

Unravelling the Depths of Deprivation in Tajikistan: Multidimensional Poverty

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Abstract

Tajikistan, a former member of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the smallest country in Central Asia with a geographically sensitive location, has made impressive development progress and continuous advancement in poverty alleviation. It has managed to reduce the poverty rate (at the national poverty rate of \$3.2 per day) from 83% of the population in 1999 to 22.5% in 2022. Notwithstanding this fact, the country remains the poorest in the Central Asian region in terms of extreme poverty rate (\$2.15 per day). It is puzzling why, despite significant progress made by the country, poverty is still widespread and persistent. The paper seeks to answer this question by distancing itself from income poverty and focusing on multidimensional poverty. Multidimensional poverty gives a more thorough perspective of the lives of the poor; thus, it provides a clearer picture of the incidence and dimensions of poverty on various levels and among different groups and communities. The concept of multidimensional poverty is even more significant for a remote, landlocked country such as Tajikistan, as the analysis within this paper reveals that non-income poverty indicators hardly improved in Tajikistan. Therefore, the intention of this research is to uncover the nature of multidimensional poverty in Tajikistan by developing further recommendations for policymakers on why and how to consider multidimensional poverty while designing and implementing poverty reduction policies. The article concludes that (1) integrating multidimensional poverty metrics into national development plans and poverty reduction policies enhances political commitment to ensure sufficient funding and effective implementation of these policies and (2)

applying multidimensional poverty measurements allows policymakers to identify and target regions and demographic groups which should be prioritized while implementing poverty reduction policies.

Keywords: poverty, multidimensional poverty, Tajikistan, Central Asia

JEL codes: F63, I32, I38, N35

Introduction

Poverty is a multifaceted challenge that affects a significant portion of the global population, with almost 700 million individuals in extreme (income) poverty, measuring at \$2.15 per day, accounting for 9% of the world's population as of 2022 (World Bank, 2023). Poverty encompasses the deprivation of fundamental human capabilities – food security, education, basic rights, dignity and income.

The international consensus, as reflected in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), is committed to alleviating poverty entirely by 2030, along with the “leaving no one behind” principle. However, despite the numerous efforts, poverty remains a persistent concern. Developing nations are particularly susceptible to this issue, and this vulnerability is exacerbated by governance shortcomings, poor infrastructure, as well as inequitable access to financial resources, education, and health-care.

Tajikistan, like many other developing countries, confronts substantial poverty challenges. At the start of the twenty-first century, an alarming statistic revealed that over 95% of the Tajik population lived in extreme poverty. Since then, significant advancements have been made in the country's pro-poor development. The poverty rate measured by the national poverty rate (equivalent to US\$3.2 in 2011 PPP terms) has witnessed a remarkable decline to 26.3% by 2019 (World Bank, 2023a).

Despite Tajikistan's great strides towards poverty reduction, the country remains the most impoverished in the Central Asian region, both in terms of national poverty rate, international extreme poverty line, and per capita GDP level. It is puzzling why, despite Tajikistan's considerable anti-poverty initiatives, it continues to hold the title of the poorest country in Central Asia.

Firstly, it is evident that poverty reduction policies have predominantly centred on addressing income poverty, overlooking multidimensional aspects of deprivation. According to one of the interviews held with poor households by the Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting (CABAR.

asia, 2019a, 2019b) in Tajikistan, a resident of Vahdat city with 5 children and a monthly salary of 600 somoni (\$63.28), received 400 somoni (\$42.18) cash in state welfare assistance in a year, which is paid every quarter. According to the interviewee, this amount of “additional income” did not contribute to their well-being, as only a single bag of flour costs 200 somoni (\$21.09). Many Tajik households grapple with numerous dimensions of poverty, including health, education, and living standards. In recent years, there has been limited improvement in non-income poverty indicators. Even though the concept of multidimensional poverty is now widely recognised, it has received scant attention in remote countries like Tajikistan. Secondly, strategies employed to combat poverty lacked inclusivity and sustainability. The promotion of local employment opportunities remained constrained, with remittances serving as a key driver for poverty alleviation. Rakhmatova et al. (2018) indicate that poverty reduction was mainly achieved due to massive labour migration, which ensured stable income for households.

Shortcomings in sustainable economic development and poverty reduction efforts in Tajikistan can be attributed, in part, to the paucity of academic research on the country’s economic and political landscape. There is also an absence of a comprehensive examination of multidimensional poverty, particularly when utilising rigorous statistical analyses. Much of the existing research is often limited in its accessibility, primarily being available in the local language.

