



# Leave no one behind

## The real bottom billion

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### Key messages

- Around a billion people continue to live in extreme poverty, on less than \$1.25 a day. One third are likely to be children, although they make up just one fifth of the non-poor population. Also over one third of the poor are actually in work – an estimated 375 million people. Under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), although poverty was reduced, the gains have been close to zero for the poorest.
- One billion people age-15-and-up have either no schooling or an incomplete primary education. Poor rural girls are often particularly deprived: on average, across 79 developing countries, 44% of poor rural females had 4 years-or-less of education compared with 23% of young adults.
- Close to one billion people (800 million) are malnourished – three quarters of whom live in rural areas.
- In all of the above, people from minority groups are significantly overrepresented. For example, more than two thirds of education- and health-poverty is found among households where the head is a member of an ethnic minority group. Moreover, across 16 countries the poorest women from disadvantaged ethnic groups were the most likely to have been left behind by progress in education and health.
- Governments will not meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) unless they tackle the specific obstacles faced by marginalised groups. Addressing discriminatory attitudes is an important part of this task and international pressure will be required to bring about normative change, particularly in countries where governments deliberately exclude some groups.

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## Introduction

Poor people are frequently treated as abstract, atomised beings. The generic classification of ‘the poor’, absent any social or economic context, is increasingly unsatisfactory as a basis for understanding the dynamics of poverty or of defining useful ways of ending it. Oxford economist Paul Collier’s famous ‘bottom billion’ (Collier, 2007) was based on classification by national boundaries – with the country of residence being the key characteristic defining poverty. Andy Sumner’s work on the ‘new bottom billion’ showed the limits of that approach (Sumner, 2010; 2012b). But as the experiences and contexts of different groups and individuals within countries diverge, what really matters to poor people, as to others, are their own experiences and whether or not they are able to realise their aspirations for themselves and their families (Narayan et al., 2009).

The experience of people in many middle- and high-income countries shows that this is not only influenced by supply-side issues – whether or not their government provides health and education – but also by whether a person’s inherent (or ascribed) characteristics enable them to readily access these and other opportunities, or whether they are excluded. The current migration crisis is just one manifestation of systematic exclusion. Countering this entails confronting the obstacles faced by groups of individuals who share similar characteristics.

Alarming, while significant progress has been made in reducing overall poverty during the last 15 years (defined both in terms of income and more widely in relation to health, education and living standards), often the poorest and most marginalised groups have not benefitted at all or have not benefitted enough. Indeed, the bottom 5% of the global income distribution made no progress at all on the key Millennium Development Goals (MDG) target of reducing income poverty between 1988 and 2008 (Milanovic, 2012). Moreover, some groups are disproportionately poor; children accounted for 30% of people living on less than \$1.25 a day in 2010 despite representing only 20% of the non-poor population (Olinto et al. 2013).

The new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) explicitly recognise group-based disadvantage and stress the need for progress to leave no one behind. They also identify a series of groups who are typically excluded from progress, who are overrepresented across several different indicators of deprivation (Kabeer, 2010), and who must make rapid advances if the goals are to be reached. These groups include the old, people with disabilities, ethnic and religious minorities, women and girls, and sexual minorities, among others.

This paper sets out why the ‘leave no one behind’ agenda should be a key priority (i) in implementing the SDGs in all countries and (ii) in assessing whether or not governments have met them. It underlines how deeply entrenched marginalisation is, how vulnerabilities often overlap to amplify multiple disadvantages, and just how little we know about some groups that are likely to be deprived.

Priorities for action in the next three years that arise from our analysis<sup>1</sup> are:

At national level:

- Identifying the marginalised populations within countries. This will require improving data quality, but also including marginalised people themselves in the process.
- On the basis of this information, governments committing to implementing policies that address the vulnerabilities that marginalised groups experience.

