



Report

‘Leave no one behind’ – five years into Agenda 2030

Guidelines for turning the concept into action

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Cover photo: A young girl walks to school in Ghana. © Arne Hoel / The World Bank

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Acronyms

B40	bottom 40%
CBMS	Community-Based Monitoring System
CCI	Composite Coverage Index
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Accord
CRII	Commitment to Reducing Inequality Index
CSO	civil society organisation
DFID	UK Department for International Development
DHS	Demographic Health Survey
DTP	diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccination
EFA	Education for All
EFHC	Extended Essential Free Health Care
EU	European Union
FCDO	UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
FCHV	female community health workers
FGT	Foster Greer Thorbecke
GDP	gross domestic product
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GNECC	Ghana National Education Campaign Coalition
GNI	gross national income
GPSDD	Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data
GRID	Group-based Inequality Database
HCP	Human Capital Project
HIC	high-income country
HLP	UN High-Level Panel
HLPF	High Level Political Forum
HMIS	Health Management Information System
IEAG-SDGs	Inter-agency and Expert Group on the Sustainable Development Goal Indicators
ILO	International Labour Organization
LDC	least developed country
LIC	low-income country
LMIC	low-middle-income country
LNOB	leave no one behind
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MIC	middle-income country

MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
ODA	official development assistance
OWG	Open Working Group on the SDGs
PHCC	primary health care centre
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PPP	purchasing power parity
PWD	person with disabilities
RMNCH	reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health
SADSAWU	The South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SHP	sub-health post
UBI	universal basic income
UHC	Universal Health Coverage
UMIC	upper-middle-income country
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNFPA	UN Population Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VNR	Voluntary National Review
WHO	World Health Organization
WIDE	World Inequality Database of Education

Glossary

Absolute: A value set independently and not in relation to other values (for instance, not relative to overall social standards or compared to others in society). ‘Absolute poverty’ is set according to a monetary value for household economic welfare (consumption, income or assets/wealth) associated with a minimum level of need. Antonym: relative.

Bias: In statistics, bias is used to describe a systematic distortion of a result due to a factor not originally allowed for when deriving the values. More widely in social sciences it is used to denote an unbalanced appreciation of or concentration on a particular subject (e.g. closed-minded, prejudicial or unfair), and, when used in socio-economic analysis, to capture prejudice for or against a person or group, especially when unjust or unfair.

Composite Coverage Index (CCI): World Health Organization (WHO) composite index made up of six indicators of reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health (RMNCH) that together make up the ‘Continuum of Care’, which includes integrated service delivery for mothers and children from pre-pregnancy to delivery, the immediate post-natal period, and childhood.

Concentration index: A measure of inequality often used in health equity analysis that considers the cumulative proportion of indicator of interest (e.g. child mortality) against the cumulative proportion of the population ranked by consumption, income or a proxy measure (Kakwani et al., 1997; Li et al., 2017).

Difference: The arithmetic result of comparing or subtracting one value from another. Difference can indicate potential inequality but is not equivalent.

Discrimination: An action or practice that excludes or results in unjust or prejudicial treatment of a person or group of people, for instance because of their race, age or sex. ‘Positive discrimination’ is then used to refer to a policy that positively appreciates those groups’ differences to counter such negative treatment.

Empirical: Evidence-based when concerned with, or verified by, observation, measurement or experience, rather than theory or pure logic. Antonym: normative.

Equity: The quality of being fair and impartial, especially according to natural law or right, and specifically freedom from bias or favour. The term is often used imprecisely to encompass inequality, poverty and other social and economic approaches to social hierarchy. Unequal outcomes may be equitable where they reflect choices or effort; equity may require unequal treatment depending on needs.

Inequality: Inequality in mathematics is the state of difference between two or more values, but in social sciences the term is used to describe a wide range of socially mediated differences. Inequality is typically viewed in a population in which members have different commodities or achievements. Inequality is often measured according to income or consumption, but the concept is equally applicable to other dimensions of well-being, such as the level of education or the degree of malnutrition (McKay, 2002). Inequality can be measured through difference in size, degree, circumstances, etc., but measures usually compare to a counter-factual state of ‘equality’.