At the same time, it is essential to acknowledge the substantial role of Tajikistan in the Central Asian region. Despite its relatively small territorial expanse, the country’s geographical proximity to politically and economically unstable Afghanistan confers its pivotal role in shaping regional dynamics. Its geopolitical role is also shaped by its contribution to water challenges in the region, as Tajikistan is a source of more than 70% of the water resources of Central Asia.

Tajikistan can be considered a crucial case in that, due to its unique historical and geographic factors, the country stands out as an exception rather than a typical example of a post-Soviet country in the region. Tajikistan is the only country with 93% area covered by mountains, which underwent a severe seven-year civil war after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the only country which remains significantly dependent on external factors, particularly the Russian economy, with remittances accounting for half of the country’s GDP in 2008, 2014 and 2022. (World Bank, 2023b). Consequently, it seems an exciting exercise to check why the experience of other nations and successful poverty reduction policies implemented

elsewhere are of little help in addressing multidimensional poverty in the country.

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to explore the nature of multidimensional poverty in Tajikistan, with the potential to consider the findings while designing and implementing poverty reduction policies.

The article is structured as follows: The first section is devoted to exploring the theoretical background of multidimensional poverty and its measurement. The second part presents the case of Tajikistan, revealing the evolution of multidimensional poverty and highlighting how multidimensional poverty analysis can contribute to poverty reduction in the country. The final section concludes.

1. The concept of multidimensional poverty

Debates in academic literature surrounding the definition and measurements of poverty have expanded. The traditional method for defining and measuring poverty remains the monetary approach, which relies on income and/or expenditure as its metrics. Until the 1970s, the poor were identified solely based on their income. Although the monetary approach remains relevant in poverty analysis, academic circles have disputed the conceptual and methodological shortcomings of the monetary approach for decades (Laderchi et al., 2003). Notably, the monetary approach lacks a correlation with other dimensions of poverty, thereby failing to capture the multifaceted experience of individuals living in poverty (Banerjee & Duflo, 2007).

These circumstances drove scholars to explore alternative approaches to the comprehension of poverty. Starting in the mid-1970s, the basic needs approach, together with the capability approach and social exclusion approach, emerged, emphasising that development efforts should prioritise meeting individuals' fundamental needs and ensuring their actual satisfaction. Among these approaches, the concept developed by the Indian economist Amartya Sen has gained significant popularity.

Amartya Sen's capability approach, introduced in his work (Sen 1976, 1979), shifts the focus away from material resources such as money, land, or food. Instead, it highlights the distribution of individuals' effective capabilities to achieve meaningful and valuable objectives.

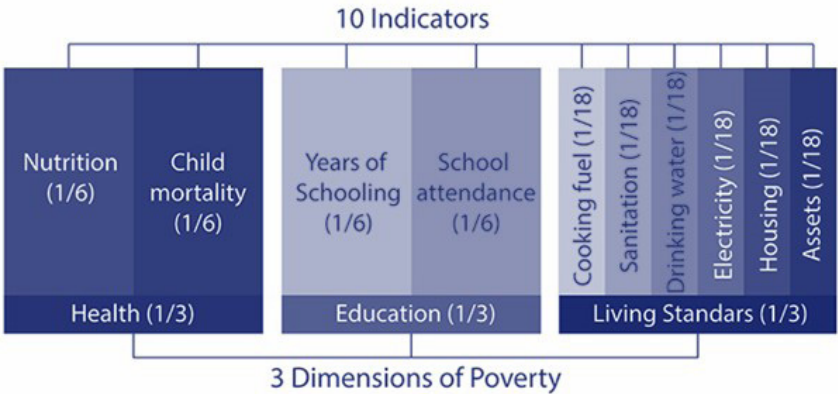
Sen's capability approach was a prerequisite for the emergence of the wider concept of multidimensional poverty, as Sen suggests that poverty

relates to functioning shortfalls in different dimensions such as education, health, housing, clothing, and the like.

1.1. Income poverty and multidimensional poverty: Does it make a difference?

The comparable and well-known measurement of multidimensional poverty is the global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), developed jointly by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2010 based on the Alkire-Foster method (OPHI, n.d.). MPI is used to calculate multidimensional poverty for more than 100 developing countries, allowing us to make comparisons across the globe. The MPI consists of ten indicators, which are divided into three equally weighted dimensions: health, education, and living standards.