At a global level:

- Regular convening of a high level global ‘leave no one behind’ summit to monitor progress and maintain political pressure. Put bluntly, unless the global phenomenon of inequality (both of income and other aspects of wellbeing including health and education) are addressed, the SDGs will not be reached. This issue is not only restricted to developing countries: developed countries also have pockets of marginalisation in which people systematically perform worse than the average. Governments everywhere need to adopt the principle that leaving no person – and no group – behind is a critical issue defining the extent of progress over the next 15 years.

## Who is being left behind?

Over recent decades, there has been some convergence across countries in terms of wealth (Milanovic, 2012). Many low-income countries (LICs) have progressed to lower-middle-income (LMIC) status. However, the poorest people in many countries have not benefitted from the high average growth rates at the national level. Overall, the richest 1% of people owned 48% of global wealth in 2014, and global wealth is being increasingly concentrated in the hands of a small elite (Oxfam International, 2015). In contrast, the combined wealth of the poorest half of the world has decreased since 2010 (ibid.).

Globally, the largest increases in per capita income between 1998 and 2008 were recorded among those at the very top of the income distribution and among the ‘emerging global middle class’ (Milanovic, 2012). Those in the bottom third of the global income distribution also made significant gains and many escaped poverty. However, the gains are close to zero for the least well-off: the poorest 5% of the population worldwide did not experience any increase in their real incomes over this period (ibid.). Ravallion (2015) also finds that while there has been considerable progress in average living standards and even in reducing numbers of poor people, there has been little progress in raising the ‘floor’ or incomes of those at the bottom.

Horizontal or group-based inequalities exist in all countries, although their specific forms depend on the national context. The failure to ensure that all groups benefit

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<sup>1</sup> See Melamed (2015).

equitably from the development process so far has also meant that group-based inequalities are increasingly a driver of conflict (Stewart, 2008). Examining inequalities through a group lens is important to identify impediments to further progress and who is being left behind (Kabeer, 2010).

In the past fifteen years, groups which have made significantly less progress across a range of development indicators, in both developing and developed countries, can be defined on a number of criteria based on gender, geography, race/ethnicity, nationality and sexuality, among other categories.

## Income poverty

- More than one third of people in poverty – 375 million individuals – are working, but still living on less than \$1.25 a day (ILO, 2014). Two thirds of the poor are in agriculture, mainly smallholder farmers (Olinto et al. 2013).
- Members of ethnic- and religious-minority groups are much more likely to be poor than people from the majority group or groups. This holds true even in developed countries. A study across 11 west and east European countries showed that the share of Roma people at risk of poverty – defined as earning under 60% of national median income – was between 78% and 97%, compared to national averages of between 10% and 22% (Ivanov et al., 2015).
- Despite considerable overall progress in many of the poorest countries, as much as 60% of the difference between real incomes globally can be explained by country of citizenship (Milanovic, 2013). As a result, migration offers significant economic returns to migrants from poor regions and their families (Adams and Page, 2005).
- Only 20% of older people globally have pensions (UNFPA and HelpAge International, 2012); pension coverage is even lower in developing countries, despite several studies indicating their feasibility in low-income settings (Hagemeyer and Behrendt, 2009).<sup>2</sup>
- In the United States, it is estimated that 10% of the general population identify as lesbian, bisexual, gay or transgender (LGBT). Among youth who are homeless, however, this number rises to 40% (Williams Institute, 2012b).

## Education and health

- A study across 33 low- and lower-middle-income countries found that more than two thirds of education and health poverty was found among households where the head is a member of an ‘ethnic minority group’<sup>3</sup>

(based on surveys conducted between 2002 and 2011) (Sumner, 2012a). Across 16 developing countries, the poorest women from disadvantaged ethnic groups were the most likely to have been left behind by progress in education and health (Lenhardt and Samman 2015).

