



MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY IN LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES: LEVELS, PATTERNS, AND PROGRESS

Sabina Alkire and Lhachi Selden

KEY MESSAGES

- Least Developed Countries (LDCs) are home to half of all people living in multidimensional poverty (560 million out of 1.1 billion) despite representing less than one-fifth of the global population covered by the global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) 2025.
- Nearly half of people living in LDCs are multidimensionally poor compared to just over one in nine in non-LDCs (49.7% vs. 11.4%).
- Within LDCs, poverty is unevenly distributed, with higher rates among children, in rural areas, and in certain subnational regions.
- Just over half of multidimensionally poor people in LDCs are severely multidimensionally poor, being deprived in one half or more of the weighted deprivations. There are very strong positive and pro-poor trends in poverty reduction in the majority of LDCs, but there are also unfortunate increases in poverty and the number of poor persons in some cases.
- Understanding deprivation patterns is critical for effective, context-specific policy interventions. While multidimensional poverty trends provide a nuanced picture, there are also clear signals that rapid poverty reduction among LDCs is possible.

INTRODUCTION

Least developed countries (LDCs) are ‘low-income countries confronting severe structural impediments to sustainable development. They are highly vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks and have low levels of human assets’.¹ In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ‘Doha Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries for the decade 2022–2031’ (DPoA) noted the impact of shocks and structural issues facing LDCs and outlined six key focus areas to accelerate the progress

of LDCs towards the 2030 Agenda.² The 2025 Doha Political Declaration—the outcome document of the Second World Summit for Social Development—again highlighted LDCs among several country groupings that face ‘special challenges’, spotlighting the need to focus on transformative actions in these contexts.³

Eradicating poverty ‘including extreme poverty, hunger and malnutrition, in all its forms and dimensions’ in LDCs is recognised in the first key focus area of the DPoA.⁴ LDCs

¹ UNDESA (n.d.)

² UNGA (2022).

³ Article 19, p.4, UNGA (2025).

⁴ Paragraph 37, UNGA (2022).

Authors: Sabina Alkire is Director of the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), an economic research centre within the Oxford Department of International Development at the University of Oxford, England; and a member of the Committee for Development Policy (CDP). Lhachi Selden is Research and Policy Officer at OPHI.

CDP Issue Briefs are a space for individual members of the Committee for Development Policy (CDP) to convey their insights on subjects under discussion by the CDP. The views and opinions expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the United Nations Secretariat or of CDP. Members of CDP, a subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), are independent experts and serve in their personal capacity. The designations and terminology employed may not conform to United Nations practice and do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Organization.

will be contributing national reviews for the mid-term review of the DPoA this year, detailing their country-led progress towards the eradication of poverty. To contribute to this stocktake, this brief focuses on the current poverty status of LDCs using the lens of the global Multidimensional Poverty Index (global MPI). This is a comparable measure of acute multidimensional poverty capturing individuals' overlapping deprivations across three dimensions (health, education and living standards) and ten indicators. There are currently 44 LDCs⁵ of which 39 are included in the global MPI 2025.

Despite representing less than one-fifth of the global population covered by the global MPI 2025, LDCs are home to half of all people living in multidimensional poverty. Moreover, nearly half of people living in LDCs are poor—compared to just over one in nine in non-LDCs. Such stark figures underscore the need for sustained and unswerving attention to be invested in poverty reduction in LDCs. The brief explores how multidimensional poverty is unevenly concentrated in LDCs (by age, rural/urban areas, and subnational disparities). It illuminates very strong positive and pro-poor trends in poverty reduction in the vast majority of LDCs, as well as unfortunate increases in poverty or in the number of poor persons over time in some cases. This brief therefore shows that progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 1.2 is possible, highlighting how six LDCs have halved their global MPI value in under fifteen years. This brief concludes that reporting MPI figures, whether global or national, in Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) and the global SDG database, provides LDCs with an important opportunity to monitor progress and demonstrate how sustained efforts are leading to meaningful reductions in alleviating the multidimensional deprivations of the world's poorest populations.

HALF OF ALL MULTIDimensionALLY POOR PEOPLE LIVE IN LDCS

The global MPI 2025 covers 6.3 billion people across 109 countries in developing regions. Of these, 1.1 billion people (18.3%) live in acute multidimensional poverty, which means that they are deprived in one-third or more of the ten weighted indicators. However, this poverty is not distributed equally across countries. Thirty-nine countries included in the global MPI are LDCs.⁶ These countries are home to 1.1 billion people—but half of all MPI poor people globally (560 million) live in LDCs.

⁵ UNDESA (2025).

⁶ **Africa:** Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Togo, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, and Zambia. **Asia:** Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Nepal, and Timor-Leste. **Western Asia:** Yemen. **Caribbean:** Haiti. **Pacific:** Kiribati and Tuvalu.

BOX 1

What is the Global MPI?

The global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) is an international measure of acute multidimensional poverty, which is published annually, covering over 100 developing countries. It complements traditional monetary poverty measures by capturing acute deprivations that a person faces simultaneously in three dimensions: health, education, and living standards

The global MPI constructs a deprivation profile for each household and person in it, covering 10 indicators. A household and all people living in it are deprived if any child is stunted or any person for whom data are available is underweight; if any child has died in the past five years; if any school-aged child is not attending school up to the age at which she or he would complete class eight; if no household member has completed six years of schooling; if the household lacks access to electricity; if the household lacks an improved source of drinking water within a 30-minute walk round trip; if the household lacks an improved sanitation facility or it is improved but shared with others; if the household cooks with solid cooking fuel; if the household lacks a durable roof, floor or wall materials; or if the household does not own more than one of these assets: a radio, animal cart, phone, television, computer, refrigerator, bicycle, motorcycle or car.

All indicators are equally weighted within each equally-weighted dimension. The health and education indicators are weighted one-sixth each, and the standard of living indicators are weighted one-eighteenth each. A person's deprivation score is the sum of the weighted deprivations she or he experiences. The global MPI identifies people as multidimensionally poor if their deprivation score is one-third or higher.

