

The Christian Aid poverty report

Reimagining paths to human flourishing



christian
aid

'As a result of the pandemic, we have a health crisis, an economic crisis, and an education crisis, but we also have a poverty crisis, a social emergency which, if not addressed, will cost countless lost lives. We must challenge leaders to face the scandal of global poverty afresh, as set out in Christian Aid's poverty report.

'It is this generation's moral obligation to overcome extreme poverty and address inequalities, and we need to find new ways to strengthen those whose voices are often not heard.

Christian Aid's poverty report is a hopeful call for justice founded on the realisation that we are responsible for one another to live flourishing lives.'

**Gordon Brown, UN Special Envoy for Global Education
and
former Prime Minister of the UK**

'This powerful new report shows that current efforts to tackle poverty are increasingly being blunted by the climate crisis. It argues convincingly that without a deeper rethink of how we share the earth's finite resources – across countries, peoples, and generations – poverty will persist, and environmental destruction will worsen. Christian Aid has brought an important faith-based perspective to the debate about how to create a just and sustainable world, in a way that is relevant to people of faith and of no faith.'

Christiana Figueres, former executive secretary, UNFCCC

'This important report highlights that poverty is the outcome of unjust social and economic relations, and eliminating it requires major changes in global, national and local economic structures. Crucially, it also requires a shift in the paradigm of development, from "having more" to "being more".'

**Professor Jayati Ghosh, University of Massachusetts
Amherst**

'Christian Aid's report shows the gains that have been made in tackling extreme poverty in recent decades, but also the limits of progress to date. The pandemic has clearly exposed the deep, persistent inequalities that continue to blight our world, with women and girls in lower income countries being hit especially hard. No one can be left out of the fight against poverty. We must listen to and be led by the most marginalised, understanding their experiences and standing with them in claiming their rights.'

Mary Robinson, former president of Ireland and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

'Jesus said: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." But no one can live a truly abundant life if they are mired in poverty. This report will help you to play your part in fulfilling Jesus's promise. Read it and act on it!'

Thabo Makgoba, Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town

'The climate crisis is pushing millions of people into extreme poverty. Yet Christian Aid's report shows that until people on the frontline of the crisis are included and elevated in climate conversations, the action we need will remain out of reach. Three things must stay with us as we organise and mobilise for change. Faith, hope and love. And the greatest of these is love.'

Vanessa Nakate, climate justice activist from Uganda and founder of the Africa-based Rise Up Movement

Co-creating the report

Action to tackle the direct and structural causes of poverty hinges on people's ability and commitment to speak out against injustice.

This report builds on the voices of people living in poverty, and on the experience of communities and partner organisations working to end poverty and overcome injustice. In 2021, a series of listening sessions were held with diverse groups across the globe to challenge and inform our analysis and conclusions. All participants are acknowledged within this report.



Above: Arjan Guyo (standing), Development Facilitator from Christian Aid partner organisation Action for Development, facilitates a meeting of the Barimel Radio Listening Group, Ethiopia.

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Cover: Children play in Sawula village, Pujehun district, Sierra Leone.

Photographs: Cover, p17: Christian Aid/Tom Pilston; p4 Indrias G Kassaye; p7: Alex Baker; p10: Latitude Space/Christian Aid; p15: Christian Aid/Elizabeth Dalziel; p19, p45: Christian Aid; p28: Gladis Mucú; p30: Mabe Richard, SPEDP; p36: Christian Aid/Nirvair Singh; p37: Amaru; p41: Christian Aid/Emily Garthwaite; p44: Kunle Amuwo Jr; p51: Christian Aid/Adrian Arbib; p55: Chris Roche/Christian Aid; p56: Norah Rotich/Christian Aid; p57: Colin Hattersley.

List of acronyms

FGM	female genital mutilation
GDP	gross domestic product
LDCs	Least Developed Countries
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
NGOs	non-governmental organisations
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations

Foreword

Christian Aid was founded by the British and Irish churches in the aftermath of the Second World War, in response to the suffering of millions of civilians who had been uprooted from their homes by the bloodiest conflict the world has seen. A huge amount has changed in the intervening three-quarters of a century: much of it positive. The story of gains in human development, many of them arising from the rights won by women and girls, is not told often enough.

The prophetic traditions of lament and hope must be harnessed in the struggle to end poverty. Poverty has deep structural causes, and action to end it will only have a lasting impact when it tackles those causes. Yet structural inequality does not reduce people living in poverty to the role of powerless pawns. In the work of Christian Aid, we are constantly reminded of people's agency and ability to change the world for the better, through countless individual acts of courage and creativity, and through the organised struggle for justice and equality.

In recognising the very real progress that has been made in tackling extreme poverty, we must never be blind to the deep injustices that continue to scar our world. We are only now emerging from a pandemic that has exposed and entrenched divisions of wealth, ethnicity and gender. The climate crisis is affecting first and worst those communities in the poorest countries that have done least to contribute to the problem of global warming. These interlocking crises are at their root crises in our relationship with each other, with the created order that human beings have done so much to abuse, and with God.

Therefore, solving the problem of poverty can never be simply a matter of political or policy change. It is profoundly relational, and requires us to transform ourselves, as well as the structures around us, so that we can flourish with the full dignity that God intends for every person. This inherent dignity is not optional, bought or earned, and leaves no room for discrimination on grounds of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age or religion.

In the Christian tradition, the fullest expression of relationship is found in the Trinity of God: the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In the Bible, we see people being called to mirror that relationship, by living faithfully, lovingly, and justly. We also see people continually fall short of that calling, and needing to repent, and repair, with the Holy Spirit's power, and restore fractured relationships. The greatest test of our relationships is



how we respond to people who are affected by the fractures of poverty and injustice. Out of this mandate flow the rights and responsibilities we call human rights.

This report sets out the challenge and opportunity of how we may restore relationships that have been broken by poverty. Christian Aid is a response to the question asked of Jesus, 'Who is my neighbour?' We are each other's neighbours, regardless of who we are or where we live. We work with people of all faiths and none because of our grounding in the Good News of God in Jesus Christ. It is in that spirit that I hope this report will enrich the wisdom and insight of everyone working in myriad ways to end extreme poverty, and spur action for a more just world.

John Sentamu

Chair of the Christian Aid Board of Trustees

Introduction

Human beings share a common home. But it is a home beset by paradoxes. We live in a world of super-abundance that holds more wealth and produces more food than at any point in human history. Yet it is also a world in which 750 million people struggle to survive on less than \$1.90 a day, and where hundreds of millions more are just one shock away from being plunged into extreme poverty.¹ It is a world in which close to 700 million people go to bed hungry and more than 40 million face the risk of famine.²

We live in a world of yawning health inequalities, in which 16,000 children under five in poorer countries die daily from preventable causes, and in which a child born in Japan has a life expectancy 30 years greater than one born in the Central African Republic.³ Yet it is also a world that is healthier than ever before. Deaths of children under five have more than halved in a generation. Since 1970, Sierra Leone has cut child mortality from one third to one tenth. It took the UK 230 years to make the same progress.⁴

Our world is increasingly educated. More than 70% of children in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) completed primary schooling in 2019, against 42% in 1990.⁵ The gap in educational opportunity between girls and boys has narrowed dramatically over this period. Boys were almost twice as likely as girls to enrol in secondary school in 1990. By 2019, there were 92 girls in secondary education in LDCs for every 100 boys.⁶ Yet it is also a world in which the Covid-19 pandemic has caused massive educational disruption, hitting the poorest children hardest, and where, even as some gaps narrow, gender inequality persists in labour markets, politics, homes and communities.⁷

The very real improvements experienced by billions of people over recent decades do not weaken the urgency of the struggle to end poverty. Instead, they should intensify the pressure. The persistence of extreme poverty in a world where poverty reduction is demonstrably achievable is a scandal. History demonstrates that where resources, power and opportunity are shared evenly, where states are accountable to their citizens and markets are harnessed to serve the common good, major strides can be made in tackling the scourge of poverty. Poverty is a result of political choices; therefore, the solutions to poverty are in the hands of people, even if – as this report will show – imbalances of power are a major barrier to creating a more just world.

While progress against poverty should make us impatient for change, the disfiguring inequalities that characterise our world should challenge us to a deep rethink of development. Improvements in human development slowed after 2010, partly as a result of the global financial crisis, with the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to end poverty and protect the planet lagging furthest in the poorest countries.⁸

Increasingly, poverty in all its dimensions is concentrated amongst people who, in the UN's language, have been 'left behind' – people for whom poverty is a symptom of deep structural disadvantage, typically through some combination of where they live and who they are. The face of poverty changes according to context, but it is overwhelmingly African or South Asian, and disproportionately likely to be rural and that of a child.⁹ Women and girls, discriminated minority groups, people with disabilities, and people displaced by disaster and conflict are all more likely to have their lives scarred by poverty.¹⁰

Below: Dookenger, a four-year-old orphan, in Usar community, Benue State, Nigeria, is excited to bring home a hygiene kit, funded by Christian Aid's Covid appeal.



Even before Covid-19 struck, the SDGs were off track, with 6% of the world's population projected to remain trapped in extreme poverty in 2030 – and many more if one uses the more realistic measure of \$5.50 a day.¹¹ The pandemic has now thrown a slowing rate of progress into reverse, creating the biggest social and economic setback in a generation: the downturn it triggered could plunge 150 million more people below the extreme poverty line.¹² Hunger and unemployment are rising in a way not seen since the 1970s, and it has been estimated that the global 'jobs gap' created by the crisis reached 75 million in 2021, before a projected fall to 23 million in 2022.¹³

Covid-19 has crystallised deep structural inequalities within and between countries, which existed long before the virus ushered in an era of lockdowns and restrictions. From the UK, where the pandemic has put a spotlight on racial inequality, to India, where migrant labourers were suddenly thrown out of work in their millions, it is clear that even if viruses do not discriminate, societies do.¹⁴ Since shocks usually hit hardest those individuals and societies with the fewest buffers, without concerted action the pandemic threatens to trigger a great social and economic divergence between richer and poorer countries.

The abnormal experience of life during the pandemic begs the deeper question: what kind of 'normal' do we want to establish as we emerge from it?¹⁵ The virus spread in a world that was far from normal, in its simultaneous failure to provide a social floor for hundreds of millions of people, while breaking through the environmental ceiling of what our planet can bear.¹⁶ The increasing concentration of climate-heating greenhouse gases in the Earth's atmosphere is part of a wider crisis of environmental degradation and destruction that is both a symptom and cause of poverty and inequality. In effect, we have mortgaged our common home many times over, and left the bill to be paid by the poorest people, and by future generations.

Many economists would describe the climate crisis as a public goods failure or a tragedy of the commons. Yet more fundamentally, it is a failure of the imagination. Dominant approaches to development have relied heavily on a set of ideas about progress that have neglected many of the most important elements of what it is to be human, and of what it is to live well in relationship to each other and to the world around us. As a result, these efforts are running out of road, and their human and environmental costs are becoming ever more apparent.

The double crisis of climate change and Covid-19 must serve as a wake-up-call to everyone involved in the collective endeavour of international development – governments, international institutions, the private sector and civil society – to think afresh about poverty, its causes and effects, and what it will take to end it. This report is one contribution towards that rethink. It is rooted in the experience of working over the last 75 years in partnership with people in poverty, and the conviction that durable solutions to poverty must be shaped by poor people themselves.

It is also informed by a conception of development grounded in a Christian understanding of human flourishing, which Christian Aid believes can add value to mainstream development

'The double crisis of climate change and Covid-19 must serve as a wake-up call... to think afresh about poverty, its causes and effects, and what it will take to end it'

approaches, and offer a way forward from the current crises. This is an approach which shares much ground with other critiques of growth-centred efforts to tackle poverty, and we hope helps to chart new paths to a better future.

Human flourishing is not simply the absence of poverty, but is about the ability to thrive. In the Christian tradition, this is described as life in all its fullness, when we are in right relationships with each other and the world that sustains us. Whereas poverty is often described as a lack of resources, choice, power or self-worth, human flourishing exists in a world of generosity and interdependence. Money and choice can be important, especially where there is a lack of either, but they are important in order to achieve something more: human growth in terms of creativity, generosity, productivity and reciprocity.

'Human flourishing is not simply the absence of poverty, but is about the ability to thrive'

1. Progress against poverty

'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights'

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

'I managed to invest some money in farming... our family is no longer the same. Our children are able to go to school'

Women's savings group member, Ngabu, Malawi

Poverty is an injustice that strips people of dignity, voice and agency, and is rightly often described as dehumanising for the person who experiences it. But poverty and the associated underlying inequalities are also bad for people who are not poor. Poverty is a symptom of broken relationships between people: it weakens societies and creates conditions in which power is more likely to be abused and resources wasted. The causes of poverty are complex, and there is no single route to ending it. But in the three-quarters of a century of Christian Aid's existence, experience has confirmed at least two things. Firstly, lasting solutions to poverty must be built on action to tackle imbalances of power and on the agency of people living in poverty. Secondly, success in the fight against poverty hinges on broad movements for change.