Figure 1: Structure of the global MPI



Source: OPHI and UNDP (2022, p. 3)

In 2018, according to the global MPI, 23% of 105 developing countries or 1.3 billion people across 105 countries were multidimensionally poor, which is almost double the income poverty figure. 83% of multidimensionally poor live in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia (OPHI, 2018). In comparison, for the same year, according to estimates based on traditional income poverty, the poverty line at \$2.15 a day (2017 PPP), the World Bank measured that only 9% of the population, or 736 million people, were poor all over the world across developed and developing countries.

In 2022, across 111 developing countries, 1.2 billion people—19.1%—lived in acute multidimensional poverty. Half of these people (593 million) are children under the age of 18 (OPHI & UNDP, 2022).

By introducing MPI, UNDP and OPHI provided the world with household-level data on multidimensional poverty, which is not only important for quantifying the number of poor people, since MPI captures more people and, therefore, the headcount of the poor is also higher. Its relevance lies also in qualitative terms: MPI can be decomposed by region, particular groups, and indicators, which allows us to directly see the suffering groups and the dimensions they are deprived of. With this knowledge, policymakers can define what kind of targeted policy interventions are needed and where they are most suitable.

2. Fight against poverty in Tajikistan

Tajikistan had been a part of the Soviet Union for almost 70 years, with a planned economy. Being one of the member states of the USSR, the Tajik economy was tightly connected to other Soviet republics and also heavily dependent on Moscow. The economic development of Tajikistan was directed towards meeting the needs of the USSR rather than the country itself and, as for all republics of Central Asia, efforts of all systems including trade, transport and energy were oriented towards Moscow, making Central Asia economically isolated from the rest of the world (Ruslan, 2014).

After the collapse of the USSR in the 1990s, Tajikistan decided to transition from a centrally planned economy towards a more market-oriented system. After the breakup of the Union, the country, on the one hand, lost its main trading partners and, on the other hand, it also lost its main source of economic support, as the subsidies received from the Soviet government made up at least 50% of the republic's budget.

Tajikistan faced one of the most severe crises, accompanied by an extremely high poverty rate. There was an economic collapse. In 1999, according to the World Bank, 96% of the population was living below the national poverty line (World Bank, 2023). The economy crumbled, and between 1991 and 1997, GDP contracted by almost 70% (UN, 2003). In the early 1990s, the country faced devastating hyperinflation with prices rising at an annual rate of over 1,000% (International Monetary Fund, 2001). The shortage of energy and other basic goods was another urgent problem Tajikistan had to cope with in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, as it was heavily dependent on energy and other imports from other former Soviet republics.

Tajikistan was not able to achieve a smooth transition like some other former Soviet republics. Right after gaining independence, the country was politically unstable, facing civil war. The communist government rejected any political competition from any other political parties; thus, the transi-

tion was paved by manoeuvres for power among the elite, which triggered a surge of civil unrest beginning in the spring of 1992. The conflict was exacerbated by the significant number of unemployed young men who had lost their jobs due to the Soviet system's collapse. By summer 1992, the unrest had developed into civil war. However, the civil war flared up and continued for almost 7 years, not only because of the domestic situation but also due to external factors. Russia and Uzbekistan were the main external actors, with their interests intensifying the conflict and supporting opposing sides in Tajikistan (Gretsky, 1995).

The civil war ended in 1997 when newly elected president Emomali Rahmon and the United Tajik Opposition signed the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan. The war left behind a devastated economy, thousands of civilian casualties, millions of refugees, and people in extreme poverty. It significantly harmed the already fragile economic infrastructure, resulting in a sharp decline in industrial and agricultural production, costing the country 7 billion dollars (International Crisis Group, 2001).

In 1992, 80% of Tajikistan's industry was destroyed (Shemyakina, 2011). In 1994, real GDP was only 37% of that in 1990. In 1997, manufacturing output was only 27% and agricultural output 50% of the 1990 level. Between 1991 and 1996, Tajikistan's gross domestic product (GDP) declined at an average rate of 17% annually, before reporting modest growth between 1996 and 1999 (Hauptert, 2008). In 2003, the GDP of Tajikistan was at the same level as that of Benin. Economic hardship forced people to migrate at the beginning of the 2000s. The social services were in their worst condition, as many schools and healthcare facilities closed down. The issue was worsening as many government officials responsible for oversight of the nation's economy were killed or expelled during the war, leaving the economy in the hands of an inexperienced administration with poor knowledge of how economic laws work.

As a result of low quality and limited linkages of various sectors of the domestic economy, industrial production was simply not competitive in external markets. Therefore, most industrial plants were forced to shut down, or they simply became obsolete. The domestic market stopped creating new jobs, forcing labour migration from the beginning of the 2000s.