- In Bulgaria, according to the 2011 Census, the primary school gross enrolment rate was 80% for Roma people, compared with 93% for those who identified themselves as Bulgarian. These rates were 59% and 95% respectively for secondary school, and 2% and 7% respectively for tertiary education (Ivanov et al., 2015).
- One billion people age-15-and-up have either no schooling or an incomplete primary education.<sup>4</sup> Poor rural girls are often particularly deprived: on average, across 79 developing countries, 23% of young adults had 4 years-or-less of education, compared with 44% of poor rural females.<sup>5</sup>
- About a third of those children out of school are disabled, with fewer than 10% of children with disabilities in Africa attending school (Peters, 2003, World Vision, 2007). Mitra et al. (2011) found that persons with disabilities have fewer mean years of education compared to those without disabilities in all but 3 of 15 countries.
- 800 million people are malnourished – three quarters of whom live in rural areas.<sup>6</sup>
- In India, child mortality rates need to fall by 1.8% per year among the richest 20% to meet the Sustainable Development Goal target of zero preventable child deaths<sup>7</sup>, while among the poorest 20%, it would need to fall by 6.3% per year - or four times faster.<sup>8</sup>

## Employment

- In 2014, the UK’s unemployment rate among people aged 16 to 64 years old was 6% for white British people – half that seen for black and Pakistani/Bangladeshi ethnic people (Department for Work and Pension, 2014). Among those 16 to 24 years old that were not in full time education, the unemployment rate among white British was 17% compared to 40% for black and 44% for Pakistani/Bangladeshi youth (ibid.).
- Half of the women at work globally are in vulnerable employment, with no job security or protection against economic shocks (ILO, 2012 cited in United Nations, 2013). Women are far more likely than men to be in vulnerable employment, with rates ranging from 32% to 85% in different regions, versus 55% to 70% for men (ibid.).
- Although only 12% of Bulgarians were unemployed

2 Cited in Samman and Rodriguez-Takeuchi, 2013

3 Data for ethnicity were estimated by creating two categories: ‘largest ethnic group’ for each country and ‘ethnic minority groups’ or all other ethnic groups. The results should be treated with caution due to low population coverage: the population coverage of ethnicity data was 50–55% of the total population of LICs and LMICs in 2007.

4 Computed from Barro and Lee (2010) data.

5 Computed from data in UNESCO (2010), p. 160-163, Table 3.3.

6 Statistics are from World Food Programme (<https://www.wfp.org/hunger/who-are>).

7 The zero rate of preventable child deaths has been agreed as 25 per 1,000 live births.

8 Computed using 2005 DHS data.

### Box 1: Data to leave no one behind

An essential element in making sure that we leave no one behind is being able to track progress for each disadvantaged group and for so-called intersections of these groups – to ensure that the most excluded people are included in development progress going forward (Stuart et al., 2015). However, governments don't know enough about their own people. This is especially true for the poorest that the SDG agenda must focus on in the next 15 years.

Assessment of progress towards development goals is based primarily on household surveys. One gap is temporal: internationally comparable household surveys are carried out every 3-5 years, meaning we often have inadequate information between those years. The other key gap is in subject: many people (Carr-Hill, 2013) and many issues of great importance to poor people (Alkire, 2007) are left out.

Household surveys generally omit by design the homeless, people in institutions, and mobile, nomadic or pastoralist populations (Carr-Hill, 2013). In practice, they also typically under-represent people living in urban slums, dangerous places, and fragile or transient households. As many as 350 million people globally may be missed out by household surveys (ibid.).

In addition, some of the most common household surveys – the DHS and the MICS – currently ask detailed questions of women only up to the age of 49 in most countries, meaning the circumstances and needs of older people cannot be fully assessed. Additionally, in DHS surveys there were consistent trend data on ethnicity (or a sufficient proxy) for only 16 of 90 countries over the last decade (Lenhardt and Samman, 2015). In some cases, the information exists, but is not consistent across years, making it difficult to monitor the progress of groups over time.

To overcome these difficulties a multi-faceted approach is needed. Governments should focus more on ensuring that data from existing sources can be more readily combined to shed light on the circumstances of disadvantaged and marginalised groups, while new technologies offer the possibility of oversampling of these groups at lower cost and higher frequency (Samman and Roche, 2014).

in 2011, 50% of Roma people in Bulgaria were out of work. Similarly in Hungary, the 2013 Labour Force Survey showed unemployment rates of close to 40% for Roma people compared with about 10% for non-Roma individuals (Ivanov et al., 2015).