The term ‘inequality’ should always be used together with a clear indicator that identifies the underlying variable and its distribution, e.g. ‘income inequality’ or ‘inequality of life chances’. Social and economic inequality are the focus of Leave no one behind (LNOB), and consequently measurement can rely on several different measures and approaches appropriate to inform policies.

Inequality of access: Differences in ability to obtain a service – due to social, geographical, financial or other reasons.

Inequality of treatment: Differences in what is provided by a service: for instance, in quality of education through class size, school funding or other reasons.

Inequality of opportunity/life chances: Differences in opportunity that relate to ‘fixed’ structural differences at birth or during childhood that arise from determining parental characteristics and social (gender, race, location) discrimination.

Inequality of outcome: Differences in income, consumption, qualification level, health status or other summary measures of well-being.

Intersectionality: Interconnected social categorisations such as race, class and gender, as represented in a given individual or group. Can be either overlapping or related interdependent aspects of discrimination or disadvantage. Clear measurement approaches will need to take account of correlation of categorical components to assess overall cumulative impact.

Multidimensional: A composite approach that involves more than one dimension of activity or measurement. A multidimensional approach to poverty, for instance, considers well-being in a number of indicators that combine into a composite measure. A multidimensional policy response will provide a mix of services to match different aspects of need.

Normative: Relating to, or deriving from, an evaluative standard or norm, especially of behaviour; an ethical or legal framework. Antonym: absolute.

Poverty: A status defined by a lack of adequate material resources necessary to achieve a desired level of minimum well-being. Poverty status is defined in relation to a threshold below which people are ‘poor’, and above which they are ‘not poor’, making poverty a binary indicator in most analysis – although different thresholds can be set, for instance a lower poverty line for ‘severe’ or ‘food’ poverty alongside a higher line based on ‘all needs’, to include clothing, housing and other necessities. The setting of a threshold is a politically influenced statistical exercise that is rarely purely ‘scientific’. Poverty over time is increasingly recognised as important – as ‘chronic poverty’ (long-term) or persistent and repeating episodes of poverty with an inability to ‘escape’ from the risk of falling back into poverty.

Quantiles: A set of values that divide a ranked frequency distribution into equal groups, each containing the same fraction of the total population. Percentile points in the distribution will be calculated for each 100th fraction. The most common approaches use decile groups that divide into 10 equal groups, or quintile groups into five.

Relative: Relative values are dependent on other numbers – for instance relative to an average or other standard, or relative to another sub-group of the population (e.g. garbage collectors are relatively poorer than the median worker, and especially so compared to bankers).

Relative poverty: This reflects the normative standards of society rather than an absolute minimum set of needs. In the European Union (EU) it is calculated as a percentage of national average or median. Per Townsend (1979), whose approach is widely accepted, people live in poverty when ‘[t]heir

resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary patterns, customs and activities’.

Resilient: Being able to withstand or recover quickly from difficult conditions, and thus often used as an antonym to ‘vulnerable’.

Social exclusion: Used across poverty and inequality approaches to consider non-participation in (or active discriminatory exclusion from) social norms, such as being in employment, having a home and being part of social and economic networks and the political process. Also includes non-material dimensions of deprivation, taking into account identity and social relations that engender deprivation. There is no single agreed definition.

Vulnerable: The quality or state of being exposed to the possibility of detriment. Often used in relation to physical threat (being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally), the term has been deployed extensively in wider socio-economic usage. The term ‘vulnerable groups’ can be ambiguously unhelpful in empirical terms without a clearly stated object – vulnerable to what?