Besides the devastating economic consequences, the civil war resulted in human losses. During the civil war, between 60,000 to 100,000 were killed (Hauptert, 2008), 20,000 women were widowed, and 55,000 children were orphaned (Falkingham, 2000). In 1992-1993, one out of every Tajik citizen became a refugee or was internally displaced. Although by 1995 the majority of displaced individuals had returned to their communi-

ties, a minimum of 600,000 people remained internally displaced at the end of the war's conclusion (ibid). During and after the Civil War, the emigration rates were extremely high, with most of the non-local nationalities going back to their place of origin, which cost the country the bulk of its skilled, qualified labour force and making it harder for the newly established country to rebuild. Between 1991 and 1995, 284,600 people emigrated from Tajikistan (IOM, 2003).

Tajikistan started its transitional period from a planned economy into a market economy with repercussions of a 7-year-long civil war. The country has introduced a wide range of reforms to transform its economy, and poverty reduction policies were among these. It has adopted numerous policies and initiatives aimed at mitigating poverty, including various programs introduced either on the national level or induced and often financed by international institutions and organisations (see Table 1).

In the domestic policy arena, programs and policies were adopted to address widespread poverty, such as the 10-year National Development Strategy (NDS). The NDS was intended to define the priorities and directions for the long-run strategic outlook within this framework, while the PRS is an action plan that outlines the implementation of the NDS. The National Development Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan 2007-2015 and 2016-2030 are the strategic documents to determine the long-term direction of socioeconomic development of the country.

The I. NDS (2007-2015) has been the key document defining national development priorities, also taking into account the national implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for Tajikistan. In 2016, the government adopted the second National Development Strategy, covering the period of 2016-2030. The II. NDS is being implemented through three Medium-term Development Programmes (MtDP), and it focuses on sustainable and diversified economic development and strengthening of middle-class society, with the strategic goal of ensuring energy and food security, breaking communication deadlock, and expanding productive employment. 78% of SDGs are entrenched in the II. NDS and its sectoral strategic programs (Kulov, 2018).

The Living Standard Improvement Strategy of Tajikistan for 2013-2015 was a three-year, mid-term national programme aiming at the strengthening of the general development foundations for improving the public administration, ensuring sustainable economic development based on the development of the private sector, and stimulating investments for the strategic and priority aims. Moreover, there have been Living Standard Surveys conducted in Tajikistan in 1999, 2003, 2007, and 2009 to monitor the

results of national strategies, including the National Development Strategy, the Poverty Reduction Strategy, and progress made towards the achievement of Millennium Development Goals.

Another step in Tajikistan to address widespread poverty was linked to international policy actors, namely the submission of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. PRSPs were introduced by the IMF and the World Bank in 1999 “to strengthen the poverty alleviation focus of their assistance to low-income countries” (World Bank, 2005, p. 12). The PRSPs are prepared every three years by a country through a participatory process involving civil society and development partners.

Tajikistan submitted the first full PRSP in 2002, with the main goal for 2002-2006 to increase the population’s real income and to provide for a fair distribution of the results of economic growth (Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2002). Even though the PRSP recognised the multidimensional nature of poverty, and it made some progress in macroeconomic management and the development of legislation, structural reform measures were not fully implemented. According to the evaluation of the World Bank (2004), the PRSP did not manage to produce high-quality results in a timely manner. For example, public access to basic social services, as one of the factors of successful poverty reduction, remained quite limited.

The second Poverty Reduction Strategy, prepared for 2007-2009, was the next step to alleviate poverty in Tajikistan. It has built upon the results of the previous PRSP (for 2002-2006). According to the international standards of poverty (US\$2.15/day), the poverty rate declined from 64% to 41%. The third Poverty Reduction Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan was designed for 2010-2012 and served as a medium-term programme to assist the implementation of the I. National Development Strategy up to 2015. The third PRSP strategy focused on the development of 12 areas within the economic reforms, providing detailed recommendations to reduce poverty. However, it focused mainly on macroeconomic development, economic growth and public administration reforms, and it said little about the conditions of the poor and the challenges they face to overcome poverty.

Besides PRSPs, there have been a lot of other programs introduced to address poverty by international organizations and institutions including the World Bank, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Asian Development Bank (ADB), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the European Union (EU) (see Table1).