## Overlapping inequalities

Looking at group-based measures of inequality reveals the social exclusion that precludes so many from benefiting from broader progress in human development. However, this may still mask severe exclusion as it assumes all people who belong to a particular group experience exclusion equally. In reality, there may be considerable intra-group disparities due to intersections of different forms of inequality where group-based characteristics overlap.

Kabeer (2010) uses the term 'intersecting inequalities' to highlight the overlapping disadvantages faced by individuals or groups that reinforce their exclusion. Along with poverty, excluded groups often face discrimination on the basis of socially marginalised identities (race, ethnicity, caste, religion or language), with gender cutting across these groups. They also suffer from spatial inequalities as they tend to be concentrated in disadvantaged locations – remote rural areas or overcrowded slum neighbourhoods.

Lenhardt and Samman (forthcoming) disaggregate average outcomes in education (years of schooling) and health (share of child deaths) by groups characterised by ethnicity, wealth and rural/urban place of residence, and pairs of these characteristics. The analysis reveals very large gaps between the most disadvantaged groups and the population average. For instance, in Ghana, while the national average is 6.6 years of education, people from the

poorest Gruma ethnic group have an average of 0.2 years of education. In the Philippines, on average, the poorest quintile in rural areas receive nearly half the national average years of schooling (5.6 years versus 10.7 years of schooling). In the case of health (measured by the share of child deaths at the household level) in Benin, the poorest quintile of those belonging to the Dendi ethnic group reveal a share of 22% compared to the national average of 10%. For the majority of the 16 countries studied, differences between the intersection of ethnic groups with wealth quintiles explain a large amount of variation in years of education: from 21% in Zimbabwe to 48% in Bolivia, and this impact has either increased or remained unchanged in most cases in the 2000s (ibid.).

Intersecting inequalities are experienced for all types of group-based inequalities discussed in this briefing. These exist not only in low-income and developing countries but also in developed countries – demonstrating the salience of 'leave no one behind' as a universal principle. For instance, African-American same-sex couples in the United States are significantly more likely to be poor than their African-American married heterosexual counterparts and roughly three times more likely to be poor than white same-sex couples (Williams Institute, 2012a).

## Discrimination

In addition to diminished outcomes, and in part a cause of them, minority groups often face high levels distrust and discrimination based on their identity. For instance:

- In 15 out of the 58 countries for which data are available more than 30% of people reported that they would not want people of a different religion as neighbours in surveys conducted between 2010 and

## Box 2: Policy approaches to leave no one behind

Identity-based marginalisation is not inevitable: various universal and targeted approaches adopted by countries have played a key role in helping reduce group-based inequalities in different ways.

In Latin America, targeted affirmative action policies have been scarce compared to those of broader social programmes. However, there have been gains when programmes have been modified for marginalised groups. For instance, in Ecuador, education conditionality of the *Bono de Desarrollo Humano* was modified for children attending bilingual schools (i.e. they need an attendance rate of 70% rather than the standard 80%) to take into account the patterns of seasonal migration of indigenous families, and the custom of children to help their parents during the harvest season (Villatoro, 2007).

Targeted policies have also helped reduce group-based inequalities. In Pakistan, the Benazir Income Support Program, the largest cash transfer programme in Asia (in terms of the number of beneficiaries, with 7.2 million households), provides income support to poor women (ADB, 2013). Beneficiaries use a significant share of income support for better food, healthcare, consumption, and investment such as housing improvements (IDS, 2009). Further, there is substantial evidence that the programme has contributed to empowering women (World Bank, 2012; Gazdar, 2011): as women bring in a regular income, they have a greater decision-making power within the household.

However, the method of targeting is important and needs to identify the drivers of inequality. For instance, investment in infrastructure in less-developed minority regions can perpetuate inequalities between local groups. In Vietnam, government policies to provide free irrigation in rural areas have widened the ethnic gap (Baulch et al., 2010). This is because Vietnamese ethnic minorities typically farm in upland fields where it is difficult to provide irrigation and their needs have remained unmet; on the other hand, the policy has benefitted farmers from the Kinh ethnic majority who usually farm in lower fields and in the deltas.