Executive summary

The Covid-19 pandemic has stalled global progress on many of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including ending extreme poverty by 2030. Inequality is rising and hard-won gains in poverty reduction are being reversed, in rich and poor countries alike. The pandemic has also shone new light on long-standing barriers to progress in reducing inequalities – notably the concentration of persisting deprivations in groups who share certain identities (e.g. age, race or ethnicity, having a disability), places of residence (e.g. remote areas) and/or experiences (e.g. forced migration).

The ‘leave no one behind’ (LNOB) agenda rose to prominence as the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) era closed. It was increasingly recognised that concentrating policy on outcomes defined by national averages concealed disparities affecting the poorest groups. The LNOB focus seeks to redress this failure by making progress for these poorest groups central to the realisation of the SDGs. Countries pledged through Agenda 2030 ‘that no one will be left behind ... we wish to see the Goals and targets met for all nations and peoples and for all segments of society. And we will endeavor to reach the furthest behind first’. This report discusses the interpretation of the principle to date, and how to advance the agenda.

Take-up of LNOB has been highest among international actors, notably within the UN system, and among bilateral donors and civil society organisations (CSOs). Among national governments, commitment varies. With some notable exceptions, our examination of the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) countries submit to the UN High Level Political Forum (HLPF) each July suggests weak overall engagement with LNOB and little prioritisation of domestic policy concerns to reflect it.

The LNOB agenda – policy, data and finance – differs between middle-income countries (MICs) and ‘left-behind countries’, where a majority of

people experience absolute deprivations. Three distinctive features of the agenda in MICs are its insistent focus on the poorest, its call to narrow the gaps between disadvantaged groups and the rest of society, and its prioritisation of those furthest behind in policy-makers’ attention. In this report, we propose an evidence-based approach by constructing illustrative LNOB profiles using publicly available household surveys for three MICs: Brazil (2002–2015), Nepal (2006–2016) and Nigeria (2008–2018). We illustrate key concepts and methods selectively for several SDG indicators: monetary and multidimensional poverty; stunting and child mortality; educational attainment and learning; interventions to support maternal and child health; and income inequality.

The evidence from these countries shows how LNOB can be interpreted in very different national contexts: reasonably inclusive development progress in Brazil; rapid progress coupled with some evidence of narrowing disparities in Nepal; and stagnation amid growing disparities in life chances in Nigeria. Our analysis seeks to distinguish three interpretations of LNOB, ranging from weak to strong: 1) all groups make absolute progress and meet the SDG target; 2) in addition, disadvantaged groups progress at least as quickly as the national average; 3) in addition, absolute inequalities in life chances between the most and least disadvantaged groups close. When considering so-called ‘basic capabilities’ – including being nourished and surviving early childhood – we argue that eliminating absolute gaps is essential to equalise life chances, while reducing prevailing inequalities is integral for other capabilities.

LNOB profiles can be generated from currently available data by computing simple descriptive statistics that show average levels of attainment and rates of change among different groups, and how these evolve over time. We

introduce summary measures of group inequality and a decomposition analysis that helps explain how group differences contribute to inequality levels and changes. In so doing, we consider the overlap in group-based differences, illustrating how belonging to more than one disadvantaged group can amplify poverty-related outcomes, and exploring more rigorously the impact of interactions among different aspects of identity.

Past policies on group-based inequality call attention to the need for inclusive human development, as well as policies that emphasise the needs of the most disadvantaged groups. We highlight three elements of such an approach:

- **Progressive universalism**, which reprioritises the poorest groups in both the allocation of policy resources and in the timeline for expansion of programmes to the whole population.
- **Anti-discrimination measures**, including positive discrimination in education, the labour market and political institutions.
- **Recognition of intersectionality** to ensure that government welfare policies cover all population groups; we contrast the possibilities offered by ‘universal plus’ strategies, such as universal basic income (UBI) alongside additional supports for disadvantaged groups, and those targeting the ultra-poor through a bundle of linked supports.