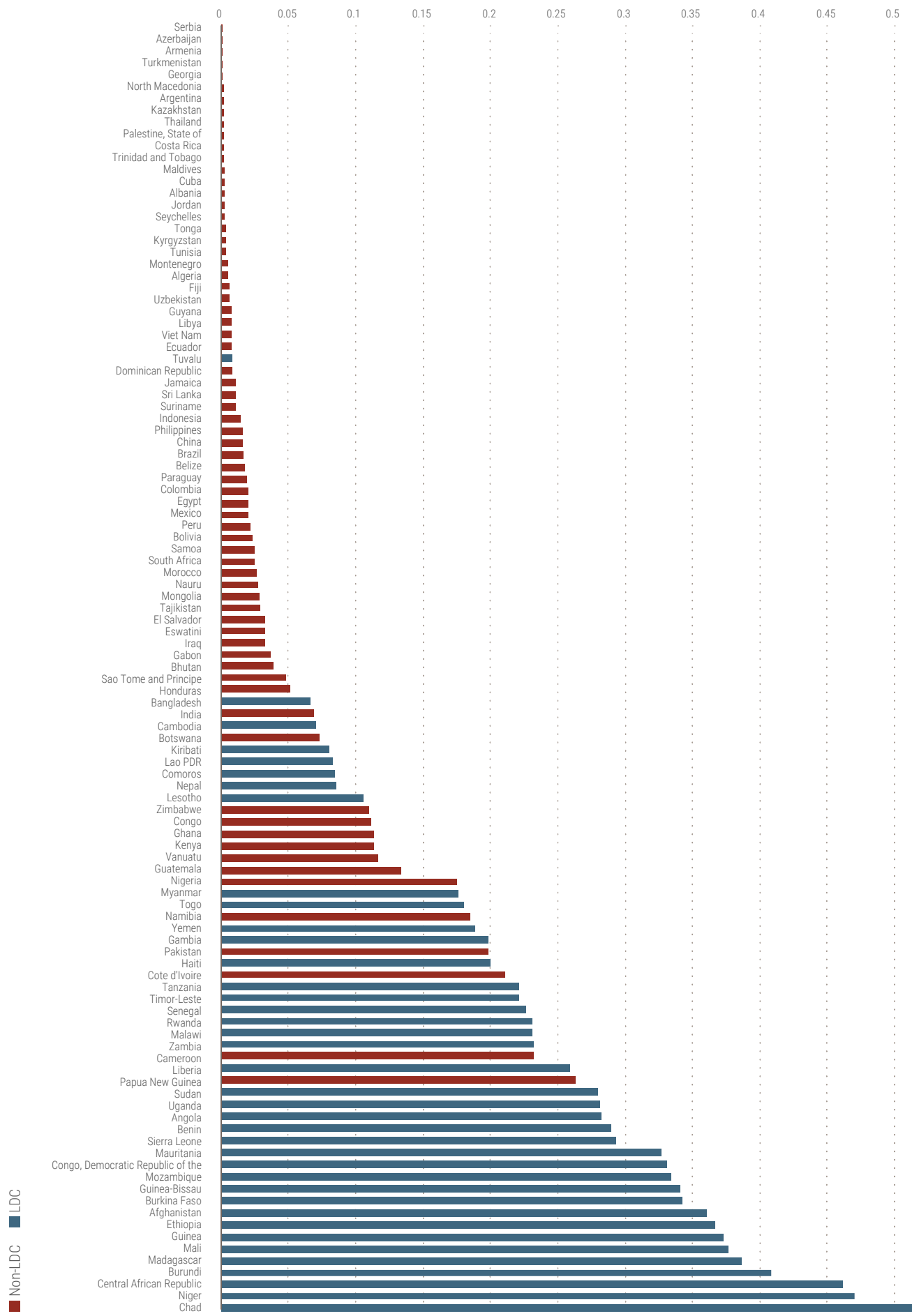
An **MPI value** is the product of the **incidence** (H, or the proportion of people who live in multidimensional poverty) and **intensity** of poverty (A, or the average deprivation score among multidimensionally poor people). Put simply, $MPI = H \times A$. MPI values range from 0 to 1, and higher values imply higher poverty. Global MPI values decline when fewer people are poor and/or when poor people have fewer deprivations.

The precise definition of each indicator is available online, together with any country-specific adjustments and the computer code used to calculate the global MPI value for each country. The global MPI is also disaggregated by rural-urban areas, subnational regions, age cohorts, and gender of the household head. By providing the percentage of a population (or group) who are poor (the incidence), the average share of weighted indicators in which they are deprived (the intensity) and a deprivation profile showing the composition of their poverty, the global MPI complements the international \$3.00 a day poverty rate, bringing interlinked non-monetary deprivations into view.

The global MPI was developed in 2010 by OPHI with the UN Development Programme (UNDP) for inclusion in UNDP's flagship Human Development Report. It has been published annually since 2010.

Source: Adapted from OPHI and UNDP (2025).

Figure 1
MPI values across 109 countries



Source: Authors' computations based on Global MPI 2025 data Table 1, National Results MPI 2025' from Alkire, S., Mishra, R., Selden, L. and Suppa, N. (2025-b).

HALF OF THE PEOPLE LIVING IN LDCS ARE POOR COMPARED WITH ONE IN NINE PERSONS OTHERWISE

The other shocking differential is the level of poverty in LDCs compared to non-LDCs included in the global MPI. Nearly half of those living in LDCs, 49.7% or 560 million people, experience multidimensional poverty. In contrast, 11.4% of the 5.2 billion people living outside of LDCs are poor (588 million people, or roughly one in nine).

It is not only the incidence, but also the intensity of poverty—at 50.4%—which is substantially higher in LDCs compared to other countries. On average, every poor person across LDCs is deprived in one-half of the weighted indicators of the global MPI—far higher than the intensity of poverty in non-LDCs (Table 1). The MPI value shows that poor people in LDCs experience over one-fourth of all possible deprivations (0.258), whereas in non-LDCs it's just over one-twentieth (0.052).

TABLE 1
Average MPI, incidence, and intensity in LDCs vs. other countries

	LDCs	Other countries
MPI	0.258	0.052
Incidence (H)	49.7%	11.4%
Intensity (A)	50.4%	42.0%
Severe poverty incidence	27.0%	3.8%

Source: Authors' computations based on Global MPI 2025 data Table 1. 'National Results MPI 2025' from Alkire, S., Mishra, R., Selden, L. and Suppa, N. (2025-b).

Poverty in LDCs is also more severe. Of the 560 million poor individuals in LDCs, more than half, 54.3% or 304 million people, are severely poor, meaning they are deprived in more than half of the weighted indicators of the global MPI. Severely poor people are deprived in more than half of the weighted indicators of the global MPI. Globally, 501 million people are severely poor and 60.8% of them live in LDCs.

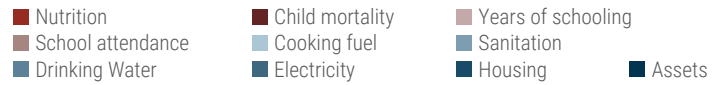
The concentration of LDCs among the poorest countries further highlights this disparity. Based on a global MPI ranking of countries by their MPI values, the 52 poorest countries include 38 of the 39 LDCs included in the global MPI⁷ (figure 1, see page 3). The situation is starkest at the bottom of the scale: the poorest 19⁸ countries by MPI value are all LDCs. In these countries, poverty is not just experienced marginally. The incidence of poverty in these 19 countries is always greater than 50%, meaning that more than half of their populations are acutely

⁷ Tuvalu is the only LDC that does not fall into the bottom 52.