Table 1: Poverty reduction strategies in Tajikistan

National poverty reduction strategies and programs		
Strategies	Time frame	Focus
National Development Strategy (I NDS)	2007-2015	Sustainable economic growth, poverty reduction, social welfare improvement, good governance enhancement
National Development Strategy (II NDS) 2016-2030	2016-2030	Sustainable and diversified economic development, strengthening middle-class society, ensuring energy and food security, productive employment expansion
Medium-term Development Program of the Republic of Tajikistan for 2021-2025	2021-2025	Macroeconomic stability, increasing the competitiveness of domestic products, increase in exports of goods and services, formation of the digital economy, development of human capital and improvement of the quality of social services
The Living Standard Improvement Strategy of Tajikistan	2013-2015	Strengthening the public administration, ensuring sustainable GDP growth; developing fiscal and monetary policy, improving foreign trade policy and procedures, improving the business climate
International poverty reduction strategies and programs		
World Bank Poverty Reduction Support Credits	2023	Financial support for accelerating sustainable and resilient economic growth to support poverty reduction and improvements in the quality of people's lives.
The European Union Multi-annual Indicative Programme	2021-2024	Inclusive Green and Digital Economy, Human development, natural resources management
World Bank Social Safety Net Strengthening Project	2018	Social assistance improvement
United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for 2016-2020	2016 -2020	Democratic Governance, Rule of Law and Human Rights, Sustainable and equitable economic development, Social Development, Inclusion and Empowerment, Resilience and Environmental Sustainability
Asian Development Bank (ADB) Road Network Improvement Project	2012-2018	Development of transport infrastructure
I. Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP)	2002-2006	Real income increase, provision of fair distribution of the results of economic growth
II. Poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP)	2007-2009	Economic growth, human and infrastructure development, good governance and environmental sustainability
III. Poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP)	2010-2012	Improving public administration, supporting sustainable economic growth, capacitating human capital

Source: Edited by the author

Despite these state efforts, no radical changes occurred. According to Nasirova (2020), poverty has become one of the elements of social reality. The country still faces significant multidimensional poverty, with 7.4% of the population in 2017 (Table 2).¹ Analysis of the tendency of multidimensional poverty in the country shows that even if the number of multidimensionally poor people decreased by 10% over more than a decade, the intensity of deprivations has not changed much. Moreover, the number of people who are vulnerable to multidimensional poverty was constant through the years, with a slight change of 3%. While great progress has been made in addressing income poverty measured by the international poverty line at \$2.15, the issue of multidimensionality of poverty, encompassing not only income but health, education, and standard of living, remains a pressing issue within the nation.

Consequently, income poverty tells only part of the story. Multidimensional poverty is an important indicator for policymakers in the country to formulate and realise policies that address specific dimensions in which the Tajiks are deprived.

Table 2. Poverty tendency in Tajikistan: multidimensional and income poverty

Survey Year	MPI	Headcount (%)	Intensity of deprivation (%)	Population share		
				Vulnerable to MP (%)	In severe MP (%)	Below the poverty international line - \$2.15 (%)
2005	0.068	17.1	40	23	3.1	5 (2004)
2012	0.054	13.2	40.8	20.8	2.5	1.4 (2009)
2017	0.029	7.4	39	20.1	0.7	1.4 (2015)

Source: Edited by the author based on OPHI (2024)

2.1. Multidimensional poverty in Tajikistan

Even though there have been plenty of policies and programs, as mentioned above, to address income poverty in the country, in terms of the international poverty rate, Tajikistan remains the poorest in the Central Asian region. Even though some progress has been made in terms of income poverty, multidimensional poverty is still widespread.

Table 3 provides the most recent multidimensional indicators for Tajikistan in comparison to other countries. According to a 2017 survey, 7.4% (about 726 thousand people in 2021) of Tajikistan’s population is identi-

1 The 2017 survey provides the latest data available for Tajikistan.

fied as multidimensionally poor. Additionally, 20.1% (about 1,958 thousand people in 2021) are classified as vulnerable to multidimensional poverty. The intensity of deprivation, showing the average deprivation score among multidimensionally poor people, is estimated at 39.0%. The MPI value, indicating the share of the population that is multidimensionally poor adjusted by the intensity of deprivations, is calculated as 0.029. In contrast, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan exhibit lower MPI values of 0.001 each.

The table provides a comparative analysis of multidimensional poverty and monetary poverty measured by the percentage of the population living below the 2017 PPP US\$2.15 per day threshold. The headcount or incidence of multidimensional poverty is 1.3 percentage points higher than the incidence of monetary poverty, suggesting that persons above the poverty line may still be deprived of health, education, and/or standard of living. Almost 1% of the population is living in severe multidimensional poverty, with more than 50% deprivation in the weighted indicators.

According to the data below, deprivation in health contributes most to MPI, indicating the problems of nutrition and child mortality in the country. This is followed by education, with school attendance indicators contributing the most, and living standards, with the most contributed indicators being cooking fuel, sanitation, and housing.