Data is often cited as a constraint to LNOB, but we demonstrate that there often exists considerable data that can be re-purposed for LNOB profiling, and that the data MICs routinely collect offers a reasonable foundation for an LNOB agenda that can be refined as statistical systems improve. Above all, the need for better data should not inhibit action. We highlight existing initiatives that collect and compile available data on left-behind groups, and potential ‘quick wins’ in terms of generating additional evidence.

Our financing discussion contrasts MICs’ capacity to afford universal policy support with actual spending. Fiscal affordability is apparent through a review of several high-performing countries’ investments in health and education,

which exceed both international commitments and assessments of the costs of basic universal service provision. We outline guidelines for domestic resource mobilisation their experiences suggest. But we also discuss evident disparities: left-behind groups and areas often receive less than better-off communities, despite evidence of greater need and potentially higher returns from such investment.

Recommendations

Our recommendations span concepts, evidence, policy and future research.

Concepts

- Interrogate further the relevance and use of the LNOB approach as a means of bridging debates about vertical and horizontal inequalities and links between inequality and poverty.
- Clarify the insights that an LNOB focus adds to well-established debates around social exclusion, poverty dynamics and chronic poverty.

Evidence

- Bring together existing evidence and invest further in constructing:
 - A centralised repository that contains an inventory of datasets, indicators, methodological work and practitioners’ knowledge and advisory notes, to advance the identification and measurement of LNOB.
 - An evaluation database and meta-evaluations on ‘what works, for whom, where?’.
 - A compilation of ‘political resources’, such as the human rights basis and foundations for LNOB for use by governments and CSOs; case studies on political economy; and evaluations of VNRs (inclusions and omissions, quality considerations, etc.).
- Invest in ‘quick wins’ to increase the evidence base on left-behind groups, particularly through making administrative data accessible and citizen-generated initiatives

that collect community-level data and use it to hold policy-makers to account.

- Raise awareness of what we already know about which groups are most at risk of being left behind in each region or country, or within each SDG goal area. This would ideally take the form of a recurrent UN-sponsored report that explores different approaches to applying the LNOB concept across the world, what effects it has had and what would be an ‘acceptable’ level of progress by 2030.

Policy

- Embed LNOB concerns in national and international policy processes:
 - Review tools and rankings intended to facilitate an assessment of the impact of fiscal systems on vertical and horizontal inequalities and poverty, to identify those best suited to evaluate the distributional impact of reform on the most disadvantaged groups or areas and to benchmark countries’ policies relative to one another.
 - The HLPF process could support a track allowing countries to report on LNOB implementation through a dedicated VNR section and a corresponding HLPF session

that requires countries to identify left-behind groups, outline policy responses and acknowledge populations missing from data and programming.

- The HLPF could encourage countries to share assessments of left-behind groups among their own populations and CSOs, thereby sparking public deliberation that can drive change at national level.

Further research needs

- Additional analysis to identify groups most at risk of being left behind and where progress has been achieved; and dissemination to stimulate public deliberation and inform policy-making.
- Generate a richer understanding of the challenges and trade-offs inherent in the LNOB agenda.
- Interrogate how countries can make LNOB fundamental in ‘building back better’ from Covid-19.
- LNOB in left-behind countries low-income countries (LICs), least developed countries (LDCs), fragile and conflict-affected states) should be a new focus and priority for future work.

1 Introduction

1.1 The SDGs and the ‘leave no one behind’ agenda

Until the Covid-19 pandemic, global reductions in extreme income poverty were described as ‘remarkable and unprecedented’ (World Bank, 2019: 1). While poverty reduction slowed more recently (World Bank, 2018), the world was expected to continue to make progress towards achieving the first Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target of ending extreme poverty (see Manuel et al., 2018a; 2020). Other core aspects of human development, such as child mortality and schooling, also recorded notable improvements in many countries.¹ The shock of the pandemic has been a huge structural brake on progress, leading to reversals in rich and poor countries alike (Furceri et al., 2020; Laborde et al., 2020; Lakner et al., 2020; Robertson et al., 2020; UN, 2020). However, preceding and underlying the pandemic shock are longer-standing barriers.