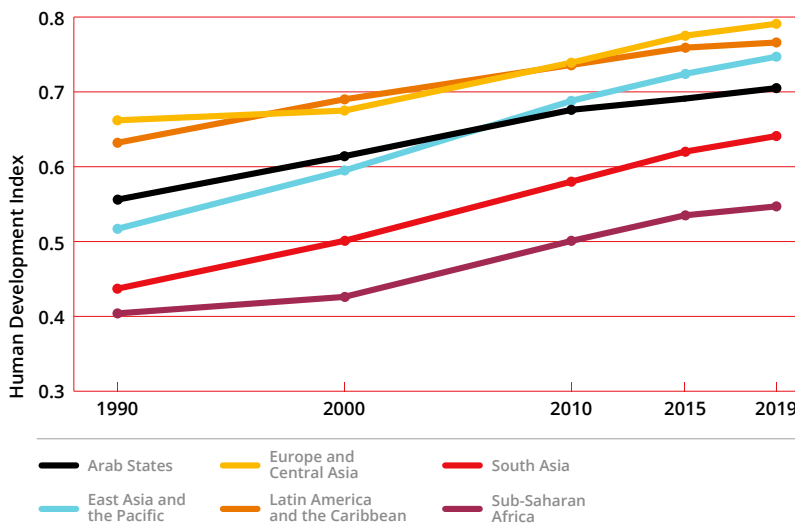
The world when Christian Aid was established was a radically different place from the world we inhabit today. Then, 2.5 billion people shared the planet, less than one-third of today's population. Just one in five of them lived in a town or city.¹⁷ As a share of the global economy, the US was at its zenith, accounting for over one-quarter of total gross domestic product (GDP).¹⁸ Large parts of East Asia, the Middle East and Europe were starting to rebuild from the ruins of the Second World War. The response to the terrible suffering and violence was an outpouring of humanitarian action and the creation of a new architecture for international cooperation and peace. The UN, which was founded in October 1945, had just 57 members, against 193 today. India would gain independence in 1947, but most of Africa and the Caribbean, and large parts of South-East Asia would remain under European colonial control for another 10–20 years. Global average life expectancy was only 46 years.¹⁹ More than one in five children died before their fifth birthday, and an estimated 44% of the world's adults were unable to read and write.²⁰ In India, home to one-fifth of the world's people,

fewer than 15% of the adult population was literate, and school enrolment was just 7%.²¹

Fast forward to 2022, and many more people live free from chronic want, a necessary first step towards human flourishing. In large part, this change is a matter of more people being able to afford necessities, such as food, and more governments being able to provide vital public services, such as healthcare and clean water. Behind that progress lies stories of creativity and courage, of people making their voice heard and claiming their rights.

In this chapter, we focus on this ‘good news’ story of how millions of people have escaped the poverty trap. This progress is not a cause for complacency, or misplaced optimism. The ways in which the Covid-19 pandemic has stalled and reversed many gains – something explored later in this report – makes this clear. Yet what this story does show is that progress is possible in tackling poverty and in laying the foundations for a more just world. Even if the steps needed to build that world go beyond the progress described here and require deeper transformation, the very real changes for the better in the lives of millions of people over recent decades should give cause for hope and spur an intensified effort to end poverty.

Figure 1: Progress against poverty



Gains in human development

Changes in human wellbeing in the last three generations can only be described as unprecedented. Since 1947, average life expectancy has increased by more than half, to 71 years. In some of the poorest countries, the increase has been even more remarkable, with Ethiopia doubling its life expectancy over the same period to 65 years – roughly where British male life expectancy stood in 1947.²² Much of this increase in average

life spans was driven by a more than fivefold reduction in deaths among children before their fifth birthday. By 2019 Burkina Faso, ranked 182 in the UN's Human Development Index, had a child mortality rate of 87 deaths per 1,000 births.²³ This still represents a scandalous toll of human life, but it is one-quarter of the level in 1960, the year it gained independence from France.

A similar story can be told in education, where the intervening decades have seen an unparalleled expansion in access to formal schooling. Despite huge variations around the world in education quality, duration, and attainment, the default expectation in almost every country is now that every child at least starts a primary education, and today 9 in every 10 children worldwide complete it.²⁴

Progress in secondary education has been similarly dramatic, albeit starting from a lower base. In Bangladesh, to take one example, the proportion of children enrolled in secondary school has climbed from 42% to 67% since 1998.²⁵ A similar story can be told over the same period about countries as diverse as the Dominican Republic, Kenya and Indonesia.²⁶ This is a stark contrast from the picture two generations ago, when schooling was, in effect, a privilege rather than a right. One of the most extreme reflections of this is the fact that, on the eve of independence in 1960, what became the Democratic Republic of Congo had just 30 university graduates among 15 million people.²⁷

These major shifts in social indicators matter both because they represent the growing ability of many millions of people to fulfil more of their human potential, and because they demonstrate that concrete gains in human wellbeing are achievable in poorer countries, over relatively short periods of time and in the context of a growing population. Many different things have shaped these changes, but two factors especially stand out.

Women have increasingly claimed their rights, with far-reaching changes in areas including political participation, education and reproductive health. Often, the movement for gender equality has been part of a broader engagement by active citizens in creating social and political change. This has contributed to an increase in the capacity of states to deliver the basic needs of people, and in their accountability to citizens. Neither of these shifts has been a simple upward trajectory. However, the overall direction has been towards a world in which greater citizen voice, progress towards gender equality, and more responsive and effective states have improved the lives of millions of people.

Below: Nine-year-old Kludie Dobiar at her primary school in Mukecha Kebele, Ethiopia



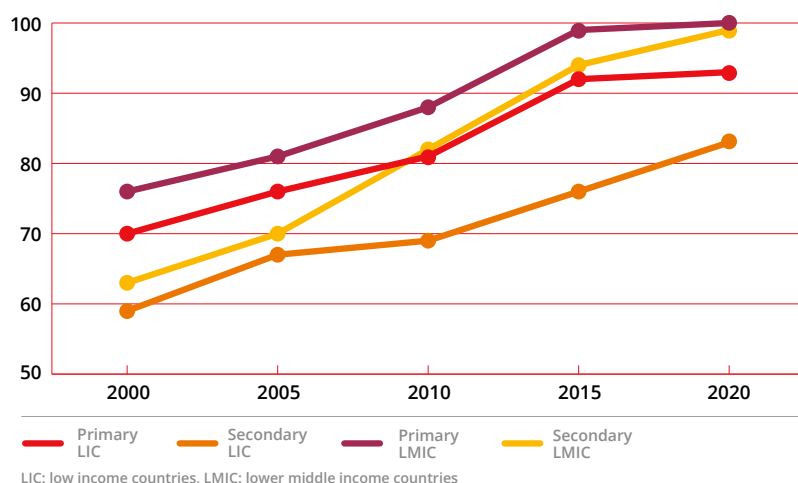
The changing status of women

The social, economic and political status of millions of women and girls has changed profoundly in recent decades. True gender equality is still an elusive goal, and the pace of progress has been uneven, with a backlash against women's rights in some contexts and attacks being made on so-called 'gender ideology' by some governments. Yet despite these barriers, many gender-based disparities have narrowed dramatically.

Trends in education reflect this shift. Between 1960 and 2010, gender attainment gaps in education narrowed in two-thirds of countries, as women's median level of educational attainment rose from two to eight years.²⁸ In 1995, the UN's Beijing Platform for Action identified universal completion of primary education for girls as one of the key strategies for combating gender inequality. At the time, 78% of girls reached this milestone. By 2020, this had reached 90%.²⁹ Increasingly, the focus has shifted in many poorer countries towards secondary education, where the gender enrolment gap persists, but is reducing sharply. In India in 1970, fewer than 3 in every 10 secondary school students were girls, but by 2018, there was near parity with boys.³⁰

Figure 2: Girls' education

Primary and secondary school enrolment for girls as a percentage of boys' enrolment



Girls' and women's education matters both as a right that has intrinsic value, and because of the way it unlocks many other social and economic benefits, not only for women and girls, but also for society at large. Girls who are educated are more likely to shape or make decisions that affect them and are less likely to marry before they reach adulthood. Educated women on average earn more, have higher incomes, are less likely to die in childbirth, and have healthier and better nourished children,

even after controlling for other factors such as income and family background.³¹

The changing status of women is especially seen in women's health, and specifically in the area of reproductive health. On average, women are having fewer children, and starting to have children later – a long-term trend that has taken place over several decades. Between 2010 and 2019, 7 of the 10 countries with the steepest decline in fertility rates were in Africa, namely Uganda, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Chad, Somalia and Ethiopia. By mid-century, it is projected that there will be a global average of 2.2 births per woman, down from 2.4 today, and from an average of 5 births in 1960.³² Family planning services have played a major role in this transition: by 2015, 8 out of 10 women globally had their demand for family planning satisfied, even if this rate falls to 50% in sub-Saharan Africa.³³ Delaying the age at which women give birth and spacing births has been a key contributor to a 44% fall in women's mortality during childbirth between 1990 and 2015; this is less than the target in the Millennium Development Goal, but nonetheless is progress that has prevented more than 200,000 women's deaths a year.³⁴

'Many of these far-reaching changes in the status of women and girls have coincided with increased political voice'

Below: Women celebrate with their savings box in Sawula village, Pujehun district, Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone is one of the most dangerous places in the world to give birth, and without money, women like these cannot afford to go to a health clinic. Now, they have joined together to save money and access loans.



Many of these far-reaching changes in the status of women and girls have coincided with increased political voice, which has driven a virtuous circle of further gains for gender equality. To take one example, women's parliamentary representation globally has more than doubled since 1997, from 12% to more than 26% – far short of parity, but a major change nonetheless. Some of the biggest changes have been in poorer countries. For example, over one-third of parliamentary seats in Tanzania are

held by women, more than double the level in the 1990s.³⁵ While women's formal political representation is only one dimension of voice and participation, and does not automatically lead to a strengthening of other rights, it is usually a necessary condition of wider progress towards gender equality (see box 1).

Box 1. Getting elected is only the start of the battle for gender equality

Christian Aid works with SEND in Sierra Leone to strengthen a Women in Governance network. A participatory research process was undertaken to understand more about the experiences of women in the network, and how they were able to make changes in the life of their communities through their election to local government.

Many participants reflected that getting elected was in many ways the easy part, and that using their power to change policy was more challenging.

Participants noted that they needed male support to create space for them to stand for election, and so SEND's programme worked with traditional male leaders to explore their attitudes and behaviours.

Elected women also reported that they needed the financial support of family members to stay in power, while some are forced to use their own savings.

'[Money is a] very big problem, we are not paid... You are not mobile. We are not able to visit our wards. We don't have vehicles'

Participant in the women councillors' workshop

'Men intimidate us, they use abusive language, insults, they sometimes call you prostitutes, all kinds of names... just to discourage you from going forward with your political career. They try to damage your character so your supporters will move away from you'

Participant in the women councillors' workshop

Some women reported hostility from the community to their holding elected office, particularly from some men.

As one woman explains: 'Violence is the number one problem... rape, marital rape, beating of women... it's rampant, everywhere.'³⁶

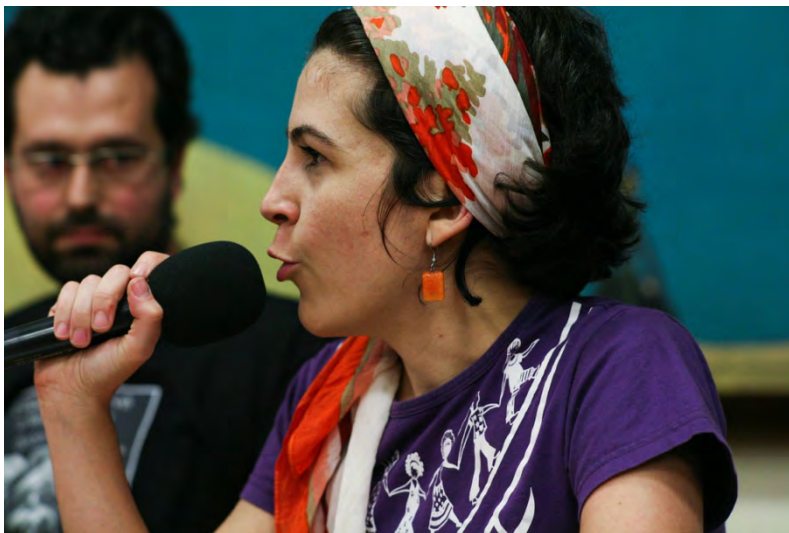
To address these challenges, SEND initiated other interventions – firstly, peer-to-peer support between women standing for election, which they felt strengthened their confidence and resilience; and secondly, the use of public radio to communicate about wider societal attitudes to women, which was used to open up space for discussion and model different expectations of women. The women in the network also used their collective power to challenge people's attitudes, making visible some of the worst gender-based violence and acting together to get local magistrates to respond.