Table 3. The most recent MPI for Tajikistan in comparative perspective

	Survey year	MPI value	Headcount (%)	Intensity of deprivation (%)	Population share (%)			Contribution of deprivation in dimension to overall MP (%)		
					Vulnerable to MP	In severe MP	Below the income poverty line	Health	Education	Standard of living
Tajikistan	2017	0.029	7.4	39.0	20.1	0.7	6.1	47.8	26.5	25.8
Kyrgyzstan	2018	0.001	0.4	36.3	5.2	0.0	1.3	64.6	17.9	17.5
Turkmenistan	2019	0.001	0.2	34.0	0.3	0.0	-	82.4	15.5	2.1
Europe and Central Asia	-	0.004	1.2	38.0	3.2	0.1	0.7	53.2	24.6	22.2
East Asia and the Pacific	-	0.022	5.3	42.6	14.4	1.0	0.9	27.9	35.2	36.8

Source: Edited by the author based on OPHI and UNDP (2022)

The MPI gives valuable insights to policymakers to identify and address the exact deprivation that poor individuals are facing. In terms of Tajikistan, efforts should be made towards improving the health conditions of the population, namely addressing the problems of nutrition and child mortality. We do not claim that other indicators should be neglected, but it is worth noting that the dimensions are interconnected. The improvement of one of the dimensions, such as nutrition in our case, will further contribute to high school attendance or better studying outcomes, making youth more educated with better job opportunities in the future.

Table 4. Global MPI in Tajikistan by sub-national region

	MPI	Incidence (H) (%)	Intensity (A) (%)	Vulnerable (%)	Severe poverty (%)	Popula- tion share
Area						
National	0.029	7.4	39	20.1	0.7	100
Urban	0.013	3.6	36.3	7	0.1	24.4
Rural	0.034	8.7	39.3	24.3	0.9	75.6
Regions						
DRS	0.024	6.3	38.9	21.7	0.4	22.5
Dushanbe	0.008	2.2	37.9	3.6	0.1	8.3
GBAO	0.024	6.3	38.5	18.8	0.5	2.1
Khatlon	0.042	10.6	39.4	25.1	1	37.3
Sughd	0.023	5.9	38.3	17.3	0.9	29.9

Source: OPHI (2024, p. 1)

The MPI also reveals disparities across geographical areas of a country. As for Tajikistan, the most multidimensionally poor people are concentrated in rural areas, where the incidence is almost 9%, while in urban areas it is only 4%. The Khatlon region is the largest in terms of population size and the multidimensionally poorest region in the country, with almost 11% of the population. The districts of republican subordination² are the second region with the highest MPI, with a percentage of multidimensionally poor people of 6.3. At the same time, the intensity of deprivation is around 40% in all of the country's regions.

According to the Asian Development Bank (2020), non-income poverty indicators have not been so impressively improved. Tajikistan has much work left to do in each of the dimensions assessed by the MPI. For example, in terms of the Human Development Index (HDI), in a decade, the country

² A region in Tajikistan, consisting of 9 districts and 4 district-level cities that are directly under central administration.

made very slight progress with scores of 0.63 and 0.68 in 2011 and 2021, respectively. Having a lower HDI than the global average (0.73), the country remains with the lowest HDI in Europe and Central Asia (UNDP, n.d.).

In the following section, the author will critically analyse the different dimensions of deprivation from a comparative perspective.

In terms of nutrition, according to the Global Food Security Index, which presents food affordability, availability, quality, and safety, Tajikistan ranked 75th among 113 countries, scoring only 56,6 out of 100. Even though the indicators improved compared to 2012, when Tajikistan was the 84th country on the list with a score of 32.2, food security is a critical point that needs attention. (The Economist, 2012, 2022).

Another indicator that shows poor performance in terms of widely defined development is the global hunger index (GHI), which measures the percentage of undernourished population, under-five underweight children, and under-five mortality by Concern Worldwide & Welthungerhilfe. Tajikistan has not made great progress in GHI during almost a decade between 2015 and 2023, ranking 67th and 62nd, respectively, among 125 countries. (Concern Worldwide & Welthungerhilfe, n.d.).

Mentioning child mortality issue in the country - despite a falling under-five mortality rate from 105 to 1000 live births in 1990 to 34 per 1000 in 2017, and the infant mortality rate from 83 per 1000 live births in 1990 to 29 in 2017, the country has failed to achieve its Millennium Development Goal targets, which indicate the reduction of the under-five mortality rate by two third between 1990 and 2015 (UNICEF, n.d.-a). Child survival and child undernutrition remain a pressing challenge in Tajikistan.

