

# No poverty

Anika Altaf and Nicky Pouw

## Target 1.1: Eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than \$1.25 a day

### Key messages:

- Poverty is economic and non-economic.** SDG target 1.1 should not only target the economically poor, but also the politically, environmentally and social-culturally poor.
- Participatory and bottom-up research highlights the difficulties to reach the ultra-poor.** Participation can empower the averagely poor, but may not be effective for reaching the ultra-poor. Poverty reduction instruments need to differentiate between the poor and ultra-poor.
- Action research needs to include the ultra-poor as stakeholders.** Action research into different categories of poor and ultra-poor should precede and inform poverty reduction policies and action in order to achieve transformative change.
- The politics of poverty.** National definitions of poverty should provide room for political minorities and marginalized, because they are currently invisible in statistics.

### Introduction

The first SDG aims to eradicate poverty for all. While the number of people living in extreme poverty has dropped by more than half – from 1.9 billion in 1990, to 836 million in 2015 – too many are still struggling for the most basic human needs. Participatory approaches in poverty research have gained ground alongside money-metric approaches to poverty primarily as complementary to provide contextual understanding of causes of poverty and its multiple dimensions. However, at the level of national and international economic analysis and policy-making, traditional poverty indicators still feature most prominently, and the ‘voices of the (poorest of the) poor’ remain largely unheard for reasons of subjectivity. Furthermore, their knowledge, potentials and aspirations remain invisible. This policy brief aims to provide insights into how to make poor people visible and heard through research and development interventions, at multiple levels of statistical poverty research and social-economic policymaking.

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## Poverty is both economic and non-economic

Research has shown that the root causes of poverty are multi-dimensional and not only related to a lack of income. Depending on context, poverty is caused by environmental, political, social-cultural and/or economic factors. By defining poverty as a lack of income, there is a risk that poverty reduction strategies may not be effective for all (Altaf & Pouw, 2016).

## Participatory and bottom-up research highlights the difficulty to reach the ultra-poor

Participatory and bottom-up research can enable communities to decide on their own criteria for assessing development impacts (Partos, 2015; Pouw *et al.*, 2016; The Hunger Project, 2015). Analyzing a problem together, negotiating findings, and writing their own development history and future can transform poor people's understandings and behaviours. The poor are stakeholders of their own development and it is their basic right to conduct their own analysis. However, this does not mean that the ultra-poor are automatically included. Specific policy and research instruments are needed to reach the ultra-poor, often requiring extra time, knowledge and resources.

## Action research needs to include the ultra-poor as stakeholders

Action type research, giving room for trial and error, feedback mechanisms, adjustment along the way and collective learning is crucial in discovering ways to include the voices of the ultra-poor and make them agents of transformative change (see also Sanz, 2015; Pouw *et al.* 2016). Currently, people with disabilities (mental or physical) are rarely considered as agents of transformative change in poverty research, but merely as dependents. Action research can shed more light on the two-way process of self-exclusion and social exclusion (Altaf & Dietz, 2015; Altaf & Pouw, 2016). It can help to explain how and why the ultra-poor make themselves invisible and unheard and how and why their community excludes them and how these two processes interact.

## The politics of poverty

There is growing attention to the fact that poverty and knowledge about poverty are deeply political and that

there is little, if any, attention to political processes and power relations within poverty research. Processes that allow some to escape poverty traps are the same that make the exploitation of others possible. Marginalization is highly political and requires solutions based on redistribution and transformations of power. Thus, questions of why societies accept that parts of their populations suffer, go hungry, stay poor, or are disempowered, and how these prevailing societal visions can change into a new vision on development and shared human wellbeing, need critical investigation.

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## Further reading

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