Although it is often difficult to quantify, these changes in formal political participation and representation have been mirrored in increases in women's access to resources and decision making in the home.³⁷ Alongside significant gains in formal political participation, civil society organisations and movements have played a critical role in campaigning for women's rights and gender equality. For example, movements against female genital mutilation (FGM), child marriage (which overwhelmingly

affects girls), and domestic violence have scored significant victories. In Burkina Faso, one legislative change on FGM helped to prevent almost 250,000 cases of cutting over 10 years, in a country of 11 million people.³⁸ Often, pushes for legal and policy change have been coupled with, and enabled by, widespread public engagement to influence values, attitudes and behaviours. Such change is complex, dealing as it does with both the symptoms and underlying causes of gender inequality, and rarely progresses in a straight line.

Christian Aid's own experience of Side by Side, a faith-based movement to tackle gender-based violence that it helped to establish, reflects this experience. There are positive examples of Side by Side starting to shift conversations in religious communities in Africa and Asia, and connecting communities in different countries to share strategies for change.³⁹ For example, in Ethiopia, Christian and Islamic leaders publicly declared their opposition to FGM and other harmful traditional practices, and opened up a wider public conversation. However, in many contexts, there were also examples of faith leaders actively opposing change, with women in faith groups often having to engage in difficult conversations to make the case for gender justice.⁴⁰

Below: Activist Sarah Roure speaks at a meeting of Side by Side in Brazil, where theologians, faith-based organisations, the Council of Churches and Afro-Brazilian religions gathered to discuss gender inequality.



The expansion of essential services and the role of the state

A major expansion in publicly funded essential services has driven dramatic improvements in health and education outcomes over recent decades. In the UK, the foundation of Christian Aid coincided with the creation of a welfare state based on William Beveridge's vision of a universalist approach

to protecting everyone in the country from the five 'giants' of want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness.⁴¹ In the intervening decades, many other countries, often in the context of post-conflict reconstruction or a burst of energy after political independence, have pursued a similar vision of universal provision of essential services to improve health, spread literacy and prevent people from falling into extreme deprivation.

Zimbabwe's experience after 1980, when it sought to desegregate a racially stratified education system, remove barriers to progress from primary to secondary school, and rapidly expand access, reflected this pattern. Within four years of independence, the country had moved from having fewer than 60% of children in primary school to universal primary education, even if later political and economic crises reversed many of these gains.⁴² In this century, Vietnam and Rwanda developed universal health protection systems in less than a decade, and have helped to achieve further improvements in health outcomes.⁴³

Countries that have achieved universal coverage of essential services have pursued varied paths in terms of whether such systems are fully publicly funded and publicly provided. But what the most successful systems have in common is a principle of universal access, free at the point of use, and effective regulation to promote equitable outcomes.⁴⁴ This growth of essential services has been accompanied by a gradual expansion in social protection policies designed to protect incomes and provide a social floor during periods of economic stress. More recently, the Covid-19 pandemic has led to a proliferation of social protection measures and has spurred a debate in some countries about the case for a renewed social contract (see box 2).

The expansion of essential services has limitations, especially in situations where wider economic and social inequalities are ignored. Many countries' essential services continue to be poor quality, especially in poorer communities, and exclude directly or indirectly through patchy coverage and high costs, even where the service is supposed to be free. Discrimination is often hardwired into the design of services – for example by denying refugees or migrants access, or by providing a service in a language that not everyone understands. These formal barriers can be exacerbated by officials treating people differently on the basis of income, gender, ethnicity or disability.⁴⁵ In many cases, community level engagement can overcome some of these barriers, by raising people's awareness of their rights and fostering greater accountability

from service providers. For example, participants in village savings and loans associations supported by Christian Aid in Burundi, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Nigeria and Malawi reported that not only did they provide an important financial buffer that enabled them to access healthcare more easily, but they also raised the women participants' level of expectation of local service providers and strengthened their sense of voice and power.

Box 2. The growth of social protection

While formal social protection systems are often traced back to the origins of the modern welfare state in 19th century Europe, many pre-industrial societies developed forms of collective support on which people could draw in times of need. These community-based systems often continue to play a critical role in alleviating poverty, even where they operate alongside formal systems that recognise the responsibility of states to realise the human right to social security. SDG 1.3 commits countries to implementing appropriate systems that ensure a minimum social floor, and substantial coverage for people who are poor or vulnerable. Yet in 2019, only 45% of the global population were covered by at least one social protection benefit, and only 29% of people by comprehensive systems.⁴⁶

Covid-19 exposed the limitations of existing social protection policies. Yet it also spurred a major growth of new policies and interventions. During the course of the pandemic, 215 countries and territories have announced plans or implemented more than 1,400 social protection measures, and global social protection spending in real terms is

23% higher than in the aftermath of the global financial crisis in 2008/9.⁴⁷

Many of these interventions have made a critical difference. Christian Aid's own experience of emergency cash assistance to migrant workers and their families in Myanmar as part of the response to Covid-19, working with local partners Karen Baptist Convention, Phyu Sin Saydanar Action Group, and Myanmar Physically Handicapped Association, shows that social protection interventions can help to maintain access to healthcare, protect consumption, and sustain investments in human capital.

However, social protection spending in LDCs continues to be almost completely reliant on external donor funding and is usually modest in scope.⁴⁸ There are calls for more predictable and substantial financing for the poorest countries, via a global fund for social protection, which form part of a growing debate about how to renew or build a social contract between states and citizens in the wake of the pandemic.⁴⁹

Although essential services continue to be chronically under-resourced in many of the poorest countries, their expansion has nonetheless been enabled by a significant increase in public investment. For example, since the mid-1990s the share of public money in total healthcare spending for low-income countries rose from 34% to 42%.⁵⁰ The change has been enabled by an underlying growth of tax revenues, including in some countries that are very poor. In Burkina Faso, for example, tax revenues as a share of GDP rose by more than half between 2002 and 2019, from 9.7% to 15.7%. In South Asia, India and Bangladesh have increased revenues as a share of GDP by one-third and

more than 20% respectively since 2000, albeit starting from what were low levels by international standards.⁵¹

This story of increased state capacity, growing coverage of essential services and civil society pressure for policy and legislative change in poorer countries has often been overlooked, especially in high-income donor countries, where there is a widespread public perception that poorer countries are locked into a cycle of aid dependency.⁵² In reality, aid is playing a steadily diminishing role in most low- and middle-income countries (see box 3). For low- and middle-income countries as a whole, aid accounts for 0.5% of GDP – one-third of the level in 1990. Even in sub-Saharan Africa, the world's most aid-dependent region, donor assistance is half as important as it was 30 years ago, and is now at 3% of GDP.⁵³

Box 3. A changing aid landscape

Official donor aid has come under growing scrutiny and challenge in recent years from two contrasting viewpoints. Aid cuts in the UK in 2020 were justified by the government on the grounds of affordability, but they were also encouraged by longstanding opponents of aid who argued that it was wasteful and bred dependency, in an echo of domestic critiques of the welfare state.⁵⁴ Aid has also been criticised, usually from a different quarter, as a tool through which donor governments exercise unaccountable power over poorer countries, and perpetuate a neo-colonial relationship, especially in Africa.⁵⁵ The history of structural adjustment in Africa and Latin America in the 1980s, and the continuing use of aid to serve trade, security and diplomatic objectives, gives plenty of ammunition to this argument, and underscores the urgent need for reform to make aid more poverty focused, transparent and owned by recipients.

These debates are taking place in the context of a rapidly changing aid landscape. A recent World Bank report shows that since 2000, private financial flows have grown in importance for low- and middle-income countries, while the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) group of big middle-income economies now accounts for 22% of global loans.⁵⁶

The number of aid actors has grown by 2.5 times over this period, and many of the largest aid actors are now outside of the traditional donor club of Europe, North America and Japan. Turkey exceeded the 0.7% official development assistance/gross national income target in 2020 and Saudi Arabia gave a similar share of national income to that of the US.⁵⁷ Aid has also fragmented during the last two decades, with a drop of one-third in the average size of each aid activity, while the share of aid being spent in donor countries, especially on refugee costs, has risen dramatically.

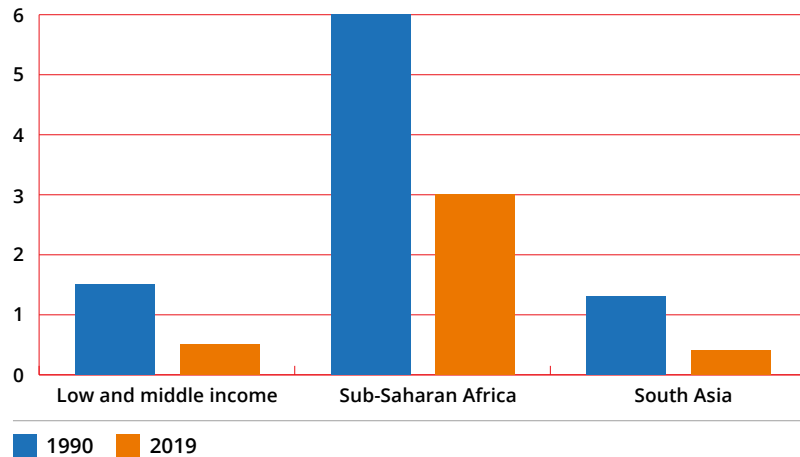
While aid is of diminishing relevance for most countries, it still has a critical role to play for the poorest and most fragile states, such as Afghanistan, where it accounted for more than 70% of public spending before the takeover by the Taliban.⁵⁸

It is also essential in supporting global public goods, such as vaccination, and in efforts to mitigate global heating and help people adapt to climate change. Yet increasingly the debate is shifting to identifying other approaches to global public finance that could be more predictable and remove many of the unequal power dynamics that accompany official aid.⁵⁹

Since aid volumes have not declined in absolute terms, a large part of the reason for reduced aid dependency is economic growth. While the global population has tripled since 1950, global income has increased by a factor of 10.⁶⁰

Figure 3: Reduced aid dependency

**Net Overseas Development Aid received
(% of Gross National Income)**



In practice, growth has been spread extremely unevenly, as the next chapter of this report will explore. Had this increased wealth been shared equally, the average global citizen would have seen per capita income \$10 a day (in 2011 prices) to \$41 a day.⁶¹ Yet economic expansion has nonetheless catalysed a massive reduction in extreme income poverty: the absolute number of people living below the international poverty line has more than halved since 1945, from 1.6 billion people to 700 million. Because of a threefold growth in the global population during that period, the incidence of income poverty has plummeted from 65% to 10% today.⁶²

East Asia accounts for much of this decline in income poverty. In 1990, two-thirds of China’s population was defined as living below the income poverty line of \$1.90 a day. By 2015 it had declined to less than 1%, and in 2021 the Chinese Government announced it had eradicated extreme poverty.⁶³ Yet even taking China out of the calculation, levels of extreme poverty fell globally from 29% in 1981, to 12% in 2013.⁶⁴ In sub-Saharan Africa, the region where income poverty is most widespread and deepest, the income poverty incidence has fallen from 60% in 1995 to 40% today.⁶⁵

These falls in income poverty are significant and have enabled many people to lead lives free from chronic material want. Yet they also tell a partial story. Income poverty measures are arbitrary and narrow and – as this report will go on to explore – do not tell us very much about critical dimensions of human

flourishing, such as people's agency and their ability to live with dignity.

Changes in governance and civic space

In the sphere of personal and collective rights, there are important signs of progress. In 1950, there were roughly five times as many autocracies as democracies. Today, there are more democratic governments than autocratic ones.⁶⁶ No country that holds elections now bars women from voting on account of their sex.⁶⁷

Formal democratic structures and processes, such as elections, do not automatically equate to peaceful transitions of power, nor to full freedom of voice, assembly and association, and protection under the rule of law. Many democracies also have deep and disfiguring inequalities. However, this expansion of formal democracy, even if flawed and partial, has also been accompanied by a dramatic growth in civil society organisations, from the community to the global level, that are connecting citizens, taking action and often fostering greater transparency and accountability. Social media has played an important part in this shift, and in altering how people expect to be treated by the state.⁶⁸

More recently, there has been a countervailing trend towards greater controls on civic space, with a growing number of countries clamping down on freedoms and restricting the ability of independent organisations to operate. Covid-19 was used by many governments as a pretext to further limit civic space.⁶⁹ Yet even during the pandemic, civil society has also been a source of resilience and new forms of activism, and an important check on state power and market-based inequalities.⁷⁰

The pandemic, together with its massive economic fallout and the grossly unequal recovery from its effects, has raised searching questions about the progress described in this chapter, including the extent to which that progress has been sustainable or has been built on inequality; and whether Covid-19 has temporarily reversed gains in human wellbeing, or more fundamentally disrupted them. Together with the accelerating effects of the climate crisis, and wider environmental degradation and destruction, the pandemic points to the limits of progress, and the urgent need to revisit current approaches to 'development' and poverty eradication.