One huge barrier arises from entrenched vertical inequalities – for example, between 1998 and 2008 the absolute income gain among the top 1% of the population was 250 times that of the bottom decile (Milanovic and Lakner, 2013).² Since the early 1980s, the ‘minimum consumption floor’ has increased only negligibly: ‘[a]t this rate of progress, extreme poverty will not be eliminated until 2278’ (Ravallion, 2018). Pockets of poverty persist globally despite rising average incomes (Sumner, 2012; Wignaraja et al., 2018). Redressing these inequalities is critical to achieving social justice and increased economic growth and health, and to reducing conflict and crime (see Stewart and Samman, 2013).

Persistent deprivation is often concentrated in groups sharing certain personal characteristics (e.g. belonging to a marginalised racial or ethnic group, being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ+) and/or having a disability); places of residence (e.g. rural areas); and/or life experiences (e.g. forced migration). These groups face barriers to progress resulting from the intersection of complex factors, including structural discrimination, unequal opportunities to accumulate assets and limited political capital. Unequal opportunity, in turn, may translate into acute group-based difference. For example, in middle- and high-income countries:

- Across 11 EU countries in 2012, fewer than one in three Roma had a job and 90% lived in poverty, while in central and south-eastern Europe, unemployment rates are five times the population average (VoA, 2017).
- In the United States, the mortality rate of Black infants is 2.3 times higher than white infants, and Black mothers are 2.3 times more likely than white mothers to receive late or no prenatal care (OMH, 2019).
- Racial inequality explained 50% to 70% of total inequality in South Africa in the mid-2000s, and 30% to 50% in Guatemala, Panama and Paraguay (Leibbrandt et al., 2012; Elbers et al., 2005; 2008, cited in UN, 2020).
- Spatial inequalities accounted for over 60% of total income inequality in Angola and Madagascar and about 40% in Zambia (Shimeles and Nabassaga, 2017; Beegle et al., 2016, both cited in UN, 2020).

1 Globally, under-five mortality fell by nearly half between 2000 and 2019, from 76.4 to 38.6 deaths per 1,000 live births; the number of children out of school fell by about 40%, from 99.7 million to 59 million, despite population growth (World Bank, 2020a).

2 They report that the incomes of the top 1% increased by \$25,000 purchasing power parity (PPP) (in 2005 PPP). The absolute gain at the global median was \$400 PPP, and at the bottom decile it was \$100 PPP (p. 31, Figure 1(d)).

- In India, in 2012, rural women had an average of 4.72 years of education, less than half the average for rural men, at 9.51 years (Varughese and Bairagya, 2020).

The LNOB agenda is concerned with those countries and groups of people who have not progressed equally or sufficiently in line with the dramatic global improvements between the 1990s and the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. The agenda seeks to focus action on the poorest and most disadvantaged, and make their progress central to the realisation of the SDGs:

As we embark on this great collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind. Recognizing that the dignity of the human person is fundamental, we wish to see the Goals and targets met for all nations and peoples and for all segments of society. And we will endeavor to reach the furthest behind first (UNGA Resolution 70/1, 2015).

Resolution 70/1 goes on to outline those population groups that are likely to require specific support in most countries: ‘Those whose needs are reflected in the Agenda include all children, youth, persons with disabilities (PWDs) (of whom more than 80 per cent live in poverty), people living with HIV/AIDS, older persons, indigenous peoples, refugees and internally displaced persons and migrants’. It also enjoins countries to define which group identities matter most in their specific contexts.

This report reviews the LNOB commitment and demonstrates how it can be taken forward to best effect.