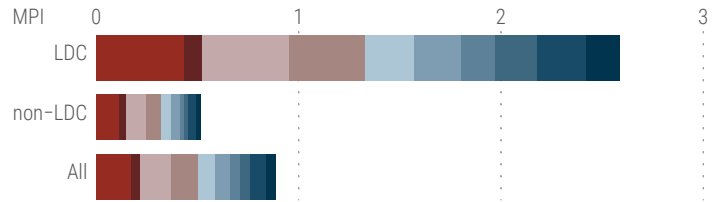
⁸ Chad, Niger, Central African Republic, Burundi, Madagascar, Mali, Guinea, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Congo DRC, Mauritania, Sierra Leone, Benin, Angola, Uganda, and Sudan.

Figure 2

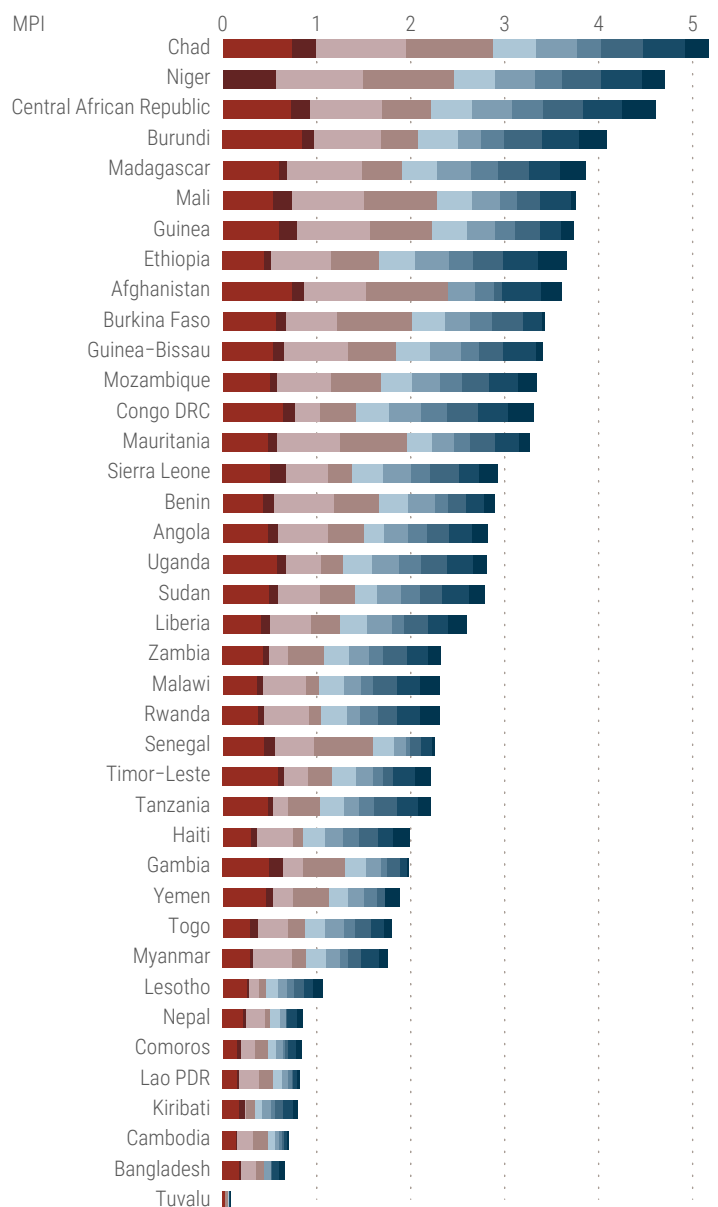
Aggregate MPI values by LDCs vs. other countries and MPI values and indicator composition for 39 LDCs



LDC vs non-LDC: Aggregate MPI values range from 0.052 (non-LDC) to 0.258 (LDC)



MPI ranges from 0.008 to 0.517: Headcount ratio ranges from 2.1% to 84.2%



Source: Authors' computations based on Global MPI 2025 data Table 1, National Results MPI 2025' from Alkire, S., Mishra, R., Selden, L. and Suppa, N. (2025-b).

deprived in indicators pertaining to health, education and living standards.

As figure 1 (see page 3) shows, poverty levels vary across countries. Among LDCs, MPI values range from 0.517 in Chad (with an incidence of 84.2%) to 0.008 in Tuvalu (2.1%). Among non-LDCs the range is lower, from 0.263 in Papua New Guinea (56.6%) to nearly zero in Serbia (0.000; 0.11%) (figure 2, see page 4).

In terms of the composition of poverty, living standards in general—and particularly deprivations in electricity and drinking water—contribute less to poverty in non-LDCs, while undernutrition contributes relatively more.

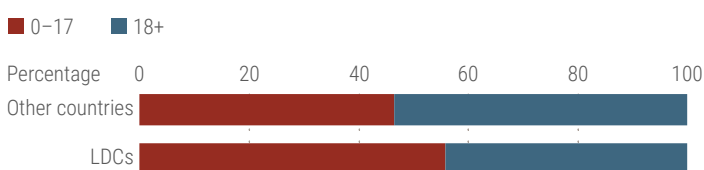
CHILDREN CARRY A HIGHER BURDEN OF POVERTY IN LDCS COMPARED TO OTHER COUNTRIES

According to the global MPI, very troublingly, half of the 1.1 billion poor people are children under the age of 18. Globally, 27.8% of children are poor compared to 13.5% of adults, highlighting the disproportionate burden of poverty among children.

In LDCs, children carry a yet higher burden. Of the 560 million people living in multidimensional poverty in LDCs, 55.9% (313 million) are children, while 44.1% of poor people (247 million) are adults. The pattern is reversed in non-LDCs, where adults make up 53.5% (315 million) of all poor people, while children represent 46.5% (273 million) (figure 3).

Figure 3

Share of the population in multidimensional poverty by age group in LDCs vs. other countries



Source: Authors' computations based on Global MPI 2025 data Table 3, Age Results MPI 2025' from Alkire, S., Mishra, R., Selden, L. and Suppa, N. (2025-c).

RURAL POVERTY AFFECTS A VERY LARGE PROPORTION OF PEOPLE IN BOTH LDCS AND NON-LDCS, BUT POVERTY LEVELS ARE FAR HIGHER IN LDCS

Across all countries, the majority of people living in multidimensional poverty are located in rural areas. In LDCs, 84.0% of all poor people, 470 million individuals, live in rural areas. A similar pattern is observed in non-LDCs, where 83.0% of poor people, or 488 million individuals, live in rural areas.

However, poverty rates differ sharply in both rural and urban areas in LDCs compared with non-LDCs. In LDCs, 61.1% of rural residents live in multidimensional poverty, compared with 25.1% of urban residents. In non-LDCs,

while rural areas are still poorer, poverty rates are considerably lower overall—18.2% of rural residents are multidimensionally poor compared with only 4.0% of urban residents.