2. Poverty amidst plenty

'If there is no money and no job... you won't know what to do. This is big poverty'

Woman respondent, Kubau, Kaduna state, Nigeria

'There are systematic disparities in the freedoms that men and women enjoy in different societies, and these disparities are often not reducible to differences in income and resources'

Amartya Sen

The rising tide of prosperity over recent decades has helped to change the lives of millions of people for the better, making them healthier, more educated, and better nourished than their parents' and grandparents' generations. Yet even a cursory look at the status of global poverty shows that it has not lifted all boats. Almost 1 in 10 people in the world continue to live below the \$1.90 poverty line, and 1 in 10 are hungry.⁷¹ It is estimated that on current trends between 360 million and 500 million people will be extremely poor in 2030, the target date adopted for ending extreme poverty.⁷²

These poverty indicators are mirrored in a story of inadequate progress in basic measures of human wellbeing. In the case of child malnutrition and severe infectious diseases, the rates of progress needed to achieve the SDG targets far outstrip what has been achieved by any country in the recent past.⁷³ By 2030, it is projected that only 6 in 10 of the world's children will be completing a secondary education, and youth literacy in low-income countries will be below 80%.⁷⁴

The progress that has been made against poverty has to be set against a backdrop of wasted opportunities, persistent inequalities, setbacks and pushbacks. The cost to millions of people living in poverty, or on the brink of poverty, is enormous, and needs to be counted in terms of marginalisation, physical and mental suffering, and lost human potential (see box 4).

That cost has not been carried equally. As this chapter shows, the deepest and most widespread poverty continues to be experienced by women and girls, and people who face structural barriers to a better life, because of who they are and where they live. These barriers are reinforced by discrimination,

violence, and a highly unequal economic and financial system. Increasingly, they are made worse by environmental destruction, most obviously in the form of climate change.

Box 4. Defining and measuring poverty

Poverty can be understood in terms of concepts, definitions and measures.⁷⁵ The concepts capture 'meanings and understanding'; definitions distinguish the state of poverty, and measures operationalise these quantitatively so that poverty can be identified and people in poverty can be counted.

Many people working to tackle poverty focus on measures of poverty, with simple income-based measures the most well-known, whereby an individual or household is defined as being in poverty if their income falls below a certain threshold. The most common global measure is \$1.90 a day. Equivalent consumption benchmarks are also often used, especially by national governments.

But the experience and reality of poverty is more complex and multi-dimensional. As one respondent in a Christian Aid survey in Nigeria described it: 'Poverty is unique as the fingerprint of the person that experiences it.'

Income measures are inherently limited. They tell us little about how people experience poverty, and the different ways in which people understand wellbeing and flourishing. They tend to obscure the variations within a group – and even within a household, where one person, often a man, may 'control the purse strings' to the detriment of others, often women and girls.

Multidimensional ideas and measures of poverty aim to capture deeper aspects of what it means for individual, household or group to experience

poverty.⁷⁶ One of the most widely used multi-dimensional measures is the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), which has gathered data across 107 developing countries.

The index is a composite of three elements: health, education and standard of living.⁷⁷ The MPI estimates that around 1.3 billion people are living in multidimensional poverty, the vast majority in sub-Saharan Africa or South Asia. This is roughly twice the number estimated to be living in extreme income poverty under \$1.90 a day.

As understanding of poverty evolves, so do definitions and measures. There is a growing interest in how to capture group discrimination and factors such as the impacts of climate change and conflict. It is not coincidental that people who are most likely to live in poverty are also more likely to be affected by conflict, to be vulnerable to climate change, and are more likely to be a woman or girl from a minority group. It is for this reason that Christian Aid increasingly focuses its programmes on countries that are prone to conflict and are extremely climate vulnerable, and particularly works with people facing structural disadvantage within those countries.

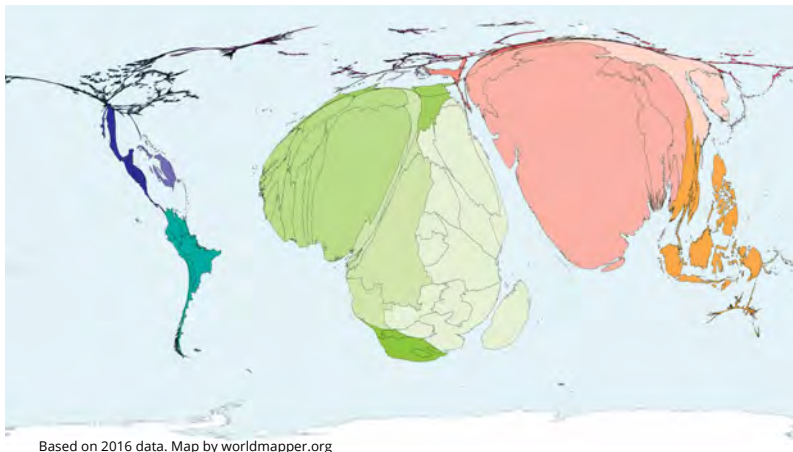
Understanding the interactions between different dimensions of poverty is critical to addressing both the causes and symptoms of poverty. Grounding this approach in the perspectives and experience of people who are poor, and in their understanding of what a life of dignity looks like, can create more effective pathways out of poverty, as well as strengthening their voice and agency.

Extreme poverty has become more concentrated

As the global incidence of extreme income poverty has reduced in recent decades, it has also become increasingly concentrated

among people who face deep structural barriers to a better life. To extend the metaphor of the rising tide, these people are often not in any kind of boat at all, but are clinging on to the flotsam and jetsam of a grossly unequal world in a bid to stay afloat.

Figure 4: Absolute poverty



This map shows the proportion of all people on less than or equal to \$1.90 a day in purchase parity in 2016.

Today, people in living in extreme poverty are a relatively small minority in most countries.⁷⁸ Extreme income poverty is widespread only in low-income countries, most of them in sub-Saharan Africa, where 40% of people live below the \$1.90 threshold (see figure 4).⁷⁹ These countries share some common experiences. Firstly, they have experienced unusually low economic growth, or have even seen their per capita incomes shrink. Between 1990 and 2017, this was the experience in the Central African Republic, Burundi, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Niger, Sierra Leone, Madagascar, Togo, Guinea-Bissau and the Gambia.⁸⁰ Falling incomes in already very poor countries have hit many people's ability to secure the daily necessities of life, but have also created a vicious circle in which they are forced into invidious choices, for example between educating their children and having enough food, which then impact on their longer-term prospects of escaping from poverty.

Secondly, most of the countries in which poverty is most prevalent began their political independence from European empires with structural economic disadvantages, including a dependence on exports of raw materials, low levels of education and limited infrastructure.

Thirdly, this economic inheritance has often been compounded by violence and political instability: 7 of the 10 African countries in which people's incomes have fallen since 1990 also

experienced civil conflict during this period. Increasingly, the poorest countries are scarred by war, with the World Bank estimating that by 2030 two-thirds of people who experience extreme poverty will live in a fragile or conflict-affected country, up from 40% today – despite these countries only being home to 1 in 10 of the world’s population.⁸¹

This does not mean that poverty has stopped being a problem in middle income countries. Multi-dimensional measures of poverty show many more poor people in South and East Asia, the Middle East and Latin America, than the official income-based poverty measures suggest. And for many people who have moved out of extreme poverty, their situation remains extremely vulnerable to economic shocks, such as natural disaster, or recession. While 1 in 10 people live below the \$1.90 line, one-quarter of the world’s population live below \$3.20, and a majority of the world survive on less than \$5.50 a day – with the largest share of people living below these higher lines in South Asia, not Africa.⁸² In short, while important progress has been made in reducing extreme poverty, these gains have slowed since 2015, and left a very large share of the world’s people continuing to live in conditions that undermine their ability to live with dignity.

‘By 2030 two-thirds of people who experience extreme poverty will live in a fragile or conflict-affected country, up from 40% today’

Below: Villagers from the community of Chajmacán in Cobán, Guatemala, attempt to cross a flooded road on makeshift rafts in November 2020, after Hurricane Iota.



The poverty impacts of the pandemic

The limits of this progress became starkly apparent when the Covid-19 pandemic struck in early 2020. Almost overnight, large parts of the global economy were shut down. While many people in wealthier countries suffered, and key measures of inequality increased, their governments were able to take unprecedented action to protect jobs and incomes, spending trillions of dollars on stimulus packages. Poorer countries had far fewer protections in place. To take one example, Germany spent 40 times more than Malawi on stimulus and recovery as a share of GDP.⁸³

As a result, many millions of people saw their incomes fall and livelihoods destroyed. For 2 billion workers in the informal sector, reliant on daily earnings and without any formal job security, the impact was especially severe.⁸⁴ In India alone, of 120 million people thrown out of work in April 2020, 90 million were small traders and labourers, many of them working in India's major cities, having migrated from rural areas.⁸⁵

Surveys across many countries during the first wave of the pandemic showed that larger, less educated and poorer households were more likely to report a loss of income.⁸⁶ In many cases, women were affected especially badly. In South Africa, it was estimated that women accounted for two-thirds of job losses (see box 5).⁸⁷

Box 5. The pandemic and gender equality

While data from most countries shows that men face a higher mortality risk than women from Covid-19, in many other respects the pandemic discriminated against women and girls, with potentially long-term impacts on their rights, and on poverty trends.⁸⁸ Massive disruption to schooling is one area of major concern. Learning among peers in the same classroom tends to flatten inequalities, while learning from home will tend to accentuate household-based inequalities.⁸⁹ There is a major gender gap in digital access, as well as an income gap. Worldwide, roughly 327 million fewer women than men have a smartphone and can access mobile internet, suggesting that fewer girls will have access to education via digital means than boys.⁹⁰

Experience from the Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014/15, when there were prolonged school closures, show that girls' education is more likely to be permanently disrupted than boys'.⁹¹ Long-term effects can include an increased risk of child marriage as increased poverty leads to desperate coping strategies, worse maternal health outcomes, and a lifelong reduction in women's earnings. In the case of Kenya, 16% of the girls aged 15-19 who married during the first year of the pandemic claimed they would not have done so was it not for Covid-19.⁹²

Women's work has also been heavily affected. Female pay lags behind male pay, and women take on a disproportionate amount of unpaid work, especially in and around the home: women spend on average four hours more a day than men on paid and unpaid work.⁹³ The precarity of women's work, most of it in the informal sector, has led to an economic shock from the pandemic that is gender-unequal.⁹⁴ Available data for the larger Latin American countries shows that women's employment in the second quarter of 2020 dropped by more than 13% in comparison to the same period in 2019, and by between 10% and 70% more than the decline for male workers.⁹⁵

Most concerning, gender-based violence has risen during the pandemic.⁹⁶ Financial pressures on households, confinement to cramped living quarters, often with people who were already abusers, the emptying of public spaces, and limited access to health and education services where abuse might be detected or addressed, have all left women and girls more vulnerable. UN Women has spoken of a 'shadow pandemic', with survey data from 13 countries showing one in four women report feeling less safe at home since the onset of Covid-19, and three in five reporting that sexual harassment outside the home has got worse.⁹⁷

In 2021, 97 million more people were pushed below the \$1.90 line because of the pandemic, and 163 million more people were pushed below a higher poverty line of \$5.50 per person per day.⁹⁸ Many of these 'newly poor' people are in households that had only recently escaped extreme poverty, had low living standards, and remained highly vulnerable to economic shocks. A large number of these people live in Latin America and Asia. The Asian Development Bank estimated that in 2020 as many as 80 million additional people across the region were pushed into poverty by the effects of the pandemic.⁹⁹ While the global economic bounce back in the second half of 2021 has meant that this fall into extreme poverty was temporary for many people, some of the effects are likely to be longer lasting. Recent research reveals a pattern of children from poorer countries being more likely to have missed out on learning during the pandemic, with children from poorer households, girls and those with disabilities worst affected.¹⁰⁰

Below: People in Marial Baai Payam, Northern Bahr el Ghazal State in South Sudan, waiting to receive crop seeds for planting during the pandemic. The community has been deeply affected by food insecurity and seasonal flooding that has destroyed livelihoods



The economic and social effects of the pandemic could be far-reaching and threaten to contribute to a 'great divergence' in the prospects of people in the very poorest countries, and the rest of the world. The early indicators are not promising. In 2021, the average incomes of people in the bottom 40% of the global income distribution were 6.7% lower than pre-pandemic projections, while those of people in the top 40% were down 2.8%.¹⁰¹ Whereas progress in reducing extreme poverty in upper-middle-income countries has been set back by five to six years, in low-income countries it has been set back by between eight and nine years.¹⁰²

Box 6: Vaccines and inequality

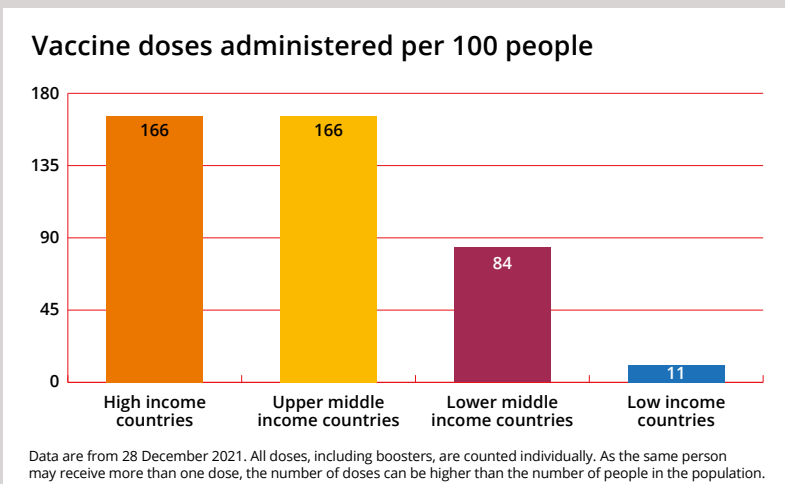


Figure 5: Vaccine inequality

The most assured way to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic is by vaccinating enough people so that many fewer become infected, and of those who do, only a small proportion will be badly affected or die.

