

National News

12 million poor - new report

Junior Finance minister says the government, together with development partners, is developing targeted interventions to address regional variations in poverty.

BY TONNY ABET

At least 12 million Ugandans are struggling with multiple forms of poverty and deprivation, significantly higher than the 7.3 million announced earlier by the government based solely on income levels.

This revelation is contained in the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) report released yesterday by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (Ubos) in Kampala. The report, based on 2024 census data, reveals sharp variations in MPI across sub-regions and between urban and rural areas.

Mr Stephen Baryahirwa, Ubos' head of the department of social surveys and census, explained that the MPI measures multiple deprivations people face in education, health, living standards, and employment.

Unlike the income poverty index, which only measures financial resources, the MPI directly reflects the performance of the government in delivering essential services. According to researchers, people who fall under the multidimensional poverty line often experience shame, powerlessness, and isolation.

The report shows Karamoja has the highest level of deprivation, with an MPI of 0.57, meaning 57 percent of its residents face multiple deprivations. This is more than twice the national MPI of 0.27, or 27 percent of Ugandans experiencing multiple deprivations.

West Nile follows at 39 percent, Sebei at 34 percent, and Acholi at 32 percent. Kampala (8 percent) and Buganda (18 percent) recorded the lowest levels of multidimensional poverty.

The report also highlights significant rural-urban disparities, with rural areas recording an MPI of 32 percent compared to 19 percent in urban areas. This gap is attributed to higher income levels, better roads, and improved housing facilities in urban centres.

Mr Baryahirwa elaborated on the relevance and methodology of the MPI. "We have been computing poverty numbers coming from expenditures and consumption, which we normally call income poverty."

"But this one is more robust as it looks at different deprivations from the different dimensions of life. This looks at different deprivations in health, education, living standards, and basic services, among others. The MPI doesn't replace the income poverty that we have been producing, but it complements that index," he explained.

Mr Baryahirwa added details on the indicators used: "In education, we assessed years of schooling and then school attendance. In health, we assessed whether there was death within the household in the past 12 months, and we also used average health insurance coverage."

"We also assessed access to clean water, access to clean toilets, sources of lighting, cooking fuel and technology, then living standards, overcrowding, housing ownership and how people use financial services," he added.



State minister for Planning Amos Lugolobi signs the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) report at Statistics House in Kampala City yesterday. The MPI captures simultaneous deprivations experienced by individuals such as health, education, living standards, basic services, among others. PHOTO/BRAHIM KAVUMA

no household member had completed primary school. UBOS would take that household as deprived.

"Everybody in that household would be classified as facing deprivation. The other dimension was basic services where if the household doesn't have access to clean drinking water, they would be deprived or if they have to move longer distance to access the water, they would also be considered deprived," Mr Baryahirwa added.

Mr Elenia Muhondogwa, a statistician at Ubos, presented the key findings. Nationally, the incidence of multidimensional poverty stands at 53 percent, while the intensity is 51 percent.

"So, the product of both, which is incidence and intensity, gives us a multidimensional poverty index of 0.27. This means between 0 to 100 percent, Uganda is at the 27th mark," he explained.

"MPI is higher in rural areas at about 32 in every 100 persons, compared to urban areas at 19 in every 100 people. We see that of those who are multidimensionally poor and deprived in health insurance, the highest is in rural areas, 61 in every 100 persons, compared to 39 in every 100 people in urban areas," Mr Muhondogwa added.

Deprivation in access to cleaner cooking fuel and technology was also higher in rural areas (60 percent) compared to urban areas (38 percent). Urban areas performed better across most indicators, including access to improved toilet facilities (32 percent deprivation in urban versus 53 percent in rural). The only exception was unemployment, where rural areas recorded a slightly lower deprivation rate of 4.2 percent compared to 4.5 percent in urban areas.

However, Mr Amos Lugolobi, the State minister in-charge of Planning at the Finance ministry, urged statisticians to revise the definition of unemployment, saying the numbers he observes in communities are higher than those reported.

Mr Baryahirwa clarified the methodology: "In the unemployment indicator, to be categorised as deprived, at least one member of the household must be unemployed, not in employment, but looking for work and available for work in the past 7 days." Some people have looked for jobs, and they have given up after failing many times to secure one.

MPI by region

AREAS	MPI
Buganda	18%
Acholi	32%
Lango	26%
Karamoja	57%
Busoga	26%
Teso	24%
Ankole	26%
Bunyoro	30%
Kigezi	29%
Rwenzori	32%
West Nile	39%
Bukedi	31%
Bugisu	30%
Sebei	34%
Kampala	8%
Madi	29%
Tooro	31%

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Karamoja and West Nile remain the most affected sub-regions. The report identifies the highest deprivations in access to better/cleaner cooking fuel and technology, health insurance, better housing facilities, improved toilet facilities, and asset ownership.