In China, as in numerous other countries, ethnic minorities are concentrated in certain parts of the country. They are disproportionately poor, in part due to spatial disadvantages which are compounded by specific discriminations. Yet, there have been significant improvements in the conditions of Chinese ethnic minorities as the country has pursued a twofold approach to tackle this (Zang, 2015). Government funds have been targeted at defined regions, with counties as the unit for poverty-reduction investments and with a focus on minority areas (Wang, 2004). The second strategy has focused on affirmative-action programmes to improve the opportunities of members of minority groups in particular, in both Han- and minority-regions. This experience shows that ethnic groups can achieve substantial absolute improvements and suggests that addressing the disadvantages that these entrenched inequalities create requires an approach which combines targeting regions and groups to address intersecting inequalities.

2014 (World Values Survey, 2014). More than half of people in 40 out of 59 countries stated that they did not trust (either very much or at all) people belonging to a different religion.

- Many people believe that men have more of a right to work than women. Between 2010 and 2014, across 60 countries around the world, on average 4 in 10 people expressed the view that when jobs are scarce, men have a greater right to one than women (World Values Survey, 2014).
- International migrants can also face considerable discrimination. In 39 out of 59 countries, more than half of respondents reported<sup>9</sup> that they did not trust (either very much or at all) people of a different nationality from them in surveys between 2010 and 2014 (World Values Survey, 2014). Furthermore, over 30% of people in 24 of these countries stated that they would not want immigrants or foreign workers as their neighbours.

Worryingly, in many countries across the world women are sometimes accepting of their systematic social subordination. For example, across 61 low- and middle-income countries, on average, 3 in 10 women believe wife beating to be acceptable (ICF International, 2012 cited in Klugman et al, 2014).

Sometimes this discrimination is not just about individually-held prejudices but it has been enshrined in legislation: 75 countries currently criminalise same-sex sexual acts between consenting adults (ILGA, 2015). Worse, eight countries officially legislate the death penalty for same-sex sexual behavior and five of these (Mauritania, Sudan, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Yemen) actually implement it. Only 18 countries globally recognise the marriage rights of same-sex couples (ibid.).

Indeed, discriminatory attitudes are closely connected to poor outcomes. For example, attitudes toward higher education for women are correlated with women's enrolment in tertiary education; attitudes about women's right to a job are less favorable where women's labour force participation is lower; and better attitudes about women as political leaders are linked with a higher share of female parliamentarians (World Bank, 2013: 23).

## Conclusion

Having learned the lessons of the MDGs, governments have now agreed that the SDGs will not be considered met unless and until they have been achieved for every group – and for some goals such as ending extreme poverty, ending

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

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maternal mortality and providing quality education, they will not be met until they have been done so for every last person. This is an extraordinarily ambitious vision. This paper has set out the extent and nature of deprivation suffered by the most marginalised in society and highlights why such a vision is needed.

Once the exercise of identifying marginalised communities has happened, policy actions to tackle entrenched poverty as experienced by older people, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities and other groups will have to be taken by national governments. There are examples of countries already taking policy actions to positive effect; we have included some here, but others will also need to urgently do so.

Some governments may be less willing to tackle identity-based disadvantage. In some countries ethnic, religious, and sexual-minority groups may be deliberately

marginalised by the dominant elite. In addition, as this paper has shown, minority groups face significant discrimination from wider society, which may in itself make their outcomes worse.

Reversing these entrenched attitudes and positions will entail a considerable normative shift. It is here that the global nature of the SDGs will be particularly important. The international scrutiny and pressure that they bring will make it harder for governments to relegate the needs of significant percentages of their populations.

This time round, under the SDGs, progress will need to reach down into the bottom billion – the individuals whose identity leaves them at the economic, social and political margins – to ensure that by 2030 no one is left behind. Targeting the worst-off groups first will be key to the goals' success.

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