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Multidimensional Poverty in Kenya: Analysis of Maternal and Child Wellbeing
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CONTEXT

The main concept used to assess poverty in developing countries is that of income poverty. People are absolutely poor if their income falls below the amount required for a given basket of commodities in a given year. However, poverty is not simply a question of income; therefore more comprehensive poverty measures are being developed based on multiple non-monetary dimensions of welfare. A research team from University of Nairobi has generated such measures of multi-dimensional poverty for women and children in Kenya.

INNOVATIVE RESEARCH ON POVERTY IN KENYA

The study analyses multiple aspects of wellbeing for women and children in Kenya using Demographic and Health Survey data. For the purpose of the study, the researchers first constructed a composite wealth index (CWI), and then applied the Alkire and Foster (2007) approach to the measurement of multidimensional poverty based on the CWI and nutritional status (child anthropometrics and BMI for adults). Stochastic dominance analysis was further used for poverty comparisons across groups. Finally, the study identified the determinants of being poor in either wealth, health or in both dimensions.

KEY FINDINGS

- Dimensions contributing most to wealth index are household assets, source of safe drinking water and sanitation.
- Low household wealth and rural residence are the major contributors to multidimensional poverty.
- Poverty among women and children in Kenya varies across space (see poverty map below) and time.
- Rural multidimensional poverty exceeds that in urban areas.
- Mother's education and height, child characteristics (gender, age and birth order), housing and environmental conditions (floor material, safe drinking water and sanitation) impact multidimensional poverty significantly.

CONCLUSIONS

- Use of complementary approaches to multidimensional poverty analysis reveals complexities in welfare distribution that one-dimensional (monetary) approaches would not capture.
- Analysis of the determinants of multidimensional poverty provides important policy insights for improving human capital investments.

Alkire and Foster (2007) M0 Indices-children
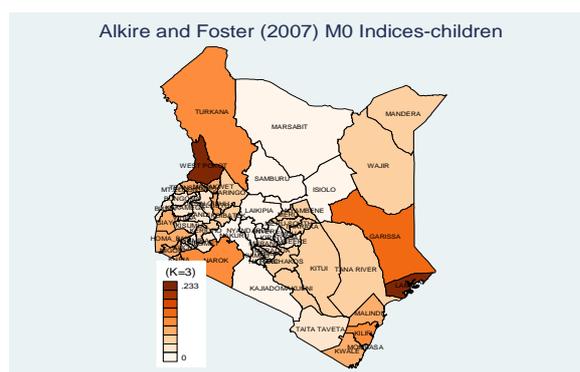
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Kenya government should promote specific programs and policies that are likely to have long term human capital returns and intergenerational effects on child welfare. With the findings of this study, we recommend:

- Re-design of social protection programs to take into account the distribution of multidimensional poverty among children and women across districts in Kenya;

- Provision of critical social infrastructure to areas where the poorest of these groups cluster - rural areas and urban slums;

- Addressing identified nutritional deficiencies of the most vulnerable groups of women and children.

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