At least 64.4 percent of children in rural areas are living in multidimensional poverty compared to 30.4 percent of their peers in urban areas, (Figure 4). Furthermore, the intensity of poverty is also higher in rural areas than urban areas. On average, every poor child in urban areas is deprived in 40.3 percent of the indicators, compared to 46.5 percent for poor children in rural areas.

Figure 1: Structure of the Namibia Multidimensional Index

Figure 2: Incidence & intensity of child poverty

Figure 3: Child based poverty by age groups

Figure 4: Child based poverty by rural/urban
Poverty disparities are also prevalent at the regional level. The highest child poverty rates are experienced in Kavango West, wherein almost 8 in every 10 children are living in multidimensional poverty. This is followed by Kavango East (74.7%) Kunene (69.2%) and Zambezi (66.2%), (Figure 5), whilst the least poverty rates are experienced in Erongo with only 15.7 percent of the children being multidimensionally poor.

As for the child poverty intensity levels, children in Kunene region experience the highest rate of 62.9 percent, which indicates that on average, the multidimensionally poor children in the region are deprived in about 63 percent (~7 of the 11) of the indicators. This is followed by Otjozondjupa, at 52.6 percent, whilst Erongo has the least at 37.5 percent, (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Child based poverty by regions
### 3.2.3 Child poverty by household characteristics

As it is often the case, children from female headed and large households are more likely to be poor. At least 52.7 percent of children from female headed households are living in multidimensional poverty compared to 49.7 percent for those in male headed households, (Figure 6).

**Figure 6:** Child based poverty by sex of head of household

Overwhelming disparities of child poverty also exists among different ethnolinguistic groups. Khoisan speaking children have a significantly higher chance of experiencing multiple deprivations with 93.4 percent of Khoisan people living in multidimensional poverty, followed by the Rukavango (67.8%), whilst German and English-speaking people experience the least multidimensional poverty (2.6% and 3.3% respectively), (Figure 7). However, of all multidimensionally poor people, the highest population counts were reported for people who mainly speak Oshiwambo (50.7%), Rukavango (17.9%) and Nama/Damara (12.0%) languages.

**Figure 7:** Child based poverty by ethnolinguistics
3.3 Factors driving child poverty
Food security and nutrition status are the two major drivers of child poverty in Namibia. Food insecurity is a major development challenge for Namibia given the persistent droughts, which could continue to worsen given the negative impacts of climate change. As such, Food Insecurity and Child Nutrition are the major contributing factors to child multidimensional poverty, accounting for 16.6 percent, each. Other major factors driving child poverty are Transportation Assets (11.7%), Sanitation (11.6%), and Cooking and Lighting Energy (11.5%), (Figure 8).

4.5% 16.1% 35.2%

Figure 8: Percentage contribution of each indicator to child poverty

3.4 Overlaps between monetary and multidimensional poverty
Monetary poverty tends to understate actual levels of poverty. Approximately 16.1 percent of children in Namibia are both multidimensionally and monetary poor. About 35.2 percent of children are multidimensionally poor but not monetary poor, suggesting that household income alone is not a sufficient predictor of poverty among children. Additionally, 44.2 percent of children are neither multidimensionally nor monetary poor, (Figure 9).

It can thus be concluded that relying on monetary poverty for policy targeting can result in high exclusion errors. In this case, a significant proportion of children (35.2%) who are multidimensionally poor, despite living in non-monetary poor households, would have been excluded. Complementarity between the two measures is thus key to better inform policies and programmes aimed at addressing the needs and deprivations faced by poor children and break the inter-generational poverty cycle.

Figure 9: Overlap between monetary and multidimensional child poverty

Non-poor = 44.2%
4. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The incidence and intensity of child poverty in Namibia illustrates the urgency and magnitude of the problem. This has been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, whose impacts could be catastrophic to children and communities, who were already living in impoverished, marginalised and vulnerable communities. The fight against child poverty is a global priority, which should galvanize governments and partners to strengthen partnerships and collaboration for a Big Push on policies and programmes at reducing child poverty in all its dimensions as articulated in SDG 1. The Government of Namibia is thus called up to strengthen its fight against child poverty, including through:

4.1 Embedding multidimensional poverty in policy making with clear child poverty targets. The forthcoming National Development Plan (NDP 6) process presents a unique opportunity for a well-coordinated and multi-sectoral approach to simultaneously address the major drivers of child poverty, including the need to:

- Invest in smart agriculture to address food & nutrition security and micronutrient supplementation to ensure adequate nutrient intake during early years of life.
- Strengthen integrated case management and the provision of social services in areas such as education and health, as a multidimensional poverty reduction strategy but also for building human capital.
- Strengthen school retention to ensure that children complete, at least their basic education, including investing in more schools to reduce distance to school.
- Expedite the implementation of the School Grant Policy to facilitate accessible, inclusive, and quality education to all children, particularly in the poorest regions.
- Prioritise public investment in WASH infrastructure targeting areas of high vulnerability and low access, including promotion of WASH education in communities.
- Promote decent work and inclusive growth to reach families, children and adolescents living in multidimensional poverty.
- Review the National Housing Policy to enhance the provision of housing, including formalising and upgrading of informal settlements.
- Strengthen investments in alternative and clean sources of energy and lighting.

4.2 Ensuring sustained, equitable and efficient investments towards child multidimensional poverty reduction, particularly in sectors and programmes supporting the development of children. This includes the need to:

- Use the NaMPI as part of the resource allocation formula at national and regional levels as well as the School Grant Policy under development.
- Protect and expand investments in children, including adopting the principle of cuts for children last, in times of fiscal austerity.
- Eliminate social spending inefficiencies, resource leakages and strengthening budget execution in all sectors, including those directly benefiting children.

- Mobilise new and innovative resources, such as social impact bonds and strengthen the financing architecture for improved quality and scale of investments towards ending child multidimensional poverty.

4.3 Strengthening child sensitive and shock responsive social protection. Social protection is an indispensable part of a coordinated policy response to child poverty. Thus, the government is encouraged to:

- Increase coverage of child grants and progressively move towards universal child benefits.
- Maintain real value of grants by adjusting transfer values to inflation, to ensure maximum impact on deprivations, including through a light targeting of the Old Age Pension.
- Strengthen the links between social protection, particularly cash transfers and the provision of complementary services linked to outcomes in human capital development and poverty reduction – education, nutrition, WASH, health, ECD, nutrition, child protection etc.
- Strengthen social protection systems so that it can respond to shocks such as disease outbreaks like COVID 19, floods and droughts, including through the development of integrated management information systems.
- Strengthen adolescent development programmes, employment and labor market interventions, in support of families, to lift children out of poverty.

4.4 Data generation for child poverty measurement: The recent publication of the NaMPI (2021) is commendable and needs to be sustained. Overtime and to the extent possible, there would be need to further enrich the Measure to include more child related indicators such as ECD, birth registration, disability, violence against children and child labour, among other key determinants of child poverty.

1. A World Bank (2021), Social Protection in Namibia: Spending and Performance Analysis show that N$630 million annual (~23% of old age grant) could be saved through a light targeting and reallocated to child benefits.