

# POVERTY INDEX: WELL DONE, BUT STILL A LONG WAY TO GO

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Issues Related to Poverty, Inclusion, Employment & Sustainable Development

The 2019 global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) from the UN Development Programme and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, which was released last week, confirmed that India's poverty reduction programmes are on the right track.

The report said that incidence of multidimensional poverty almost halved between 2005-06 and 2015-16, climbing down to 27.5%, indicating that the number of poor people in the country fell by more than 271 million within 10 years. Among states, Jharkhand showed the greatest improvement, with Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, and Nagaland slightly behind. Multidimensional poverty defines poor not only on the basis of income, but also on other indicators, including poor health, poor quality of work and the threat of violence. The poorest district is Alirajpur in Madhya Pradesh, where 76.5% of people are poor – the same as Sierra Leone in Sub-Saharan Africa.

India's progress in reducing multidimensional poverty has happened thanks to investments in key areas. The country reduced deprivation in nutrition from 44.3% in 2005-06 to 21.2% in 2015-16. Child mortality dropped from 4.5% to 2.2%; deprivation in sanitation from 50.4% to 24.6%; people deprived of cooking fuel from 52.9% to 26.2%; and those deprived of drinking water from 16.6% to 6.2%.

The positive numbers, however, cannot hide another stark reality.

Despite poverty reduction across religions and caste groups, the report also found that 50% of tribals in the country are poor, as are 33% of Dalits and 33% of Muslims. Keeping in view the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, how can India ensure that Dalits, Muslims and tribals are not left behind? The UN's recently released *World Economic Situation and Prospects* as of mid-2019 makes a critical point: Economic growth alone is not sufficient for poverty reduction.

What matters are the types of investment by the State. Countries that have driven poverty reduction trends, the report added, have focused their investments on people, importantly through the provision of health, education and social protection. India has been doing that; now it needs to put the pedal to the metal by not just increasing investments in these areas, but also improving implementation of national programmes and ensuring that they reach the last mile.

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