LDCS ARE HOME TO THE MAJORITY OF THE WORLD'S POOREST SUBNATIONAL REGIONS

Disaggregation by subnational regions illuminates inequality. Across the 39 LDCs, the global MPI can be disaggregated for 525 subnational regions. There is a wide variation in poverty across these regions, from 2.0% of people living in multidimensional poverty in Vientiane, Lao PDR to 99.3% in Kanem, Chad. In 325 LDC subnational regions, home to 444 million poor people, half or more of the people are poor.

Non-LDCs can be disaggregated into 834 subnational regions, and the incidence of MPI in these ranges from 0.0% in 17 subnational regions⁹ to 87.0% in Hela, Papua New Guinea. However, in non-LDCs, there are only 60 regions, home to 133 million poor people, where half or more of people are poor.

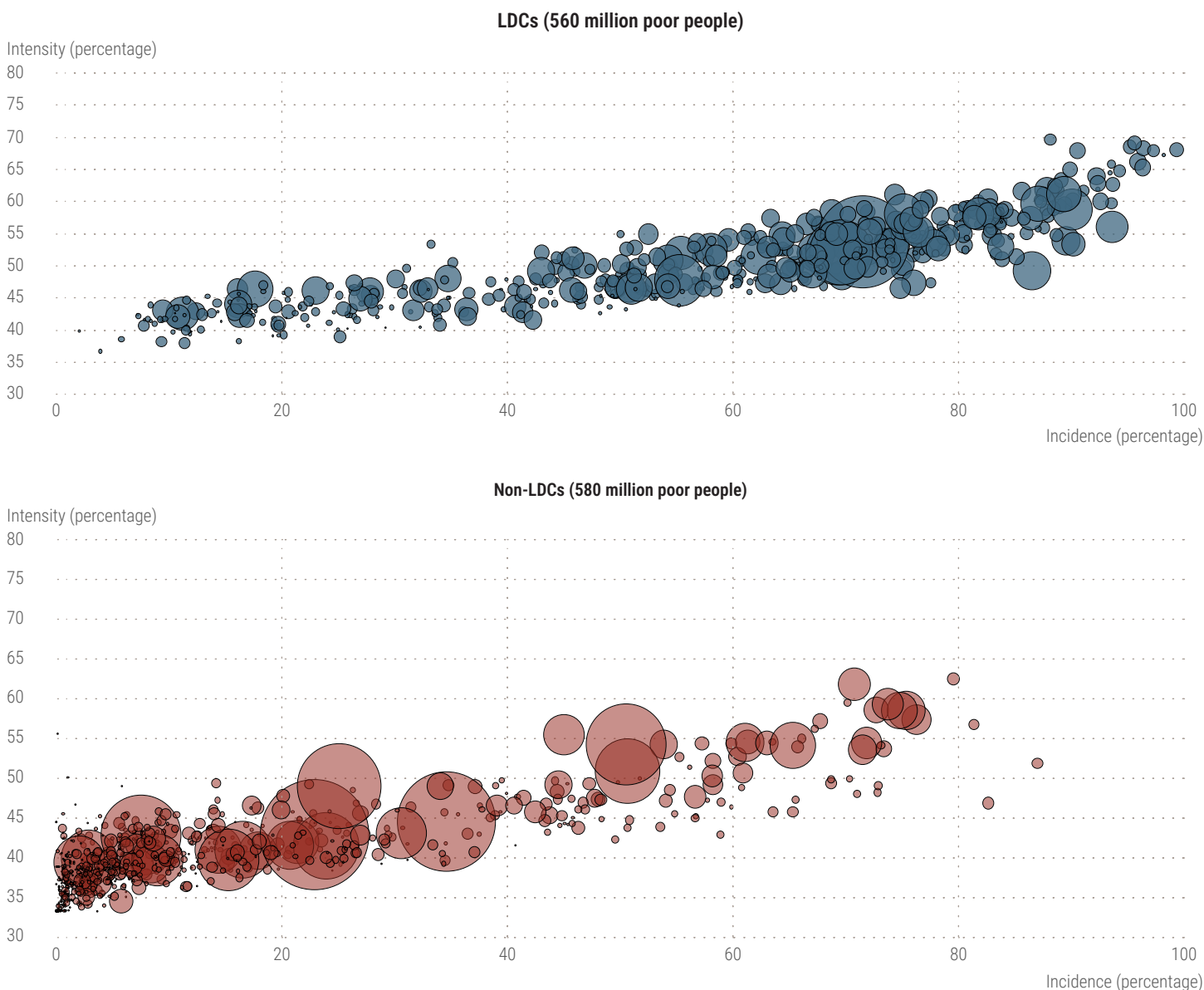
The bubble charts in figure 4 (see page 6) transparently depict these inequalities. The MPI incidence is on the horizontal axis with the poorer regions on the right; the height shows the intensity of poverty (higher is more intense poverty) and the size of the bubble shows the number of MPI poor people in that region. The vast majority of the world's poorest subnational regions are located in LDCs, where high incidences of poverty are compounded by higher intensity among the poor. Conversely, most subnational regions in non-LDC countries face lower poverty levels.

THE COMPOSITION OF MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY ACROSS LDCS: INSIGHTS FOR EFFECTIVE POLICY DESIGN

Beyond the incidence and intensity of MPI, examining the composition of the deprivations that constitute multidimensional poverty at the subnational level within LDCs further highlights actionable disparities and policy levers (figure 5, see page 7). In Lesotho, for example, the national MPI is 0.106, but within its regions, the estimates range from 0.062 in Maseru to 0.283 in Thaba Tseka. Even regions with similar MPI values can exhibit markedly different deprivation profiles. Butha-Buthe and Mohale's Hoek in Lesotho have similar MPI values of 0.120 and 0.124, respectively, yet deprivations in years of schooling (households in which no one has completed six years of schooling) contribute far more to poverty in Mohale's Hoek, while undernutrition is a far larger component of poverty in Butha-Buthe. Actions to reduce poverty in each region can draw on this information.

⁹ Belonging to Azerbaijan, Botswana, Cuba, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, Suriname and Turkmenistan.

Figure 4
Incidence vs. intensity in LDCs vs. other countries



Note: Each bubble represents a subnational region. The size of the bubble is proportional to the number of poor people in that subnational region during the survey year.
Source: Authors' computations based on Global MPI 2025 data Table 5, Subnational Results MPI 2025¹⁰ from Alkire, S., Mishra, R., Selden, L. and Suppa, N. (2025-c).

A similar pattern can be observed in Cambodia. Prey Veng and Battambang have similar MPI values of 0.047 and 0.046, respectively, yet the composition of poverty differs. In Battambang, the living standards dimension (blue) contributes visibly more to the MPI, compared to Prey Veng, reflecting higher levels of deprivation among the poor in Battambang across indicators such as cooking fuel, sanitation, electricity, and assets. However, Prey Veng has considerably more undernutrition and education-related deprivations. These differences illustrate how regions with similar overall poverty levels can face distinct deprivation patterns, underscoring the value-added of the MPI information platform in informing context-specific and evidence-based policy interventions at the subnational level.

