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Q16

"The incidence and intensity of poverty are more important in determining poverty based on income alone". In this context analyze the latest United Nations Multidimensional Poverty Index Report.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2020 · GS II · 15 marks · International Institutions

Important International institutions, agencies and fora - their structure, mandate.

Core demand of the question

- "The incidence and intensity of poverty are more important in determining poverty based on income alone". In this context analyse the latest United Nations Multidimensional Poverty Index Report
- Honour the official stem. Use the **Global MPI 2020** (OPHI/UNDP) - health, education, living standards - and India's trends as then reported
- Keep the analysis within a 15-mark length

Revision summary

Income poverty ignores overlapping deprivations; MPI multiplies incidence by intensity.

Global MPI 2020 (UNDP/OPHI) used health, education and living-standard indicators with a one-third cut-off.

About 1.3 billion people were MPI-poor globally, many of them children, concentrated in South Asia and Africa.

India had large MPI reductions but a still-large rural and high-intensity residual.

COVID-19 was flagged as a shock that could reverse gains even if 2019 income looked better.

Introduction

Income poverty counts people below a money line. It misses a child who is out of school in a household that just crossed that line, and it treats a rupee of deficit the same whether the family lacks nutrition, electricity, or both. The UN Global Multidimensional Poverty Index, jointly from UNDP and OPHI, makes incidence (how many) and intensity (how deprived the poor are) the measure. The 2020 report is the 'latest' the stem pointed to.

Body**Why incidence and intensity beat income alone**

- Incidence (headcount, H) is the share of people who are multidimensionally poor.
- Intensity (A) is the average share of weighted deprivations those poor people suffer.
- **$MPI = H \times A$** : a society can cut the count while the remaining poor stay deeply deprived, or thin intensity while many still miss one extra indicator.

- Income lines (World Bank \$1.90 or a national Tendulkar/Rangarajan line) cannot see intra-household nutrition, years of schooling, or housing; growth can raise median income while MPI stalls.

What the **Global MPI 2020** reported

- The 2020 Global MPI covered about 107 countries and 5.9 billion people; it found on the order of 1.3 billion people multidimensionally poor, a large share of them children.
- **Indicators sit in three dimensions:** health (nutrition, child mortality), education (years of schooling, school attendance), living standards (cooking fuel, sanitation, drinking water, electricity, housing, assets).
- A person is MPI-poor if deprived in at least one-third of the weighted indicators; intensity records how far above that cut-off the poor lie.
- South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa together held the bulk of the MPI-poor; the report stressed rural concentration and the overlap of deprivations.

India in that 2020 lens

- India had shown large absolute reductions in MPI over a decade in the data then used (NFHS-era comparisons in OPHI/UNDP analysis): tens of millions leaving multidimensional poverty, among the biggest national exits in the global set.
- Remaining poverty was still huge in count, and poorer States and scheduled-community districts showed higher intensity - which is why 'income alone' mis-ranks policy urgency.
- Nutrition and housing/cooking-fuel deprivations often dominated intensity; a wage bump that does not change LPG, stunting, or attendance will not move MPI as fast as a money metric might suggest.
- The 2020 report was prepared as COVID-19 struck; it warned that pandemic shocks to school, jobs, and health could reverse MPI gains even where 2019 income looked stable.

Analysis for policy

- **If incidence falls but intensity is sticky, the leftover poor are harder:** they need bundled health-education-habitat action, not only a cash line.
- If intensity falls while incidence stays high, many households sit just over the **one-third threshold**; a small shock (COVID lockdown, drought) pushes them back - the case for resilience, PDS, and school continuity.
- India's NFSA, **Swachh Bharat**, Ujjwala, Saubhagya, and housing missions map onto MPI living-standard indicators more than onto a pure income line; that is the practical meaning of the stem.
- **Caveat:** MPI is only as good as surveys; lags, missing conflict zones, and urban informal housing can understate intensity.

Conclusion of the analysis

- **The 2020 Global MPI supports the statement:** counting the poor and measuring how poor they are, across functionings, is a better poverty diagnostic than income alone, especially for a country that had been cutting MPI fast but still carried a large, intense rural residual, with COVID as a reverse risk.

Flow diagram

Income line -> Missed deprivations

Incidence headcount -> Global MPI 2020

Intensity of deprivation -> Global MPI 2020

Global MPI 2020 -> Health education living standards

Conclusion

Incidence and intensity in the UN **Global MPI 2020** explain poverty as overlapping deprivations, not as a missing rupee. India looked like a high-reduction, still-high-burden case, with nutrition and living standards driving intensity. Income growth is necessary; without tracking H and A, policy will congratulate a line-crosser who still cooks on wood and misses school.

Facts & figures

Global MPI 2020

UNDP and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative joint report the stem calls the latest UN MPI.

$MPI = H \times A$

Headcount ratio times average intensity among the poor.

Ten indicators / three dimensions

Nutrition, child mortality; schooling years and attendance; six living-standard assets and services.

One-third threshold

Deprivation in at least a third of weighted indicators classifies a person as MPI-poor.

COVID warning in 2020

The report's context: pandemic risk to education and health functionings, not captured by a lagged income line.

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