The rapid development of many effective Covid-19 vaccines is remarkable.¹⁰³ But while the scientific ingenuity of vaccine developers provided hope to billions of people around the world, the manufacture and distribution of vaccines has exposed stark political and economic inequalities. Ensuring equitable access to vaccines reduces inequalities by giving everyone a level of protection against serious illness.

Many high-income countries bought their way to the front of the vaccination queue, by agreeing contracts with pharmaceutical companies for large quantities and quick delivery of Covid-19 vaccines. By the third quarter of 2021, richer, well-vaccinated countries started to administer booster

vaccine doses, while the rate of initial vaccination in low-income countries was under 5%.¹⁰⁴

Governments have subordinated the ethical imperative of equitable vaccination to national and corporate self-interest, allowing unprecedented pharmaceutical profits in the absence of effective global coordination, and regulation of access.¹⁰⁵

The consequences of ‘vaccine nationalism’ have been a longer-lasting and more deadly pandemic, and increasingly divergent recoveries between the ‘have-jabbed’ economies and the ‘have-nots’.¹⁰⁶ As well as the stark health impacts of different rates of vaccination, there is a social and economic aftershock from the pandemic which persists for longer and is more severe in countries with low vaccination rates. In the absence of high vaccine coverage, governments are more likely to need to take other steps to limit the impact of Covid-19 and see consumer and market confidence take longer to recover. On the basis of low-end growth projections, countries such as Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo will have higher poverty headcount rates in 2030 compared to 2019.¹⁰⁷

Poverty and structural disadvantage

The experience of the pandemic shows that poverty does not strike randomly. Indeed, as extreme poverty is reduced, it tends to become increasingly concentrated among people who face multiple disadvantages. Geography is one factor. Poverty continues to be deeper and more widespread in rural areas, which are home to 80% of the world’s extremely poor people. One survey found that in 6 out of 12 African countries, the percentage of people below an asset poverty line was over 50 percentage points higher in the countryside than in cities.¹⁰⁸ Often, particular regions are especially marginalised. In India,

where regional inequalities have steadily increased since 1980, only 7% of Kerala's population live below the national poverty line, while poverty rates in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand are almost 40%.¹⁰⁹

The majority of developing countries have at least one region where poverty is likely to persist beyond 2030, the UN target date by which extreme poverty should be ended.¹¹⁰ Often, these regions are home to racial, ethnic, religious or linguistic groups who are disproportionately disadvantaged. For example, Hausa people, living mostly in the north of Nigeria, account for less than half of the population, but more than 70% of the country's poor.¹¹¹ In many cases, poverty reflects marginalisation of a particular group. Across Latin America, indigenous people are overrepresented among the poor. In Mexico, people who speak an indigenous language are almost four times more likely to live in poverty than the national average. In Bolivia, indigenous people are 44% of the population, but are 75% of those living in poverty.¹¹²

Often, this disadvantage has deep roots in a history of discrimination and violence. In many parts of Latin America, indigenous people were economically marginalised by the loss of access to land during the colonial period, and by formal and informal racial and linguistic divisions. Even today, indigenous people in the region are one-fifth less likely to own the house in which they live than the wider population.¹¹³ In Zimbabwe, poverty is deepest and most widespread in communal agricultural lands – in 2017, 75% of people in these areas were classified as poor. These areas are a legacy of 19th century land seizures by European settlers, through which the African population was pushed on to less productive areas. Typically, the communal areas are poorly served by transport links, have worse educational outcomes and are less well covered by basic infrastructure.¹¹⁴

Almost universally, women and girls are more likely to experience poverty than men. Globally, there are 122 women aged 25-34 for every 100 men of the same age group living in extreme poverty.¹¹⁵ Many of the structural disadvantages that shape women's poverty are grounded in laws and social attitudes. For example, in 39 countries, daughters and sons do not have equal inheritance rights, and only 13% of agricultural landholders are women.¹¹⁶ Giving women an equal material standing with men is right in itself, and has wider economic benefits. Action to tackle unequal pay, including through effective gender pay equality laws, audits and action, can not only lead to large increases in income – around 20% on average

in formal employment settings in higher income countries – but can also boost economic activity and government revenues.¹¹⁷

Often, discriminatory practices are reinforced by violence, or the threat of violence, with women in the very poorest countries substantially more likely to report intimate partner violence than women in wealthier countries.¹¹⁸ Despite the progress described in the previous chapter, in 2018 the World Economic Forum estimated that on current trends it would take another 108 years to achieve gender parity, across economic, political, educational and health measures.¹¹⁹ Some women and girls are much more likely to experience poverty than others, as gender intersects with other characteristics and vulnerabilities, including location, age, income, ethnicity, religion, disability and sexual orientation, to shape a person's life chances. The idea of intersectionality comes from feminist theory, but also describes well the complex drivers of poverty. Effective action to tackle poverty relies on a strong intersectional analysis, supported by disaggregated data and by a commitment to working alongside those who have least formal power (see box 7).¹²⁰

'The World Economic Forum estimated that on current trends it would take another 108 years to achieve gender parity'

Box 7. Tackling LGBT discrimination in Myanmar

In Myanmar, same-sex relations are illegal under penal code 377. Although this law is rarely enforced, it has been reported that it is used to intimidate gay people. It also influences perceptions in wider society, and contributes to the increased vulnerability to poverty and exploitation of LGBT+ people.¹²¹

In an effort to stop this discrimination, Christian Aid's partner Gender Equality Network organised a workshop on penal code 377, to explore how sexual minorities are affected by the law and better understand the changes they want to see.

Participants shared that the law is a threat to their daily life and makes them feel unsafe.

With the technical support from lawyers, around 30 people representing the LGBT+ community decided to advocate for an amendment to the code specifying that only non-consensual sexual acts should be illegal. This would not only prevent misuse of the law, but also advance a positive agenda by protecting people from sexual abuse. The workshop was one part of a longer advocacy process, in which lawmakers and opinion formers are being engaged.

Inequality and poverty

Ending extreme poverty is slower and more difficult in a world where money and power are shared unevenly: both within societies, and between richer and poorer parts of the world. It is possible to reduce poverty even where societies are highly unequal, and it is also the case that income inequality can rise as poverty is reduced. However, this does not mean – as some people have argued – that poverty and inequality are separate concerns.¹²² There are at least three reasons why poverty and inequality are closely connected. Firstly, economic inequality

increases the incidence of poverty at a given level of income. Secondly, high levels of inequality will normally slow the rate at which income poverty is reduced.¹²³ Historical comparisons between more equal countries, such as Ghana and Costa Rica, and less equal countries, such as Botswana and Brazil, suggest that inequality explains the different rates at which economic growth has translated into poverty reduction.¹²⁴ In some cases, such as Zambia between 2003 and 2010, extreme poverty has increased even as the economy expanded.¹²⁵

Thirdly, inequality carries social costs, as well as economic ones, which can create a vicious cycle in which poverty is reinforced. Inequality exists both vertically (between individuals and households) and horizontally (between groups). Group inequality especially breeds social instability, and there is strong international evidence that, from South Africa to Honduras, violent crime and perceptions of safety are closely correlated with income disparities and group inequalities.¹²⁶

Perhaps unsurprisingly, violent and unequal societies do a bad job of creating economic opportunities for people in poverty. In Central America, which is home to just 0.5% of the world's people, but accounts for 4.5% of the world's murders, the social costs of homicide are estimated at almost 0.7% of the region's GDP.¹²⁷ In 2006, per capita incomes in Colombia were estimated to be one-third lower than they should have been because of the economic impacts of violence in the preceding decade.¹²⁸

While national measures are needed to narrow inequality and tackle the social grievances that arise from it, action at the community level also has a critical role to play in challenging violence and its underlying causes. Supporting peace-building groups that promote rights, and the voice and agency of people affected by violence, can build trust and mutual respect, and create conditions in which communities are more likely to find common ground.

The tensions, resentments and dysfunction created by extreme inequality can create a fertile breeding ground for armed conflict. Conversely, there is evidence that in the long run high inequality is associated with conflict and incomplete democratic transitions.¹²⁹ While there is no direct causal line from inequality to war, inequalities often deepen the grievances of a particular social group, and create zero-sum contests for resources and power. There is evidence that ethnic, religious, and linguistic group-based inequalities, especially those in which one group of people consistently lose out to another dominant group, are most likely to spark conflict.¹³⁰ For example, in Syria rising unemployment, falling subsidies and preferential policies towards some religious and social groups combined with

growing repression and human rights violations to create the conditions in which civil war broke out in 2011.¹³¹

Environmental crisis and poverty

While Covid-19 has impoverished millions of people, and been a sharp jolt to the economic and social prospects of millions more, environmental destruction and damage represents an even bigger threat. People living in poverty, or who are vulnerable to poverty, are more likely to rely directly on the natural environment for their survival, as farmers, fisherfolk and pastoralists. Common resources, including waterways and forests, are often critical sources of food and nutrition, and energy. Yet increasingly, these resources are being severely degraded or lost completely. Since 1970, as the global economy has expanded fivefold and trade has grown tenfold, resource use has intensified: three-quarters of ice-free land and two-thirds of the oceans is now impacted by human use. One-third of all fish stocks are over-harvested, against 10% in 1970, and half of all agricultural expansion between 1980 and 2000 was at the expense of forests, and the communities that rely on them for their way of life, often in order to free up land for palm oil cultivation and beef farming.¹³²

This impact has been driven mainly by consumption among people who are relatively better off: while per capita consumption in high income countries is 60% higher than in Upper Middle-Income Countries, it is 13 times that in low-income countries.¹³³ It has been argued that in the second half of the 20th century, humankind entered the Anthropocene era, when demand for resources began to outstrip the Earth's holding capacity, leading to what many scientists consider to be the sixth great biological extinction since the start of life on Earth.¹³⁴

The climate crisis is the most extreme manifestation of this wider crisis, in which the Earth's atmosphere has been used as a sink for greenhouse gas emissions that are now causing rapidly escalating damage both to people and the world they inhabit. As with the degradation of land and waters, the poorest people are most exposed to the climate crisis, since they are more likely to be reliant on agriculture, live in areas that are exposed to the greatest storm and flood risks, and have the fewest financial buffers to withstand climate-related shocks and losses.

'The poorest people are most exposed to the climate crisis, since they are more likely to be reliant on agriculture, live in areas that are exposed to the greatest storm and flood risks, and have the fewest financial buffers'

Below: In the aftermath of Cyclone Fani in May 2019, a man walks to his shop in his totally destroyed village. This one was of the strongest storms recorded in the region, and the poorest state of Odisha was the hardest hit.



Between 1998 and 2017, direct economic losses from disasters around the world were almost \$3tn, with climate-related disasters accounting for 77% of the total, and claiming 1.3 million lives – more than double the death toll from the conflict in Syria.¹³⁵ The World Bank has estimated that more than 130 million people could be pushed by climate change into extreme poverty by 2030, with the poverty impacts increasing over time until net zero policies come into effect and climate change is stabilised.¹³⁶

While it is possible to adapt to some of the impacts of climate change, the poorest communities have limited resources to do so, and many climate impacts involve irreversible loss and damage. Christian Aid's work with smallholder farmers in Chikwawa district in Malawi illustrates the challenge: farmers are making the most of improved access to weather forecasting and climate-resilient agricultural methods. But the long-term sustainability of these efforts is threatened by increasingly erratic rainfall which continues to push people off the land and into alternative strategies for survival. Recent research shows that 8 of the 10 worst-affected countries for climate-related loss and damage are in Africa, and face a hit to GDP of more than 70% by 2100 under the current climate trajectory, and a 40% hit even if the world keeps to the UN target of limiting global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.¹³⁷

At present, wealthy countries' support for climate adaptation efforts in the poorest and most climate-vulnerable communities has been slow and grossly inadequate. At the Copenhagen climate summit in 2009, \$100bn was pledged annually by 2020 to help poorer countries mitigate and adapt to the effects of

climate change. The target was missed dramatically – by as much as 80%, if one counts only public climate financing that is given in grants. On some estimates, only \$5.9bn in adaptation support went to the 46 LDCs between 20014-18 – equivalent to roughly half a day’s healthcare spending in the US.¹³⁸

Action to compensate the poorest and most climate-vulnerable communities for irreversible loss and damage has been even less forthcoming, with the 2021 UN climate summit in Glasgow agreeing only to initiate a dialogue on the issue.¹³⁹ This is despite the fact that the climate crisis is overwhelmingly the result of current and historical consumption in rich countries: The wealthiest 10% of people in the world, most of them in high-income countries, consume 20 times more energy per person than the poorest 10% . Even the poorest one-fifth of people in Britain consume more than five times as much energy per capita as the bottom billion of India’s population.¹⁴⁰ Unless loss and damage from the climate crisis are addressed, its effects will continue to reflect and reinforce poverty, with the most vulnerable regions of the world, including southern Africa and low-lying small islands, likely to suffer the worst from loss of settled land and displacement and migration.¹⁴¹

Below: Janet Ben showing where her old home used to be before it was destroyed by flash floods in Chikwawa District, Malawi.