Other notable deprivations include low completion of primary education and overcrowding, especially in Karamoja. Local leaders and researchers attribute Karamoja's persistent challenges to years of insecurity, conflicts, persistent drought, and erratic rainfall.

In West Nile, a high refugee population continues to strain limited social services and exacerbate environmental degradation. The sub-region also faces limited access to electricity and relies heavily on subsistence farming and low-return colonial-era cash crops such as tobacco, unlike the more prosperous coffee-growing areas like Buganda.

While launching the report, Mr Lugolobi said the government

"Over the years, the government of Uganda has invested heavily in programmes geared towards ending household poverty. The intention: moving every Ugandan into the money economy. Income poverty levels have progressively reduced from 56 percent in 1992/1993 to 16.1 percent (around 7.3 million) in 2023/2024," he said.

Mr Lugolobi attributed the decline in income poverty to strategic interventions by the government and development partners. "By May 2024, 23.5 percent of the households in the subsistence economy had already benefitted from the Parish Development Model (PDM) funding. How they utilised the fund is a question for another day."

"With the introduction of PDM, it is envisaged that we shall further bring down the poverty rates by strengthening the household and economy base. Despite the reduction of income poverty levels over the years, we remain with a challenge given the multidimensional nature and prevalence," he added.

The minister noted that the government, together with development partners, is developing targeted interventions to address regional variations in poverty. "In the national development plan, we have a programme of regional development, and this information will be very essential for that programme. For Karamoja, we have already formulated, and recently we discussed in Cabinet the new Karamoja development plan, which will address most of the issues," he said.

Mr Geoffrey Ekanya, MP for Tororo North, attributed higher deprivations in rural areas and certain sub-regions to climate change and related disasters. He criticised the lack of intentional, targeted interventions.

"Karamoja has always been at that level. You come to Bukedi and West Nile, the trend has always been like that. We need to ensure policy makers use the statistics to design interventions and fund the priority areas," he said.

MP Ekanva added: "In the last four

years in the same position. The Constitution provides that we need to be having targeted interventions to address these poverty challenges."

Ms Faith Nakut, Woman MP for Haplo District in Karamoja and member of the Parliamentary Forum on Finance and Planning, echoed the call for better use of data in targeting interventions and ensuring results in every programme.

"For many years, the ruling National Resistance Movement party-led government has been focusing on how to fight poverty in Uganda, with programmes upon programmes introduced, but the results have been minimal. Perhaps there was really not much (data) that the government could use to help in the targeting," she said.

MP Nakut added: "Our country is still a poor one compared to others. This means we don't have the luxury to be material and error. We should have outputs for every coin we spend."

Ms Irene Birungi, a board member of Ubos, who represented the chairperson called for effective utilisation of the data.

"Reliable data is not only for technical requirements for policy making, but it is also a strategic asset that enables the government, private sector, and the public to make informed decisions that can improve the livelihood of all citizens," she said.

Mr Thangavel Palanivel, the United Nations Development Programme's senior economist, comparing previous national reports about MPI in Uganda, expressed concern about the indication of an increase in the incidence of multidimensional poverty.

According to previous national surveys, the incidence of multidimensional poverty was 44 percent in 2016 and 42 percent in 2020, while the new report puts it higher at 53 percent.

"The numbers seem to be increasing. It had reduced to 42 percent in 2020 and now it appears we have gone back to 53 percent," he said, adding that the country recovered from the Covid pandemic, it was expected that the incidence would reduce.

But Dr Chris Mukiza, the Ubos executive director, explained that the new MPI report should be treated as a baseline and not compared with the previous report because this new data is based on the 2024 census report.

"We are taking census data as a benchmark. First of all, the strength of our census data is very robust. We can go granular up to the village level. So we can use Census data at MPI more rigorously and so let us not make a sin of comparing census data with survey data," he said.

Dr John Ilukol, an economist at the World Bank, commended Ubos for producing multiple thematic outputs from the census, saying the new report is a critical resource that offers a clear picture of poverty patterns across the country and regions.

He emphasised that the World Bank will utilise the report not only as a publication but also as a dataset to guide programme design, beneficiary targeting, and efforts towards reducing poverty in all its forms and promoting shared prosperity.

"I grew up in Karamoja. My animals are more important than money. The report is very important to us as World Bank, because our focus is on fighting poverty: Health poverty, education poverty," he said.

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