TRENDS OVER TIME IN THE GLOBAL MPI ACROSS THE LDCs: A NUANCED PICTURE

Thirty-five of the LDCs included in the global MPI have data from more than one point in time, allowing for the analysis of trends over time¹⁰ (all except Angola, Kiribati, Myanmar and Tuvalu). When looking across the 64

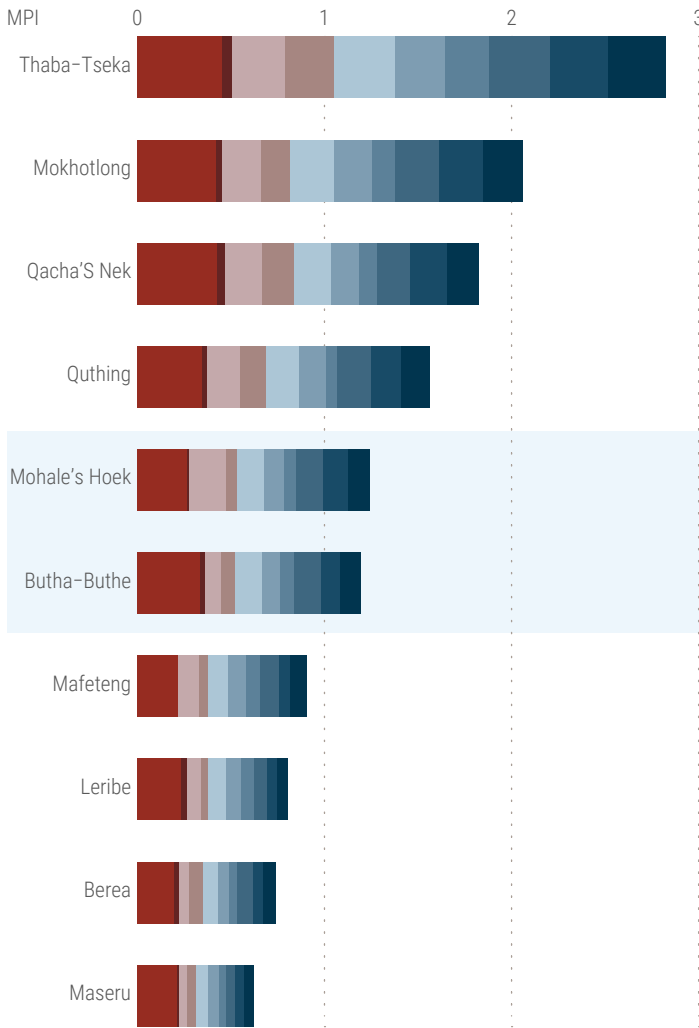
¹⁰ Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Central African Republic, Comoros, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Niger, Sudan, Timor-Leste, Uganda and Yemen have **one time period**. Bangladesh, Cambodia, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Lao PDR, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Togo and Zambia have **two time periods**. Benin, Senegal, United Republic of Tanzania, have **three time periods** and Nepal has **five time periods**.

Figure 5

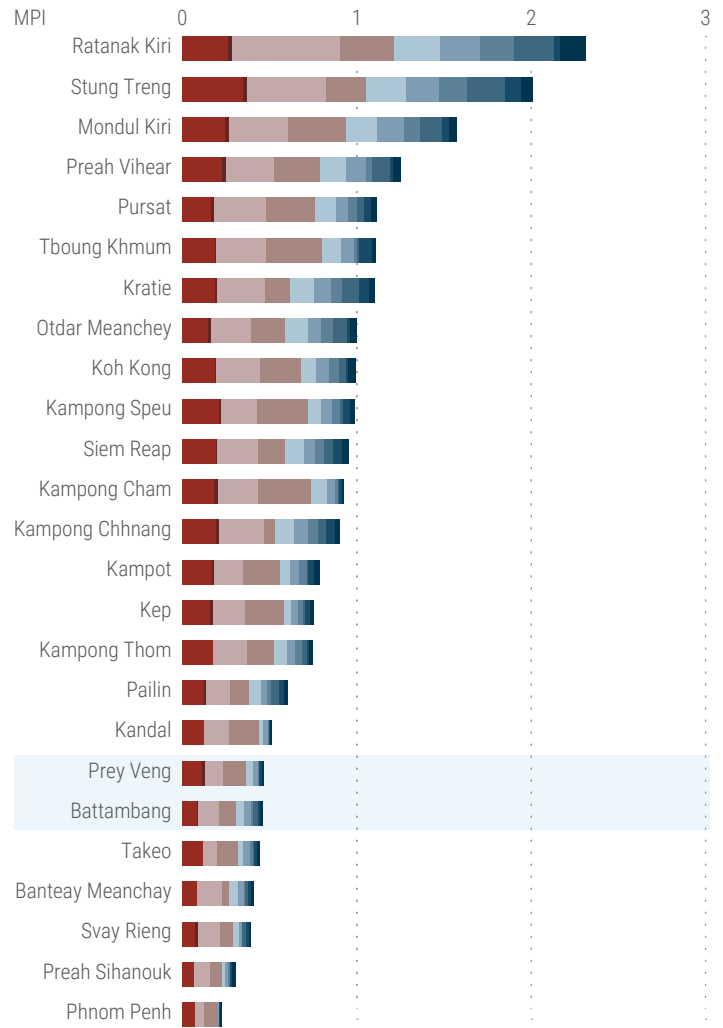
Composition of poverty across subnational regions in Lesotho and Cambodia

■ Nutrition ■ Child mortality ■ Years of schooling ■ School attendance ■ Cooking fuel ■ Sanitation ■ Drinking Water ■ Electricity ■ Housing ■ Assets

Subnational regions of Lesotho: MPI ranges from 0.062 to 0.283
Headcount ratio ranges from 17.4% to 61.5%



Subnational regions of Cambodia: MPI ranges from 0.022 to 0.231
Headcount ratio ranges from 5.8% to 49.1%



Source: Authors' computations based on Global MPI 2025 data Table 5. 'Subnational Results MPI 2025' from Alkire, S., Mishra, R., Selden, L. and Suppa, N. (2025-c).

periods available, 31 countries¹¹ achieved a reduction in multidimensional poverty in at least one period. The fastest reductions, by absolute annualised change in MPI value, occurred during some period(s) in Sierra Leone, Togo, Ethiopia, Liberia, Nepal and Timor-Leste, while poverty increased in Guinea, Central African Republic and Afghanistan, in some period(s) (figure 6, see page 8).

Among the 12 countries with trends only for a single period, eight countries¹² recorded reductions in both the

¹¹ Except in Afghanistan and Central African Republic where poverty increased and Yemen and Guinea-Bissau where reductions were not statistically significant.