Resourcing development

The current impasse over funding for the response to the climate crisis is just one of a broader set of financial barriers that hold back people in poverty. Despite an increase over the last 20 years in state revenues in most low- and lower-middle income countries, many core government functions in the poorest countries continue to be heavily underfunded.

As a share of GDP, low-income countries generate revenues at about one-third of the level of OECD members.¹⁴² This leads to chronic underinvestment in essential services, which undermines broader poverty reduction efforts and can reinforce inequality between women and men (see box 8). For example, only two African countries – Rwanda and South Africa – have met the African Union target, adopted in 2001, of committing 15% of public spending to healthcare, leaving health systems in the region heavily exposed to the effects of the Covid pandemic.¹⁴³

Box 8. Essential services and poverty reduction

Comprehensive public services are critical to reducing poverty and inequality. As well as being human rights that are intrinsically valuable, education, healthcare, clean water and sanitation expand people's choices, boost productivity, and reduce ill health.¹⁴⁴ Inequalities between groups can also be reduced through consistent provision of quality public services to all. Ensuring the consistency of provision of public services remains challenging, even when states have sufficient funding. Practical considerations such as what language a service is provided in, or how physically

accessible it is, must be addressed to maximise the chances of reducing inequalities, especially in contexts where the poorest people live in remote settings, or belong to minority groups.

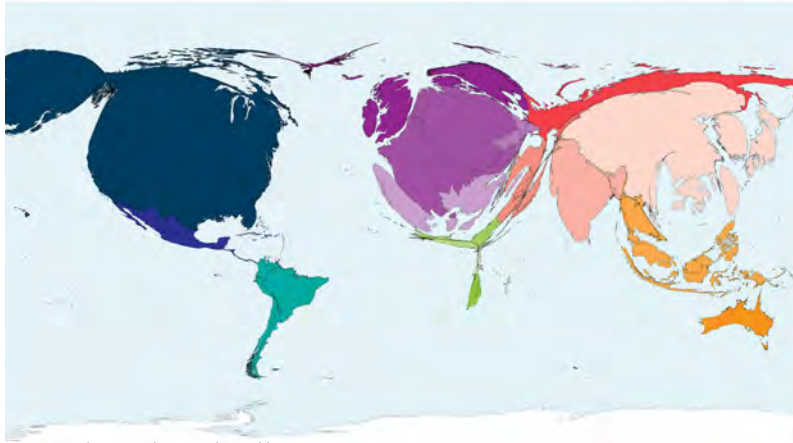
The question of recognising and addressing structural barriers to quality public services is deeply connected to the question of unpaid care and domestic work. When states reduce public service provision, women usually step in to bear the brunt of the care and subsidise the state through their own unpaid labour in the form of domestic and care work.¹⁴⁵

Meanwhile the tax burden in the poorest countries tends to fall disproportionately on the poor. In most countries, the combined effects of recent tax competition and the pursuit of 'efficiencies' in public services, such as privatisation, have reinforced economic and social inequalities.¹⁴⁶ Yet the poverty reduction case for redistribution through taxation and spending is clear.¹⁴⁷ For example, reductions in income inequality in Latin America since the early 2000s were achieved in part through a shift to more equitable tax policies, including a move towards more direct taxation (on incomes and property) and less indirect taxation on consumption.¹⁴⁸

Regressive taxation in poorer countries takes place in the global context of an economic system that enables wealthy individuals and major companies to avoid tax on a massive scale, and allows them to choose the low transparency jurisdiction in which they pay. Christian Aid's research suggests that developing countries forgo \$416bn a year in revenues as a result of finance flowing illicitly across borders.¹⁴⁹ The IMF has estimated that \$200bn a year is lost to low-income countries alone, a larger share of GDP than for advanced economies, and

four times the amount of official aid that they receive from donors.¹⁵⁰

Figure 6: Inequality



Based on 2018 data. Map by worldmapper.org

Territory size is proportional to the combined wealth of all citizens of that territory who were billionaires in 2018.

The scale at which extreme wealth has been accumulated in recent decades is reflected in the fact that a pandemic-era ‘solidarity tax’ of 99% on the world’s billionaires could yield sufficient revenue to provide Covid-19 vaccines for everyone and provide every unemployed person with a grant of £14,000 – a sum above the ‘average’ global income (see figure 6).¹⁵¹ Had national wealth taxes been implemented consistently by governments during the last two decades, they would have had the double advantage of making more resources available for essential services, while also reducing the incentives for companies and rich individuals to profit from a global race to the bottom on tax rates. Recent G20 efforts to put a floor under the rate of tax payable on corporate profits are a step in this direction, although the rate, details and loopholes suggest that the impact will be limited, particularly for lower-income countries.¹⁵²

The persistence of poverty amidst plenty, the increasing concentration of deprivation amongst groups of people who face interlocking structural obstacles to human flourishing, and the growing impact of environmental crises on poverty and inequality all indicate that the approaches taken to tackling poverty over the last 25 years – despite some successes – will not deliver the UN SDGs. Covid-19 should have jolted the world out of any complacency. Increasingly, demands are being made for new approaches to ending extreme poverty, not least by people most affected by it.

3. Rethinking development

'The world has enough for everyone's needs, but not everyone's greed'

Mahatma Gandhi

'The earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor'

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*

The fight against poverty is at a crossroads. The persistence of extreme poverty in a world of unprecedented wealth; the deep social, economic, and political fissures exposed and deepened by the Covid-19 pandemic; and the profound environmental crises that threaten the very existence of societies together point to the need for fundamental change in the practice and conceptual underpinning of development.

A rethink of development needs to start with a recognition that people experience poverty in multiple dimensions, and therefore poverty can only be tackled by taking an integrated approach that addresses both its underlying and direct causes. Power imbalances, which reflect and reinforce poverty, are foremost among these causes. People living in poverty are agents of change and must be treated as development actors in their own right: where there are active citizens, claiming their rights and working together for just and sustainable societies, states are more likely to be accountable and responsive, and markets are more likely to promote shared prosperity. The breaking of the Earth's environmental capacity points to the urgent need for an approach to development that is less centred on growth and acquisition, and more on wellbeing and flourishing. The idea of development itself needs to be interrogated. The history of efforts to tackle poverty shows that, rather than it being a linear progression from one 'under-developed' economic and social model to another, 'developed' model, it is more often been an ongoing struggle for just relationships in which there are setbacks as well as victories.

Rethinking people living in poverty

Many of the development failures described in the previous chapter have at their root a failure to put people at the centre of efforts to end poverty, and to uphold human dignity. Development actors have spent more time speaking *for* and

about people living in poverty, rather than listening and responding to them, as part of a shared endeavour to build the common good.¹⁵³ Both state and market-led approaches to development have often fallen into this trap, and in the worst instances stripped people of agency and trampled on their rights, from experiments in agricultural collectivisation to the 'shock therapy' of market liberalisation.

Rights violations in the name of development continue to affect many millions of people. The deforestation of the Amazon rainforest is a case in point. An area of rainforest seven times the size of Greater London was cleared in the year to July 2020, as part of an accelerating trend that has been actively backed by the Brazilian Government in a bid to promote mining and agriculture.¹⁵⁴ For the forest's 1 million indigenous people, deforestation threatens the permanent loss of vital goods and services, from food and building materials to medicines and clean water, and does incalculable damage to community wellbeing and culture. Because deforestation contributes to the emissions that cause climate change, it has a double impact on people in poverty.¹⁵⁵

In the northern Brazilian state of Para, Christian Aid's Forest Custodians project works with indigenous and mixed Afro-indigenous, or Quilombola, people to protect more than 35,000 square miles of rainforest and 28,000 residents from land grabbing and destruction. Communities are supported to monitor invasions of their land from illegal mining, logging and large infrastructure activities, and helped to secure land rights.

Below: Christian Aid works with, and through, partner organisations that are rooted in communities and understand the local context. Christian Aid partner ARUN, based in India, works to transition women involved in manual scavenging into dignified occupations.

'Both state and market-led approaches to development have... in the worst instances stripped people of agency and trampled on their rights'



Recognising the agency of people living in poverty and respecting their dignity is a good in itself. It can also be a practically effective way to strengthen communities' ability to protect their livelihoods and other interests, and to increase the accountability of the state and other powerful actors. Human rights lie at the heart of this relationship between effective states and active citizens, and rights advocates and defenders have a critical role in not only promoting rights and calling violators to account, but also in laying the foundations for poverty eradication (see box 9).

Box 9. Human rights and development

For many people the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, represents a landmark achievement in the struggle for justice and equality. But it was not until 1976 when the International Covenants on civil and political rights, and on economic, social and cultural rights came into force, that rights became prominent in thinking about international development.

Despite serious deficits in the attainment of human rights, rights frameworks provide a powerful basis for national policy and legislation to protect human dignity and provide for essential needs. The underlying principle of human rights – that they are universal, inalienable and indivisible – has been reflected in many national constitutions, and is an important spur to equity and redress, especially for people who face systematic discrimination. It has also helped to shape the SDGs, and is reflected in key principles for their delivery, including participation and the ambition to 'leave no one behind'.

Rights have been criticised by some people for being broad and aspirational, and impossible to prioritise. Yet human rights treaties are clear that states are required to 'respect, protect and to fulfil' rights, implying both a negative and positive agenda – rights must not be interfered with or curtailed, and people and groups must be protected from human rights abuses, while states must also take active steps to further their 'progressive realisation'.¹⁵⁶

Rights have also been attacked in some quarters as being a Western concept, and as privileging individual autonomy over collective goods. However, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights clearly situates rights within a framework of the common good, social harmony and human flourishing, recognising that people have rights and duties because they are social and live in relationship with each other.

The failure to engage with poverty as a lived experience, and to recognise people in poverty as active participants in their development, is reflected and reinforced in the use of narrowly economic measures of poverty. As well as being arbitrary, wealth and income measures are a weak proxy indicator of human wellbeing: to take one example, Gabon and Bosnia Herzegovina have similar levels of per capita GDP, but Gabon's child mortality rate, at over 4%, is more than seven times that of Bosnia.¹⁵⁷ This is not surprising. GDP measures the value of all the monetary transactions that happen within an economy over a given period. But in and of itself, it tells us nothing about who

gains and loses from that activity, and whether it translates into human wellbeing. GDP also tells us nothing about the environmental consequences of economic activity. Growth created as a result of low-carbon, renewable energy generation is treated in exactly the same way as growth from the construction of a coal-fired power station, for example.

GDP similarly fails to capture the benefits of activities that do not involve monetary transactions. Unpaid care within the home and community, without which societies would cease to function, is usually overlooked or marginalised in analyses of who contributes to, and benefits from, economic activity. Yet unpaid care and domestic work, the large majority of it done by women and girls, is estimated to be equivalent to between 10% and 40% of GDP in most countries.¹⁵⁸ The failure to take proper account of this work can create time poverty for women and girls, and unrecognised barriers to education and employment. One unintended effect of poorly designed female economic empowerment programmes can be that they leave women stretching their time even more thinly by adding paid work to existing unpaid labour.¹⁵⁹

A growing recognition of the limitations of economic measures of poverty has helped to shape the UN's Human Development Index, which combines income, life expectancy, and education to provide a wider lens on what contributes to wellbeing.¹⁶⁰ It has also influenced a growing body of work on multi-dimensional poverty. In practice, poverty is characterised by a combination of direct lacks, such as insufficient and insecure income and limited access to essential services; by relational dynamics, such as marginalisation and mistreatment; and by core experiences, such as disempowerment, struggle and resistance.¹⁶¹ These dimensions are connected and often experienced simultaneously, even if they vary depending on a person's context. Although people living in extreme income poverty often also experience the deepest and most intractable poverty based on multi-dimensional measures, it is also the case that many people above income lines continue to be subjected to many of the core experiences of poverty.

In talking with people in Anchau community in Nigeria's Kaduna state, poverty was described to Christian Aid staff as lack of money, food, and a job. But people also talked about a lack of peace of mind, and the limits placed on their ability to cope with the unexpected. 'It means that you cannot deal with a problem when it arises,' said one respondent.