Even though the primary education enrolment reached universal levels, there were lags in the gender parity index at the tertiary education level at 0.52 in 2011 (ADB, 2020). In 2018, nearly 18% of female youth of secondary school age were out of school compared to 8% of male youth of the same age. For youth of secondary school age, the biggest disparity can be seen between male and female youth (Education Policy and Data Center, 2023). Moreover, according to UNICEF (n.d.-b), the preschool net enrolment rate for children aged 3-6 years is the lowest in the region. More than three in five children under the age of two receive little stimulation at home; four in five do not have books to read.

According to the World Bank, even if enrolment in the country is high, with 96,6% in 2019, the learning outcomes remain quite low, with poor school teaching and learning environment (World Bank, 2023d). With an official literacy rate of 98% in 2017, it is hard to assess the quality of education, as the country misses national and international assessments.³

3 Tajikistan is not participating in Program for International Student Assessment (PISA).

According to the World Bank, only 55% of the Tajik population has access to safely managed water supply services, which is the lowest indicator in the Central Asian region. Only 24% of the rural population was covered by piped water supply services in 2017 (World Bank, 2023c). Even though the country is rich in water resources, the poor infrastructure and mountainous areas make it hard to provide the population with access to safe drinking water. The availability and continuity of water supplies are in question, as there are breakdowns in water supply infrastructure, and many households do not have access to sufficient quantities of water when needed. The water supply sector of Tajikistan is under-invested and lacks proper operation and maintenance.

Even if over the last decade access to sanitation has improved, the country continues to have some of the poorest conditions in Central Asia. Access to flush toilets connected to a sewer system in rural areas remains low, at only 1.7%, as opposed to 60% in urban areas (World Bank, 2017).

Whilst Tajikistan successfully achieved the goal of providing universal access to electricity, the existing energy system functions inefficiently, since energy infrastructure is quite poor and old. The majority of hydro plants were built in the Soviet era and are, therefore, outdated and need rehabilitation. Losses caused by the poor quality of the country's transmission and distribution systems have averaged 15.5% for the last two decades. In comparison, average losses in International Energy Agency (IEA) member countries were below 7% of supply and saw a steady decline in the same period (IEA, n.d.). Meanwhile, Tajikistan's non-domestic sector experiences an average of six power outages per month.

Tajikistan has a housing stock of 1.23 million units (Habitat for Humanity, 2013). This is only 163 dwellings per 1,000 inhabitants, which is the lowest level of all countries in Europe and the Central Asia region.

2.2. Poverty reduction policies in Tajikistan considering multidimensional poverty – policy implications

Multidimensional poverty analysis equips governments with valuable insights to enhance their understanding of various dimensions of poverty, empowering them to refine the design, adaptation, and implementation of targeted poverty reduction policies. Numerous studies on other developing states provide profound observations into strategies to combat poverty employing multidimensional poverty metrics.

Adopting a multidimensional poverty framework and utilising logit estimation, Fauzi et al. (2022) reveal the main variables significantly influencing the probability of a household being poor in Indonesia. The authors

emphasise such indicators as electricity, access to school, and home ownership, calling for the government to target these specific dimensions.

Bader et al. (2016) researched the Lao People's Democratic Republic using a multinomial regression model and found that monetary poverty fails to adequately capture the various deprivations faced by ethnic minorities. Notably, groups from ethnolinguistic families other than the Lao-Tai are identified as poor only when applying multidimensional poverty metrics.

Recognising the value of multidimensional poverty measurements, numerous countries have effectively incorporated MPI into their poverty alleviation strategies, including Mexico, Colombia, Bhutan, Chile, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Ghana, Angola, and Namibia. Mexico is a unique case, since it includes income within its MPI alongside 6 social rights. Columbia's MPI spans 5 dimensions, including family education, children and youth conditions, employment, health, and access to public facilities (Salazar et al., 2013). Together with monetary poverty statistics, MPI guides poverty reduction policy in the country.

Additionally, multidimensional poverty measures can serve as the basis for targeting and allocating resources to the poor in the context of development interventions supported by official development assistance (ODA). The Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) has adopted multidimensional poverty analyses to develop a cooperative approach that addresses the multidimensional challenges experienced by the poor. For example, by using multidimensional poverty measures, Sida identified those deprived of food security in Cambodia, Mozambique, Ethiopia, and Afghanistan and has implemented relevant programs to invest in greater agricultural productivity and sustainability (Sida, 2021).