¹² Burkina Faso, Burundi, Comoros, Haiti, Niger, Sudan, Timor Leste and Uganda.

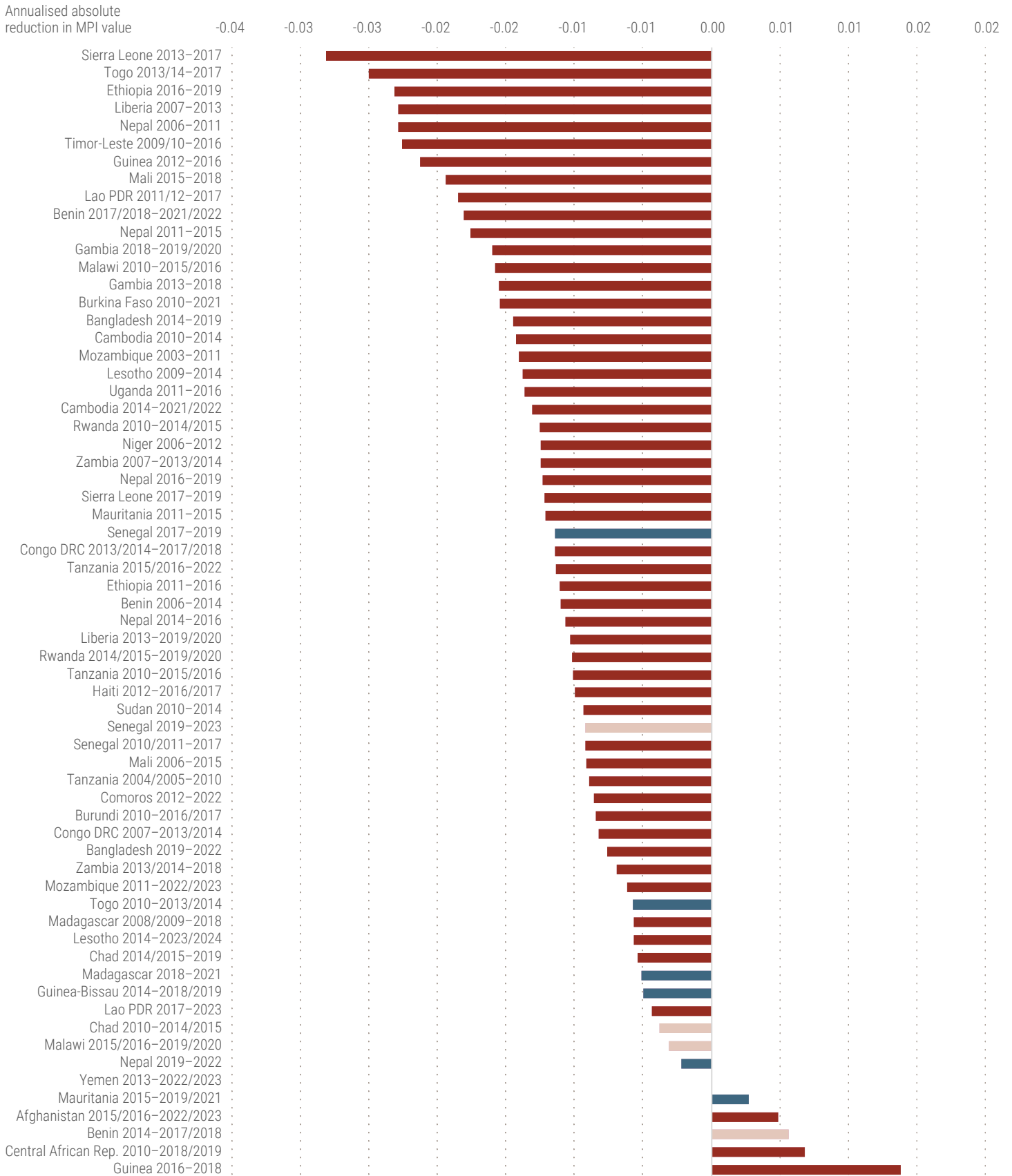
MPI value and the incidence of multidimensional poverty. Thirteen¹³ of the 19 countries with trends across two time periods experienced statistically significant reductions in the MPI value in both periods, and 11¹⁴ recorded such reductions in the incidence of multidimensional poverty. The largest change in the number of poor people occurred in Bangladesh, where 28.7 million people left poverty between 2014 and 2022. This was followed by Cambodia, where nearly 4 million people left poverty between 2014 and 2021/22.

¹³ Bangladesh, Cambodia, Congo DRC, Ethiopia, Gambia, Lao PDR, Lesotho, Liberia, Mali, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Zambia.

¹⁴ Bangladesh, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Lao PDR, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Rwanda, and Zambia.

Figure 6

Absolute annualised changes in multidimensional poverty across 64 time periods in 35 LDCs



Note: The lighter red bars represent reductions that were statistically significant only at 90% and the blue bars represent reductions that were not statistically significant.

Source: Authors' computations based on Global MPI 2025 data Table 6. 'Trends Over Time MPI 2025' from Alkire, S., Mishra, R., Selden, L. and Suppa, N. (2025-a).

TABLE 2

Six countries halved their MPI value within 15 years.

Country	Year		Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI _T)		Multidimensional Headcount Ratio (H _T)		Intensity of Poverty (A _T)		In severe poverty		Total population at survey year		Number of MPI _T poor people		Number of MPI _T in severe poverty	
	t ₀	t ₁	t ₀	t ₁	t ₀	t ₁	t ₀	t ₁	t ₀	t ₁	t ₀	t ₁	t ₀	t ₁	t ₀	t ₁
	Year		Range 0-1		% pop.		Avg % of weighted deprivations		% pop.		Thousands		Thousands		Thousands	
Bangladesh	2014	2022	0.145	0.050	30.5	11.5	47.5	43.6	10.99	2.62	157,965	169,385	48,206	19,504	17,368	4,430
Cambodia	2010	2021/22	0.225	0.070	47.1	16.6	47.8	42.2	19.49	4.09	14,501	17,202	6,832	2,863	2,827	704
Comoros	2012	2022	0.171	0.085	34.6	19.4	49.3	43.8	15.12	5.68	682	834	236	162	103	47
Lao PDR	2011/12	2023	0.210	0.082	40.4	17.8	52.0	46.2	21.81	6.49	6,519	7,665	2,631	1,366	1,422	497
Lesotho	2009	2023/24	0.228	0.106	49.6	25.0	46.0	42.3	19.04	6.05	1,981	2,337	982	585	377	142
Nepal	2006	2022	0.300	0.068	58.3	16.4	51.4	41.3	31.22	3.64	26,565	29,715	15,478	4,869	8,293	1,083
Nepal	2011	2022	0.186	0.068	39.2	16.4	47.3	41.3	16.84	3.64	27,464	29,715	10,755	4,869	4,626	1,083

Source: Global MPI 2025 data Table 6. 'Trends Over Time MPI 2025' from Alkire, S., Mishra, R., Selden, L. and Suppa, N. (2025-a). Authors' computations based on Global MPI 2025 data Table 6. 'Trends Over Time MPI 2025' from Alkire, S., Mishra, R., Selden, L. and Suppa, N. (2025-a).