Poverty was also associated in people's minds with particular stages of life, with gender and with difficulty in finding for

oneself: disability, being orphaned, or widowed, were cited as major reasons for people experiencing poverty, as was old age.

Below: Hauwa Joshua is a single mother in Rimau, Kaduna State in Nigeria. Due to the pandemic, she had no source of income or means to provide for her household of eight people.



Respondents contrasted poverty with wealth. The jobs done by people living in poverty – hard labour, street trading – were seen as different from those done by the economically well-off. Eradicating poverty was also seen as entailing more than an end to individual hardship. When asked to describe what their community would look like without poverty, people talked about peace, low crime, good schools, fair employers and young people with prospects – a reminder that people experience poverty as a collective lack as well as a personal one.

Poverty is often experienced by people as a member of a particular social group, or as someone living in a neglected geographical area (or both), so it can be compounded by marginalisation (see box 8). The psychological violence of poverty, and denigration and destruction of the cultures of people in poverty, are frequently ignored or underestimated. Yet people in poverty are widely stigmatised, belittled or ignored as having little to contribute to society.¹⁶² These attitudes risk being internalised, with people who are poor sometimes coming to devalue or feel ashamed of their language or culture – often in invidious contrast to supposedly superior European or metropolitan culture and practice. This ‘poverty of being’ can reinforce the cycle of poverty and injustice. For example, the erosion and devaluing of traditional environmental knowledge has often contributed to the loss and degradation of fragile ecosystems, and has reduced the social and economic benefits that they create for communities.¹⁶³

Speaking a language associated with being poor, from the countryside or from an ethnic group that experiences discrimination, can create practical social and economic barriers, as well as feelings of humiliation. As one Bolivian respondent to a recent poverty survey described it: 'When people come from the countryside, they can't speak Spanish, they speak Aymara... they're not received.'¹⁶⁴

Rethinking power and poverty

Unequal power lies at the root of poverty. At a basic level, poverty disempowers because people who are poor have fewer choices, and face bigger risks when making choices, partly because they have less ability to withstand economic shocks. But poverty is also a manifestation of people's exclusion from many of the spaces that others are able to shape, and in which they take decisions.

Power can be used to good as well as bad ends and is often a creative force. Yet without accountability it is easily corrupted. From Christian Aid's perspective, there is a distinction between 'power with' and 'power over', and development actors need to ensure that power is used accountably, while also working to shift more of it to people who are currently disenfranchised.¹⁶⁵

Below: In September 2021, Kenyan citizens came together to demand that the German Government take steps towards a waiver on intellectual property on Covid-19 vaccines.



To say that poverty is political is to recognise that it is the result of choices, by design or default, that lead some people to be sidelined, exploited or drowned out by others with more wealth, opportunity and voice. Societies can create elaborate systems and stories to justify these inequalities and limit change. Inequalities based on race, ethnicity colour, caste and gender are all buttressed by stories that seek to justify that abuse of power.

The relationship between race, ethnicity, colour, caste and poverty is varied and complex, and also under-researched. In many societies, poverty is deepest among members of minority racial and ethnic groups. Often, ethnic and racial inequalities have linguistic, religious and geographical dimensions, which together shape how people experience poverty. Caste in South Asia is a case in point. Dalits, who face continued discrimination despite gaining many important legal protections in the decades since Indian independence, remain poorer, less educated and less healthy than members of other castes. Indeed, there is evidence that as some caste inequalities have narrowed, violent hate crimes against Dalits have risen.¹⁶⁶ Caste-based discrimination in employment and job segregation persist, with many Dalits trapped in bonded labour, hereditary occupations and new caste-based employment categories that are emerging.¹⁶⁷

There is a growing recognition that the development sector has often actively or tacitly ignored the many ways in which poverty and power are shaped by race, ethnicity and colour, especially at the global level. International development actors, such as official donors and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are dominated by white Europeans and North Americans and mostly located in the global North, yet extreme poverty mainly affects black and brown people living in the global South.

History, including the continued legacies of colonialism and the persistence of racial inequality, influence millions of people's experience of poverty, their position and power, and their potential pathways out of poverty. Technical 'fixes' to poverty can only go so far in tackling the problem, and in many contexts meaningful development requires a recognition of, and response to, personal and collective trauma, building of cultural self-esteem, active steps to shift political power, and action to redress structural injustices. This needs to be done in ways that recognise that identities are complex and are often understood differently depending on the context. Where poverty is shaped by racial and ethnic inequalities, responses need to engage deeply with the reality of injustice and inequality, without inadvertently reinforcing or fixing divisions, which can weaken those same efforts.

The power imbalances that underpin poverty exist at international, national and local levels, with the global economy often replicating and reinforcing deep inequalities. Patterns of trade and investment for the very poorest countries still widely reflect colonial models of extraction, with raw materials exported to wealthy countries where value is added through

'The power imbalances that underpin poverty exist at the international, as well as the national and local levels, with the global economy often replicating and reinforcing deep inequalities'

processing and manufacturing.¹⁶⁸ Meanwhile, trade policies continue to be shaped by the interests of the economically dominant countries of Europe, North America, and East Asia, with the international financial institutions – largely controlled and financed by those same countries – using loan conditions, technical advice and other levers to influence markets in poor countries.¹⁶⁹

Official aid operates within this economic system and is also often used to serve rich countries' geopolitical and economic interests.¹⁷⁰ Increasingly, there are calls to rethink aid in the wider context of funding flows, and to increase donor transparency and relocate power in ways that make aid responsive and accountable to people in poverty. Calls to 'decolonise' aid are part of this movement, driven by critiques of the ways in which current thinking and practice in development institutions is shaped by colonial legacies and racial inequality.

For international NGOs like Christian Aid, as well as for official donors, there are growing challenges to the ways in which power is exercised through aid budgets: both in governance and accountability structures, and in deep-seated donor assumptions about which forms of knowledge and experience are most valuable. Moves to shift power and resources in the humanitarian sector, through localisation, is one part of a wider agenda for change (see box 10) and has highlighted both the potential for progress, and the limitations of current efforts.

Christian Aid, like some other international NGOs, is evolving its partnerships with national and local civil society organisations to move decision making and resources closer to people living in poverty. ACT Ubumbano, a collaboration between Southern African civil society organisations and European members of the ACT Alliance of church-based development and humanitarian actors, is one such example. It emerged from a review of Christian Aid's work in South Africa, which led to a country office being superseded by a membership organisation supporting joint civil society initiatives on social, economic, gender and environmental justice. It has an advisory board of eight partners from Southern Africa and three from Europe, supported by a small secretariat in the South African-based Church Land Programme. The partnership principles help to ensure that the agenda is driven by Southern African members. An annual meeting brings together member organisations and activists from across the region to reflect and learn from each other's work, and these are translated into programmes, such as a recently created 'community voice' app, which provides an online platform to share stories and experiences.

Box 10. Shifting power and humanitarian localisation

Through the 'localisation' agenda, humanitarian organisations have committed to shift more decision making and resources to national and local organisations in the global South. At present, only 14% of humanitarian funding goes directly to local aid organisations, despite their often being first to respond, and last to step back during a humanitarian crisis.¹⁷¹ Sector-wide pledges made through the Grand Bargain, an initiative launched at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, and programmes such as Accelerating Localisation Through Partnerships, in which Christian Aid and other organisations sought to rebalance local and international responses, are part of a growing effort to reform humanitarian aid.

Localisation has the potential to achieve faster humanitarian responses that are more accountable to communities affected by crises. It can also play a key role in spurring the wider changes in power relations that support longer term work to increase resilience and end poverty. Yet in practice, most humanitarian actors have been extremely slow to deliver on their promises. The Grand Bargain pledged that 25% of funding would go to local and national responders by 2020. Some important changes were made in areas such as cash-based assistance, which places more power in the hands of disaster-affected people, and a growing number

of organisations – including Christian Aid – provided at least 25% of their funding to national and local actors. Yet most signatories fell well short of their targets.¹⁷²

The Covid pandemic should have been an opportunity to accelerate localisation, as most international travel stopped and donors and international NGOs operated remotely. Yet in practice, progress was slower and less substantial than it should have been, and in some cases stalled.¹⁷³

The slow and uneven pace of localisation, and the ways in which it risks perpetuating neo-colonial categories of 'local' in the South and 'global' in the North, has led to calls for more fundamental change.¹⁷⁴ Christian Aid is actively working with partners and international NGOs ensure that localisation is not just about shifting power and resources to national and local civil society organisations, but is a step towards putting power and resources in the hands of communities affected by crisis. In several countries, Christian Aid has worked with other ACT Alliance members and local partners on survivor and community-led response' approaches, which aim to empower people affected by crisis to play a leadership role in their own response and recovery.

Rethinking progress

Both the gains and the setbacks and barriers described in this report underscore the need to rethink the idea of development as a linear progression from poverty to prosperity. The origins of development theory can be traced back to European Enlightenment ideas about the rationality and perfectibility of human beings.¹⁷⁵ Industrialisation and urbanisation in 19th century Europe created enormous pressure for social and political reform, and led to growing movements for greater freedom, equality and justice.¹⁷⁶ This first wave of development was connected to a simultaneous expansion of European empires across Africa, Asia and the Americas through colonisation, in which territory, natural resources, and people were subjugated and controlled.¹⁷⁷

Industrialisation and colonial expansion created a need for a new account not only of how and why change happened through time, but also of why economic and social conditions had diverged between places and peoples. Economically and technologically advanced societies in Europe and North America became increasingly described as 'developed', with the implication that other 'less developed' societies were involved in an effort to catch up. As European economic and cultural dominance grew, a mythology of power developed, with non-European societies widely seen to have varying capacities to successfully develop themselves both economically and culturally – an idea that has been widely used to justify systematic violence and exploitation, from the forced destruction of indigenous cultures, to the segregation of apartheid South Africa.

Reconstruction after the Second World War and political independence across much of Africa and Asia led to a second wave of development, in which poverty reduction became an increasing focus, culminating in UN goals to end poverty, first adopted in 2000. Yet while this contributed to many of the positive changes described earlier in this report, underlying assumptions about development as an inexorable march towards a Western-style society and economy continued to have widespread currency.¹⁷⁸

Today, these assumptions about the economic and political end state of development are looking increasingly threadbare. Models based on accumulation and acquisition have been criticised for failing to translate into gains in human wellbeing, especially once people's more immediate needs are met. Mainstream economic theory itself recognises that there are diminishing returns to wealth and income – an additional \$5 a day for a person living in poverty can be transformative. For a person earning \$50,000 a year, it will be barely noticed. This points to the need for redistribution as a key element of poverty eradication.

A focus on having more, as opposed to being more, has also led to the undervaluing of the social aspects of development. Human beings live in relationship to each other, and values such as creativity, productivity, exchange and generosity give texture and meaning to people's lives, and create the conditions in which societies are able to articulate and pursue what it is that is valued collectively. Conversely inequalities, by creating hunger, fear and marginalisation, exclude many people from being able to participate in the common good and so, by definition, undermine it.¹⁷⁹

Box 11. Can we sustain economic growth?

The environmental crisis being created by a global economic model based on endless growth has led to a growing debate about the limits to growth, and the need for alternative development frameworks. The idea of 'degrowth' has become a more prominent public policy idea, with its proponents arguing that the world cannot afford limitless economic expansion because it necessitates planet-destroying carbon emissions, and that growth should be abandoned as public policy objective.¹⁸⁰

Degrowth and an end to extreme income poverty are compatible in principle, if there was a radical global redistribution of wealth and opportunity: average global per capita income stands at \$27 per person per day, well above any income poverty threshold. Critics of degrowth question the political

feasibility of governments in high-income countries selling a fall in living standards to their electorates.¹⁸¹ The alternative would be a 'decoupling' of economic growth from carbon emissions.

Yet even if environmental constraints make a case for degrowth, it begs the question of how to end extreme income poverty in the absence of economic growth.¹⁸²

While there is plentiful evidence that such a pattern is possible – for example, through ending reliance on coal power and the general shift to more service-oriented economies – the near-total separation required to meet ambitious climate targets and ensure global prosperity entails more detailed, far-sighted and perhaps radical policies than yet implemented.

The ways in which human consumption is exceeding the planet's hard environmental constraints perhaps poses the most fundamental challenge to growth-based models of development, with some advocates calling for degrowth in the rich world (see box 11).¹⁸³ While growth in incomes is an urgent priority for millions of people living in poverty – most of them living in lower income countries – it is environmentally unsustainable for this to be driven by carbon-intensive growth in rich countries. Decoupling income growth for poorer countries from the continual economic expansion of richer countries poses a major challenge in a globalised world, yet urgent action to decarbonise economies is needed, whatever economic model is followed.