1.2 Left-behind groups and left-behind countries

The LNOB concept has been applied in two main ways – to left-behind groups within countries where the majority is non-deprived in absolute terms; and to left-behind countries

where a majority of the population faces absolute deprivations by global standards. Each category requires a distinctive approach to how deprivation is defined, identified and prioritised, and in terms of the policy, financing and data requirements that follow. Notably, LICs and LDCs require a structural, aid-focused emphasis that seeks to maximise Official Development Assistance (ODA) and ensure that it reaches countries where extreme poverty is highest (see Manuel et al., 2018a; 2020). The emphasis also calls for attention to addressing conflict and other forms of fragility that characterise the poorest contexts (OECD, 2020).³ In high-income countries (HICs) and MICs, relative deprivations become more important and countries rely predominantly on their own economic resources.

Our focus in this report is on MICs because we believe the LNOB agenda carries distinct implications for countries where absolute poverty is no longer a sole arbiter of targeting and prioritisation. Their economic circumstances enable them to act both to cover the ‘last mile’ in terms of persisting absolute deprivations, but also to close relative gaps and, ideally, absolute inequalities. Our intended audience is policy-makers and practitioners tasked with developing practical measures of LNOB that illustrate trends over time and ways of responding to persisting inequalities. While in HICs the ‘social exclusion’ approach has sought to address similar issues (Atkinson and Marlier, 2010; Silver, 2015), this concept has attracted less attention and political traction in MICs.

1.3 Importance of the LNOB agenda

Five years on from the signing of Agenda 2030, the intent to ‘leave no one behind’ has become institutionalised at a global level through the VNRs countries present at each year’s HLPF.⁴ It has also featured in the strategies of selected countries, international organisations and CSOs (see Section 2.2).

The year 2020 was intended to mark the beginning of a ‘Decade of Action’ meant to spur

³ In 2020, fragile contexts were home to 23% of the world’s population and 76.5% of those living in extreme poverty globally (OECD, 2020: 10).

⁴ To date, 205 VNRs have been presented, including some countries that have presented twice (e.g. Turkey and Uganda) and some that have presented three times (e.g. Togo).

‘deep transformative change’ to deliver Agenda 2030. In December 2019, UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed announced that 2020 would be ‘the year we must change course’, and that a first annual UN ‘moment’ would take place in September to take stock of the SDG process to date, five years into the agenda, and to determine how to accelerate change. The three specific needs she highlighted included the delivery of solutions ‘*for those most in need*, to catalyse progress on multiple SDGs at the same time’ (IISD, 2020c; emphasis added).

This ambitious undertaking has been derailed by Covid-19, which has led to setbacks in many SDG goal areas. For the first time since the end of the 1990s, the number of extremely poor people is rising (World Bank 2020b). However, such reversals cannot be considered in isolation from entrenched inequalities, which are critical in understanding the impact of the pandemic and what comes next. Certain groups are bearing the brunt of Covid-19 in terms of exposure to the disease and its economic toll – including people who live and/or work in congregate facilities such as prisons or nursing homes, homeless people, marginalised ethnic and racial groups and poorer people. These groups face a much higher likelihood of contracting Covid-19, and of dying if they do. Low-skilled workers face job losses and diminished employment prospects (with knock-on impacts on those who depend on their income, for instance through remittances), while workers with advanced levels of education are scarcely affected (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020; Bottan et al., 2020; Furceri et al., 2020; Rothwell 2020; Sánchez-Ancochea, 2020; World Bank, 2020a). Studies have highlighted the disproportionate impacts on young workers in the United Kingdom (Blundell et al., 2020), on Black and Hispanic workers in the United States (Buckley and Barua, 2020) and on women and girls worldwide (World Bank, 2020c).