Among countries with more than two periods of data, results vary. In Benin, poverty declined in two of the three observed periods (2006–2014 and 2017/18–2021/22), while in Senegal reductions were recorded in one of three periods (2010/11–2017). In Nepal, reductions were observed in four periods between 2006 and 2019, but not in the latest pandemic period 2019–2022, while in the United Republic of Tanzania poverty declined in all three periods between 2004/05 and 2022. Looking at changes in the number of people living in poverty, the largest reduction among these countries occurred in Nepal, where 10.5 million people left poverty between 2006 and 2019.

However, when population growth outpaces the rate of poverty reduction, the number of people living in poverty can still increase even as poverty rates decline. In the latest periods for all LDCs, the number of poor people increased in nine¹⁵ countries.

Unfortunately, in Afghanistan (2016–2023), Central African Republic (2010–2019), and Guinea (2016–2018), the MPI value increased. In Afghanistan and Central African Republic, the incidence of poverty also went up, as did the number of poor people by 5.3 million and 619,000 respectively.

THE PROGRESS OF LDCS TOWARDS ACHIEVING SDG TARGET 1.2 TO DATE

As figure 5 shows, many LDCs show that substantial reductions in multidimensional poverty are achievable—even in time periods that spanned the pandemic. Of the 35 covered countries, 31 LDCs significantly reduced MPI in at least one period while the MPI value increased in only three countries (Afghanistan, Central African Republic

and Guinea). Similarly, of the 64 LDC country-periods covered, MPI fell significantly in 50 periods, and significantly increased in three periods. This strong pattern of progress across LDCs merits recognition and further study.

In particular, six LDCs have halved their MPI value in well under 15 years, illustrating that meeting SDG target 1.2 is possible when sustained efforts are made (Table 2). Bangladesh, Cambodia, Comoros, Lao PDR, Lesotho and Nepal each reduced their MPI value by half across periods spanning 8 to 14.5 years. In Bangladesh, the incidence fell from 30.5% to 11.5% during the period 2014–2022 and Cambodia's incidence dropped from 47.1% to 16.6% during the period 2010–2021/22. Lao PDR cut its MPI incidence from 40.4% to 17.8% during the period 2011/12–2023. Nepal's MPI more than halved, falling from 39.2% in 2011 to 16.4% in 2022. If we extend the time period further, it fell massively from 58.3% in 2006 to 16.4% in 2022. Meanwhile, Lesotho's MPI fell from 0.228 to 0.106 (its incidence fell from 49.6% to 25.0%) during the period 2009–2023/24. Comoros halved its MPI from 0.171 to 0.085 during the period 2012–2022, while its incidence fell 34.6% to 19.4%. These changes show that great strides are possible in LDCs in periods of under 15 years, ending 2021/2022 or later.

Reductions in all six countries were also pro-poor in the sense that the number of people who experienced severe poverty went down relatively faster than MPI. For example, while Bangladesh cut the number of multidimensionally poor people by nearly 60% in eight years—from 48.2 million to 19.5 million—it cut the number experiencing severe poverty by nearly three-quarters, from 17.4 million to 4.4 million.

Other LDCs may have halved poverty on the ground, but data are not sufficient to track their progress. Sierra Leone, for example, had the fastest progress of any country, cutting poverty from 74.0% to 57.9% in merely four

¹⁵ Niger, Burundi, Burkina Faso, Sudan, Zambia, Malawi, Congo DRC, Chad and Mozambique.

A selection of LDCs reporting the results of National MPIs in Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)

VNRs offer important spaces to reflect on progress towards the SDGs.

- **Mauritania's** 2024 VNR noted how monetary poverty and extreme poverty were decreasing but that multidimensional poverty 'remains high' affecting 59.6% of the population in Mauritania. As a result, the President of the Republic's priority programme aims to consider 'poverty in all its forms' and is currently targeting 'improving purchasing power, job creation, and access to basic services for the most disadvantaged populations.'^a
- **Nepal's** 2020 VNR reported that 'Multi-dimensional poverty reduced from 59 per cent in 2006 to 39 per cent in 2011 and 28.6 per cent in 2014 (NPC, 2018b)' setting a target 'to reduce multi-dimensional poverty to 6 per cent by 2030.'^b The report highlighted that 'A number of projects have been initiated and coordination needs to be further enhanced to ensure their effectiveness. With more detail mapping and disaggregated data on multidimensional poverty and targeted and comprehensive interventions, these programs will be further consolidated.'^c
- **Uganda's** 2024 VNR reported 'Although multidimensional poverty (those facing multiple deprivations) for all ages declined from 44.3% in 2016/17 to 42.1% in 2019/20, the value was still high... This means that there are challenges in providing critical services to poor and vulnerable households, including education and health. Multidimensional poverty was higher in rural areas (54%) compared to urban areas (14.1%) in 2019/2020.' The challenge of rural poverty is in part behind plans to invest in the Parish Development Model to integrate 39% of the population in subsistence agriculture into the money economy.'^d
- **Sierra Leone's** 2024 VNR reported 2019 multidimensional poverty data in the absence of more recent monetary poverty estimates and reported a decline in MPI incidence from 64.8% in 2017 to 58.0% in 2019. They noted 'that multi-dimensional poverty is largely a rural phenomenon, with the western area rural and urban the least poor regions in the country'. The report asserted that 'The findings of the MPI provide insightful information at national and district levels, with wide-ranging policy implications for the implementation of the SDGs and the National Development Plan. It shows that despite progress in other areas, poverty in Sierra Leone remains high, and hence one of the most serious challenges the country is facing today.'^e

^a p.22, Mauritania 2024 VNR. Available at <https://hlpf.un.org/countries/mauritania/voluntary-national-reviews-2024>.

^b p.28, Nepal 2020 VNR. Available at <https://hlpf.un.org/countries/nepal/voluntary-national-review-2020>.

^c p.30, Nepal 2020 VNR. Available at <https://hlpf.un.org/countries/nepal/voluntary-national-review-2020>.

^d pp.15-16, Uganda 2024 VNR. Available at <https://hlpf.un.org/countries/uganda/voluntary-national-reviews-2024>.