Our collective failure to live within our environmental limits reflects not only a broken economy, but also a world of unequal power and social status. The climate crisis exemplifies this injustice, with untrammelled consumption and exploitation of the natural world by people in the richest countries threatening to jeopardise the development prospects of the poorest countries, and the lives of future generations. More fundamentally, it reflects a sense of separation from the natural world of which people are a part. Dominant approaches to development have played a key role in fostering this sense of separateness, by treating the Earth and everything in it as an economic resource, or as a sink, without proper consideration of its intrinsic value as a common home (see box 12).¹⁸⁴

'The ways in which human consumption is exceeding the planet's hard environmental constraints perhaps poses the most fundamental challenge to growth-based models of development'

Box 12. A Christian view of development

Ideas of human flourishing can draw on many different religious and philosophical sources. Christian Aid bases its approach on a Christian understanding of humanity, while believing that it is relevant to any person who is concerned about dominant growth-oriented models of development. Most fundamentally, a Christian vision of development is rooted in the belief that people are made in the image and likeness of God and have an innate dignity, and are called to live in full relationship with God, the whole created order and other people. 'Full relationship' means that each person is able to flourish as a creative, responsible, productive being, both giving and receiving as part of a wider society.¹⁸⁵



Below: Christian Aid supporters in the Czech Republic, supporting the Jubilee 2000 Drop the Debt campaign.

Poverty and extreme inequality are the inverse of a world of full relationship and are dehumanising both for people who are poor, and those who are not. The flawed structures that generate and reinforce poverty reflect broken relationships that can be mended. Action to end poverty therefore cannot be separated from how people acquire wealth, and how people who are not poor and those who are poor relate to each other.¹⁸⁶

A lot of what makes for human flourishing is not in the gift of government or simply about public policy. The communal and personal, as well as the political space, are key to people living well, and the state, market, and civil society all have a critical role in building a more just world.

The biblical idea of Jubilee offers a vision of a sustainable world in which in the seventh Sabbath year – or every 50 years – there is an economic, cultural, environmental and communal pause, when the land and people rest, debts are cancelled and all those who are in slavery are set free to return to their communities. The Jubilee laws sought to ensure that people live in ways that reflect good relationships.¹⁸⁷

In practice, ideas of development have always been contested.¹⁸⁸ Rather than development being a linear progression, it is often experienced as a struggle for justice that has to be constantly renewed, as people's experience of both material and immaterial poverty changes. The word *sankofa* in the Twi language of the Akan people of Ghana means 'go back and get it', which encourages people to return to the past to revisit forgotten truths.¹⁸⁹ *Sankofa* symbolises a quest for knowledge that is grounded in critical examination and patient investigation of the past, in order to walk with integrity into a future in which people can live with dignity. In reimagining development, the underlying values used to explore those paths will be crucial to arriving at a fuller vision of human flourishing.

4. Paths to human flourishing

'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair'

Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*

'Imagination is a danger, thus every totalitarian regime is frightened of the artist. It is the vocation of the prophet to keep alive the ministry of imagination, to keep on conjuring and proposing alternative futures to the single one the king wants to urge as the only thinkable one'

Walter Brueggemann

Many millions of people have never had it so good. Our world has more measurable wealth than ever, on a scale that previous generations could have scarcely conceived. Yet for a large proportion of the human family, poverty defines daily life. Some are born into a state of chronic want and remain trapped there, while others fall into poverty through the loss of income, family or government support; or through the inability to make positive changes themselves. The brittleness of economic systems has been exposed by the Covid-19 pandemic and is being revealed more slowly, but just as surely, by the effects of climate change. Technology helps the contemporary world to harness seemingly infinite data and analysis, yet many people doubt apparently objective facts or their messengers. In a plural world, there is an ongoing struggle to find effective ways of having shared conversations about how to respond to collective problems.

The English novelist Charles Dickens wrote *A Tale of Two Cities* 150 years ago, setting his text in the midst of the events leading up to the French Revolution. Looking back, he discerned a heady time when competing forces led to outcomes which benefited some, but set back the lives of others. Looking back over Christian Aid's first 75 years, there is a similarly conflicted picture. From one end of the telescope, remarkable social and economic gains mean so many more people born today have a good chance of living into old age and meeting their material needs. But viewed from the other end of the telescope, these gains have been secured in ways that bypass hundreds of

millions of people living in extreme income poverty and, in many cases, actively reinforce their exclusion.

The world remains a very long way from a vision in which all people can flourish in ways that are just and sustainable. If poverty is a collective failure, it requires a collective solution: the world's abundance can sustain everyone, and a world in which people recognise and uphold each other's rights will be a happier and more stable home.

The experience of the past 75 years provides grounds for hope that poverty can be overcome. The resources and ingenuity needed to end poverty exist, but only if they are allied to a common commitment to a more just and equal world.

From developing others to developing ourselves

The history of development is littered with recommendations and action plans that are ignored, and promises that are broken. The SDGs that were adopted in 2015 are already heavily off track, and without a concerted course correction they are likely to become an even more distant prospect.¹⁹⁰ Such goals can be important: they provide ambition, a common framework and reference point for political accountability, and help to identify the best way of allocating finite resources.

Civil society organisations, businesses and governments must use their power to bend collective efforts further and faster to eradicate poverty. Notwithstanding the unequal and inadequate scale of response to Covid-19, the pandemic has also demonstrated human resourcefulness and sacrifice, and shown what is possible when normal conditions are set aside. The same urgency and scale of effort is now needed to tackle poverty in a climate-constrained world.

Action needs to be underpinned by values. International development needs to move beyond the polarity of 'us' and 'them' – the divide between people with enough, and people who lack the conditions for a dignified life – which easily leads to people in poverty being the object of actions decided by remote and unaccountable actors. At root, 'development' should be an expression of care for others whose fate is bound up in one's own. Because people are inescapably interdependent, full human flourishing for one person – regardless of their status, power, resources and freedom – is not possible in a world where other people are systematically denied the opportunity to flourish. More than that, acts of solidarity and mutual aid contribute to the flourishing of both the giver and the recipient. The mark of a just world is that

'The world's abundance can sustain everyone, and a world in which people recognise and uphold each other's rights will be a happier and more stable home'

every person is able both to give and receive in a spirit of common concern.

Paths to human flourishing

Old paths	New paths
Development as having more.	Development as being more.
Poverty as an economic condition.	Poverty as multi-dimensional.
Development defined and led by those in power, and done to people in poverty.	Development defined and driven by people with lived experience of poverty and who are directly impacted by the outcomes.
Development as a linear progression from a state of underdevelopment to the social and economic conditions of rich countries.	Development as paths to human flourishing that constantly evolve and vary depending on context.
Development that assumes limitless growth and a continuous supply of natural resources to fuel production and trade.	Development that is based just and sustainable sharing of the Earth's resources.
Knowledge that is controlled by power holders and disregards or is ignorant of local knowledge.	Knowledges of historically dispossessed people create new visions of mutual development and restoration.
A financial and economic system that concentrates wealth and exploits people in poverty.	A financial and economic system that redistributes wealth and opportunity, restores and repairs relationships, and recognises the historic and current responsibility of wealthy countries for the climate crisis.
Current thinking and practice in development institutions is shaped by colonial legacies and racial inequality.	A recognition and response to personal and collective trauma, building of cultural self-esteem, along with agency, dignity and flourishing that is repairing and restoring.

Dignity

Many religious and philosophical traditions recognise the intrinsic worth of each person, and the role that their voice and agency plays in being fully human. From this insight flows an imperative to respond to unmet need in a way that strengthens that voice and agency, instead of diminishing it.

The development sector can behave as if overcoming poverty only means eradicating extreme income poverty. In reality, just as poverty is multidimensional, so is a flourishing life; it entails enjoying human rights as well as meeting basic material needs; it is also about the security of one's home and family against the dangers of conflict or climate change. It means having a voice that can be heard by government officials, being able to exchange goods and labour fairly in the market, and not being discriminated against on the basis of one's gender, religion, ethnicity, disability, sexuality or age. Where people struggle to articulate their own needs and rights, it is essential that people acting in support of them exercise power sensitively, in ways that uphold their dignity and strengthen their ability to be heard.

Below: This couple are members of the Dalit community in Akkanapuram village, Virudhunagar district, India. They are casual farm labourers, but work is not guaranteed. They want to work on a collective farm to develop their own business and have a regular income.



In measuring progress against poverty, it is critical to know who and what is being counted, and who and what is being left out. The underlying reasons for people's exclusion need to be understood. In many cases, a common group identity – such as gender or ethnicity – makes it more difficult for people to claim their rights, get access to public services or earn a living. However it is defined, poverty is increasingly concentrated among people facing multiple deprivations; the responses to poverty need to understand and address these different dimensions.

Equality

With the increased concentration of extreme poverty among people who face structural discrimination, development efforts need to start from a recognition of the politics of poverty. There is much to learn from how progress against poverty has come about. For example, expanded educational opportunities for girls happened as much because of changes in the values and behaviour of families and communities, as it did through the funding and provision of school places, with the two changes reinforcing each other. Increased equality requires the right policies and funding choices, but it also demands a deeper recognition of people's rights and the importance of their ability to claim those rights.

Some resources are finite, such as the Earth's atmosphere, while there are some goods to which the stock can be added. An individual's rights are enhanced if they live in a society where other people can also freely exercise their rights. Some barriers to human flourishing are easier and cheaper to tackle

than others. For example, many discrimination laws can be removed for very little economic pain and potentially a lot of gain as societies change and economies grow.

Yet a deeper equality between individuals and groups often involves difficult choices. Two countries cannot hold the same land; the same tax cannot be paid in full in more than one jurisdiction; a government will inevitably choose to spend more in one area than another. Those working to end poverty must work out how they can amplify the agency and voice of people in poverty, but also do so in ways that create as much common ground as possible, recognising that power is least likely to be abused where it is shared and flows between people.

Below: Sadia Isako at Adi huka Manyatta addressing the members of Usafi women group in Marsabit county, northern Kenya. Sadia is not only a businesswoman, buying and selling livestock, but is also a volunteer helping women to voice their issues and be part of public participation forums.



Justice

A lasting end to poverty depends on the right ordering of relationships, which is another way of describing the nature of justice. Violence and the abuse of power is the antithesis of justice, destroying the opportunity to live in dignity and equality. Sustainable resolutions of conflict hinge on a just peace that is accepted across communities, and upheld by institutions that are seen to treat people equally. External actors can play a positive role in promoting justice and peace, where they are seen not to have a direct stake in a conflict. These roles may be particularly suited to some faith-based organisations who are able to work readily with faith leaders and faith communities.

Yet development actors also need to recognise that however neutral they aspire to be, they are often seen by people in poverty as advancing a particular agenda, as powerful

'Development actors also need to recognise that however neutral they aspire to be, they are often seen as advancing a particular agenda, as powerful organisations built on the resources of people in rich countries'

organisations built on the resources of people in rich countries. It is also the case that the intention to do good is not a shield against the abuse of power. Organisations that work to end poverty can reduce the risk of misusing their power by reducing the physical and cultural distance from people living in poverty, and taking decisions in ways that enable communities to hold them accountable.

A just approach to development needs to recognise that contemporary poverty is shaped by historic injustices, often at the hands of people and institutions in wealthier countries. Reparative justice is about more than financial reparation, and there are good reasons for giving aid that are unrelated to historic wrongdoing. However, there is a powerful moral and political argument in favour of rich countries recognising their contribution to the state of extreme poverty today. Most obviously, this is seen in the growing claims by the poorest countries for compensation for climate-related destruction of the natural environment, and the lives and livelihoods it sustains.

The pursuit of justice needs to be shaped by what is really seen as valuable, rather than simply by what can be priced. For example, this means valuing care, whether or not it is ascribed an economic value in the market, and understanding the value of culture and forms of knowledge which have been sidelined. Often, it is only by active listening to people living in poverty, and especially people within communities who are quietest, that these dimensions of human flourishing can be properly understood.

Below: Archdeacon Rosemarie Mallett speaking at Christian Aid's The Time is Now climate justice event at Glasgow Cathedral, in November 2021.



Love

Equality and justice are inextricably tied to human flourishing. But unless they are anchored in a commitment to the care and nurture of every person, they can degenerate into a crude exercise of power. History is heavily populated with examples of people being treated as a means to an end, in the name of abstracted justice or equality. In the Christian tradition, the command to love is a reminder that in every encounter with one another, people stand on sacred ground.

In contemporary societies, love is often relegated to the private and personal sphere, and is rarely articulated in the technocratic or political settings where 'development' is usually framed. Yet human flourishing relies on a realistic and full account of what it is to be human: without values of love, mutuality and solidarity, people risk being drawn into ever tighter circles of interest. And in abandoning the public square to organising principles of choice and competition, there is a risk not only that people who for different reasons struggle to compete and choose are abandoned, but also a risk that a sense of common humanity is eroded.

By contrast, relationships grounded in love, mutuality and solidarity build connection and common ground, and multiply rather than simply add to human flourishing. Collaboration can generate creative forms of power that liberate people, and replace dependency with interdependency, and subjugation with dignity.

In a world that continues to be scarred by poverty, the history of people working together to overcome it should give cause for hope and inspire new paths to human flourishing.

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External:

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