The Covid-19 pandemic heightens the need for dedicated attention to the LNOB agenda, to design appropriate responses to the shock and to galvanise progress for disadvantaged and marginalised groups in the recovery. It is widely hoped that this juncture will provide

an opportunity for governments to ‘build back better’: to take steps that address pre-existing inequalities and construct more resilient and equitable societies.⁵ Disruptions to the ‘status quo’ have historically been enablers of progressive change (McDonnell et al., 2019). Even before Covid-19, discussions of ‘building back better’ (from shocks) emphasised the importance of inclusivity: ‘building back better means ... that the entire recovery process *does not leave anyone behind* — i.e. that even the poorest and most vulnerable receive the support they need to fully recover’ (Hallegatte et al., 2018: 2; emphasis added). This argument assumes even greater importance in addressing the impacts of a global pandemic. Bringing LNOB to the fore in relief efforts is imperative to promote recovery and ensure that future pandemics do not have such devastatingly unequal effects.

1.4 Structure of the report

This report aims to highlight the importance of LNOB, and how it can be applied. It argues that LNOB has analytical possibilities that merit more rigorous scrutiny. We consider LNOB’s empirical foundations; explain how it offers a profiling framework that can identify and quantify the situation of left-behind groups in diverse MIC contexts; and discuss the implications for policy and practice. We believe that making the inequalities associated with group identity visible and providing examples of how they can be addressed can empower policy-makers and others to act and to ensure their policy responses are informed by the empirical evidence.

Our analysis focuses on three MICs – Brazil, Nepal and Nigeria – and on their experiences of economic welfare, education and health. These three countries illustrate different inequality trajectories: reasonably inclusive development progress (Brazil); stagnation amid rising group inequalities (Nigeria); and rapid progress amid some narrowing of group inequalities (Nepal).

The report is organised as follows. Chapter 2 reviews the evidence on the LNOB concept to understand its emergence, its analytical value

5 The phrase was first used with this meaning in 2006, during the 2014 Indian Ocean tsunami relief effort (Office of the UN Secretary General’s Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery, 2006).

and its potential to bring about transformative change. Chapter 3 turns to how the concept can be applied in practice. It seeks to illuminate group-based inequalities focusing on current levels of attainment and trends over time, drawing primarily on publicly available household surveys for Brazil, Nepal and Nigeria. Our primary aim is to present simple ways in which the approach can be operationalised focusing on progress in reducing absolute deprivations and in gaps in

attainment between the most disadvantaged groups and others. Chapter 4 discusses implementation of the LNOB approach in policy and practice, with an emphasis on the national level. We focus on the policy elements that are likely to form part of a successful approach to addressing the LNOB agenda, ways to harness existing data and evidence and guidelines for financing that can potentially reduce group-based deprivation and foster greater equality.

2 ‘Leave no one behind’ and the Sustainable Development Goals

LNOB addresses two related concerns: poverty and inequality. This translates into ending absolute poverty in all its forms, and ensuring that those who have been ‘left behind’ (in relative or absolute terms) ‘catch up’ with those who have experienced greater progress (Stuart and Samman, 2017). The phrase itself is not new; indeed, it has recurred throughout history in very different guises.⁶ In its SDG embodiment, the normative discourse emphasises the moral imperative to reach everyone, no matter how difficult or costly, and adopts a group focus in its insistence on the need to identify which groups face the greatest disadvantages, and how policy can be designed to support them. It has much in common with earlier approaches to tackling concentrated disadvantage, focused on social exclusion. This chapter examines the LNOB concept to ask three main questions: what does LNOB mean?; how did it get into the SDGs?; and how has it been interpreted and measured?

2.1 How LNOB became a guiding principle for the SDGs

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) era drew to a close with increased recognition that goals and targets had concentrated on outcomes defined by national averages. These ignored within-country inequalities (Fukuda-Parr, 2010) and undervalued the reduction of global inequalities (Fehling et al., 2013). Critiques (e.g. Kabeer, 2010) centred on how policy could focus on those better off among the poor (often referred as ‘low-hanging fruit’), allowing policy-makers to ignore those who were more disadvantaged in order to achieve goals. Evidence emerged on the disparity in results for the poorest relative to the average – e.g. in under-five child mortality (Reidpath et al., 2009) and maternal mortality (Wirth et al., 2008). As this evidence accumulated, it came to influence the post-2015 development agenda.