Although the present research utilises descriptive rather than quantitative analysis, it provides valuable insights into the dimensions of poverty faced by the poor in Tajikistan, encouraging the government to develop a national MPI as a tool to address poverty alongside traditional monetary poverty statistics. Providing extensive information on the nature, incidence, intensity, and location of the multidimensionally poor, the national MPI would enable informed decision-making.

There are two primary ways in which the multidimensional poverty concept can assist the Tajik government in alleviating poverty in the country more effectively and sustainably.

Integration of multidimensional poverty in government agendas and accountability enhancement: By incorporating multidimensional poverty measurements into key national development plans and poverty reduction strategies, the government can foster unwavering political commitment at the highest echelons of leadership. This commitment forms the corner-

stone for coordinated efforts to address poverty and secure the necessary funding for effective implementation. Moreover, these metrics create a system for monitoring progress towards predefined poverty reduction goals, assuring programs remain on course and effective in achieving their intended outcomes.

Firstly, Tajikistan needs to incorporate the multidimensional poverty index into its government strategies and programs. Even if there is no chance of considering MPI in the National Development Strategy until 2030, it is possible to make MPI the priority in Medium-term development programs. These programs ensure the implementation of the NDS 2030 introduced for 5 years and the latest for 2021-2025. The new Medium-term development program will be drafted in 2024-2025. Moreover, MPI can be taken into consideration while developing the next NDS. Secondly, the Tajik policymakers should make an effort towards the drafting of a separate 'multidimensional' poverty reduction strategy, with the main indicator of poverty as MPI.

Targeted Policy Formulation and Resource Allocation: By applying multidimensional poverty metrics, the government will be able to pinpoint regions and specific demographic groups that necessitate focused attention during the formulation and implementation of poverty reduction policies. These measures enable a granular assessment of disparities, allowing policies to be tailored to meet the unique needs of different communities. In the case of Tajikistan, the rural areas in the Khatlon region and districts under the republic's subordination should aim for poverty reduction with the highest MPI. Additionally, multidimensional poverty analysis offers a framework for coordinating and prioritising investments across various sectors, minimising redundancy, and ensuring a more efficient allocation of resources. Multidimensional poverty metrics can serve as a tool for budgeting, guiding the distribution of national resources, and, therefore, promoting suitable resource allocation. For the decade 2010-2020, Tajikistan has directed an average of 40% of its state budget to the social sector, including education (16,9%) and social insurance and social protection (15.5%). At the same time, healthcare is the least financed sphere, accounting for 7.2% of state expenditure (Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2020). The consequences of the allocation have been seen in multidimensional poverty indicators, with the highest deprivation being in the health dimension among individuals. It is crucial to accept that without proper financing, the implementation of the poverty reduction policies is becoming quite hard. At the same time, it is worth mentioning that there are synergies in these areas, as an intervention in one of the spheres – health, education, or improvement of standards of living can positively ameliorate the impact of another intervention. This fact should be considered while

planning and implementing programs and policies by better coordination between segments of public administration so that all interventions are aimed in the same direction.

Conclusion

Multidimensional poverty analysis represents a comprehensive approach aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the various dimensions of poverty. It goes beyond the narrow focus of the widespread one-dimensional measure of income poverty and captures various critical dimensions of deprivation. The multidimensional poverty index serves as a tool to pinpoint the most influential factors contributing to poverty and address the main question: “Which dimension has the greatest impact on the poor and thereby should be prioritised in policy decisions?”

Moreover, MPI holds the potential to serve as a means for tracking progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Out of the ten indicators of MPI, seven – including education and health indicators, as well as measures related to living standards such as access to sanitation, safe drinking water, and clean cooking fuel – directly align with SDGs, while three dimensions have indirect links.

The most recent multidimensional poverty analysis in Tajikistan reveals that impoverished individuals experience deprivations across multiple dimensions simultaneously. A significant portion of the poor in Tajikistan contend with challenges related to both health and education. While MPI measures may suggest that the overall multidimensional poverty level is not as high as income-based poverty estimated according to the national poverty rate, the intensity of deprivation is notably greater. Poverty incidence is markedly more pronounced in the southern part of the country, including the Khatlon region, indicating where interventions should be concentrated for national multidimensional poverty reduction. Additionally, there is a noticeable rural-urban disparity, with MPI being almost twice as high in rural areas, emphasising the concentration of a larger portion of the poor population in rural settings, which signals the need for targeted interventions in these areas.

The multidimensional concept of poverty is not only about differences in measurements, but the main added value of this approach is its potential role for policy making and implementation in Tajikistan. In this vein, government officials can better identify, measure, and target the individuals who are most in need.

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