^e pp.7, 37–38, Sierra Leone VNR 2024. Available at <https://hlpf.un.org/countries/sierra-leone/voluntary-national-reviews-2024>.

years (2013–17), and cutting it further from 2017 to 2019, but these data only cover a six-year time span and there are unfortunately no data more recent than 2019. Global MPI poverty trends span less than 10 years for 19 of the LDCs¹⁶ and less than 7 years for 10 LDCs. This points to an urgent need for multidimensional poverty data in LDCs in the form of high-quality multi-topic surveys that cover MPI indicators that are updated frequently, and that can be extensively disaggregated.¹⁷

HOW LDCS REPORT PROGRESS IN MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY TO THE SDGS

The first of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals is to end poverty, and the second of the 169 SDG targets—SDG target 1.2—is to halve poverty in all its forms. SDG indicator 1.2.2 measures the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions. To accord with national specifications, many governments have developed bespoke official national MPIs whose structure and design reflect country-specific priorities, datasets and/or policy contexts. Currently, 56 developing countries have official national MPIs, covering around 4 billion people worldwide, of which 19¹⁸ are LDCs. An additional 10 LDCs are in the process of building their first official national MPI.

SDG Indicator 1.2.2 is unique as it is the only SDG indicator for which national governments act as the custodian agencies. UNDP, UNICEF and the World Bank support national governments to submit their MPIs to the global SDG database.

Multidimensional poverty has been a visible topic of discussion across the SDG period. Since 2016, 86 Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) have reported multidimensional poverty data drawing on national, global or other MPI measures. National MPIs remain the most frequently reported approach, appearing in 64 VNRs, including nine from LDCs¹⁹ (Box 2). A number of countries which do not yet have an official national MPI have reported their global MPI estimates—with 21 VNRs doing so, including five²⁰ from LDCs.²¹

¹⁶ The first and last trend points available are less than 7 years for: Sudan, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Uganda, Guinea, Niger, Sierra Leone, Burundi, Gambia, Timor-Leste, and they span 7 to 9.5 years for: Afghanistan, Togo, Ethiopia, Central African Republic, Mauritania, Chad, Malawi, Rwanda, Yemen.

¹⁷ This was underlined in the Doha Political Declaration (A/RES/80/5): '43 (i) Support developing countries, particularly African countries, least developed countries, small island developing States and landlocked developing countries, in, inter alia, strengthening the capacity of national statistical offices and data systems to ensure access to high-quality, timely, reliable and disaggregated social development data.'

¹⁸ Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Djibouti, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nepal, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Uganda, and Yemen.

¹⁹ Angola, Djibouti, Madagascar, Mauritania, Nepal, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Yemen.

²⁰ Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Lao PDR and Liberia.

²¹ See Duncan (2025) for more details on VNR reporting of MPI.

Twenty-one of the LDCs that do not yet report a national MPI under SDG Indicator 1.2.2 do have global MPI estimates. For these countries with recent and/or upcoming global MPI data, reporting the global MPI levels and trends could offer an important opportunity to monitor multidimensional poverty and progress towards the SDGs. As the global MPI captures deprivations across key SDG indicators, it provides a useful framework for assessing the interconnected dimensions of poverty in all its forms while simultaneously reflecting progress across multiple SDGs (1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 11). Nepal considered alternative MPI structures, then officially decided to adopt the global MPI as the official national MPI and reports it under SDG 1.2.2. For other LDCs, reporting a global MPI could be a useful option, and would make progress in poverty reduction visible in cases where the global MPI structure already reflects national definitions, or while a national MPI is being developed.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Using the global MPI, an analysis of multidimensional poverty of LDCs shows how they face pronounced challenges compared with non-LDCs. Half of people in LDCs live in multidimensional poverty compared with one in nine people in non-LDCs. These findings highlight the importance of including a strong focus on LDCs in global poverty eradication efforts, particularly as poverty in these countries is often compounded by other vulnerabilities, such as conflict, climate and limited access to trade, finance, and basic services. These findings also further emphasise the importance of prioritising poverty eradication within the national development plans of LDCs with support from the international community.

The lenses of child poverty, rural poverty and subnational poverty when applied to LDCs collectively highlight clear urgent priorities for national poverty reduction policies and SDG implementation, because they show the disproportionate burden of global poverty that LDCs carry. While the global MPI provides a troubling yet nuanced picture, change is possible. There are clear positive cases showing that rapid poverty reduction among LDCs is possible. In fact, six LDCs have reduced their global MPI by half in less than fifteen years, showing that SDG target 1.2 can be achieved with sustained action towards poverty eradication. Other LDCs may have experienced real reductions in poverty, but data limitations make it impossible at present to track their progress.

Serious investment in high-quality multi-topic surveys covering MPI indicators are critical to monitor progress in poverty reduction. Frequent updates and disaggregation for population subgroups provide a firm evidence base for high impact policy design. Reporting multidimensional poverty in the Global SDG Indicator Database also remains key. In the absence of national MPI data,

the global MPI may provide a useful alternative, and may show the direction of travel, enhancing the stocktake on progress that the Mid-term review of the DPoA aims to provide.

References

- Alkire, S., Mishra, R., Selden, L. and Suppa, N. (2025-a). ‘The global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) 2025: Changes over time results for 88 countries’, OPHI MPI Methodological Note 63, Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), University of Oxford.
- Alkire, S., Mishra, R., Selden, L., and Suppa, N. (2025-b). ‘The global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) 2025 Country results and methodological note’, OPHI MPI Methodological Note 61, Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), University of Oxford.
- Alkire, S., Mishra, R., Selden, L. and Suppa, N. (2025-c). ‘The global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) 2025: Disaggregation results and methodological note’, OPHI MPI Methodological Note 62, Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), University of Oxford.
- Duncan, E. (2025). ‘Multidimensional poverty in Voluntary National Reviews 2016–2025’, OPHI Briefings 60, Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), University of Oxford.
- Global MPI 2025 Data Table 1: ‘National Results MPI 2025’.
- Global MPI 2025 Data Table 3: ‘Age Results MPI 2025’.
- Global MPI 2025 Data Table 4: ‘Area Results MPI 2025’.
- Global MPI 2025 Data Table 5: ‘Subnational Results MPI 2025’.
- Global MPI 2025 Data Table 6: ‘Trends Over Time MPI 2025’.
- Government of Nepal (2020). *Nepal National Review of Sustainable Development Goals*.
- Ministry of Planning and Economic Development (2024). *Sierra Leone 2024 Voluntary National Review Report*.
- OPHI and UNDP (2025). *Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2025—Overlapping Hardships: Poverty and Climate Hazards*, Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).
- Republic of Uganda (2024). *Uganda’s 3rd Voluntary National Review Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.
- Republique Islamique de Mauritanie (2024). *Revue Nationale Volontaire des Objectifs de Développement Durable 2024*.
- United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) (n.d.) The least developed countries (LDC) category. Available at: <https://policy.desa.un.org/least-developed-countries> (Accessed: 16 March 2026).
- United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) (2025) List of least developed countries. Available at: https://policy.desa.un.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/ldc_list.pdf (Accessed: 16 March 2026).
- United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) (2025). Doha Political Declaration of the “World Social Summit” under the title “the Second World Summit for Social Development”. Available at <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/80/5> (Accessed: 18 March 2026).
- United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) (2022). Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries. Available at: <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/76/258> (Accessed: 18 March 2026).