⁶ *Nemo resideo* (‘leave no one behind’) has long informed the history of warfare, from Greek mythological heroes rescuing those captured by the enemy to modern militaries making core commitments to recovering fallen, missing or captured personnel (<https://edition.cnn.com/2014/06/09/opinion/galdorisi-leave-no-man-behind/index.html>). This perspective arguably resonates with the insistence that LNOB reaches every person, and invokes the trade-off that reaching the ‘left behind’ could compromise the well-being of others. In social policy, the concept came to prominence in the United States No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which sought to provide all children with a fair, equal and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education.

LNOB's focus on inequality was heightened by growing global debates around the accumulation of gargantuan wealth by a tiny proportion of the world's richest. The 2008 financial crisis was followed in 2011 by protests in financial centres around the world, coinciding with discussions on the post-2015 development agenda. Seminal and widely cited work on inequality was published during the build-up to 2015's decisions on the SDGs, including *Capital in the twenty-first century* (Piketty, 2014), which focused on inequality *within* countries, and the Oxfam report *Even it up* (Seery and Castoir Arendar, 2014), which focused on *global* inequality.⁷

The inclusion of LNOB in the current UN 2030 Agenda and the associated SDGs emerged from two parallel processes: the 'Post-2015 Development Agenda' initiated by the UN Secretary-General to work on the overall development agenda, and the Open Working Group on the SDGs (OWG) of the UN General Assembly (UNGA). Both worked on goals for sustainable development, but had different political compositions. The Post-2015 group (as it came to be known) comprised Global North donors and the UN High-Level Panel (HLP) – a very visible and central component of the process – had the UK Prime Minister as its lead. Meanwhile, the OWG process was run by UN member states, with substantial room for input from large civil society groups and high-profile countries from the Global South, including Brazil and Colombia.

Both groups agreed that inequality – understood as the gap in resources and income between the rich and poor (Fukuda-Parr, 2010) – needed to be reflected in the new agenda, but were divided on how to do this. Opinion was split on whether it should be a stand-alone goal, and whether certain inequalities (e.g. between

population sub-groups, or 'horizontal') were more important than others (e.g. differences in wealth, income or consumption, or 'vertical'), and on what terminology would be used for inequalities.

The OWG proposed a stand-alone goal, 'Reduce inequality within and among countries', but this was contested. The G-77 and China defended the stand-alone goal while the Western bloc moved repeatedly to drop it (Fukuda-Parr and Hegstad, 2019). The United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, France, Germany and Switzerland all submitted written statements against a stand-alone goal and favoured focusing on inequality between social groups, i.e. horizontal inequality. Meanwhile, the HLP favoured an approach that prioritised inequality between groups and recommended mainstreaming such horizontal inequality as an objective throughout the goals, rather than having a stand-alone goal. The new agenda should 'leave no one behind', and noted ethnicity, gender, geography, disability, race or other status as markers of exclusion.⁸

A preliminary early mention of 'leave no one behind' – in the form that echoes the current conceptualisation of the agenda – is in the report *Ending poverty in our generation*, submitted by Save the Children (2012) to the post-2015 process, which highlighted how women and children were left behind by the MDGs, and built on the collective discussion by CSOs around the issue. In 2013, the HLP's report outlined the motivation behind the promise to 'leave no one behind' as finishing the job started by the MDGs (UN, 2013).

At the conclusion of the SDG process, negotiators opted for an attenuated version of inequality that emphasised group-based inequality across the goals, with the partial exception of Goal 10, a stand-alone goal on

7 The report famously demonstrated, using Credit Suisse data, that the richest 85 people in the world owned more wealth than the poorest half of the world's population combined.

8 Technical attempts to influence the agenda with alternative indicators for vertical inequality goals, such as the Palma ratio (Cobham and Sumner, 2013), changed little (Fukuda-Parr, 2019): OWG and the UN HLP's roles were considered political and not technical, while the decision on the technical specifications of targets was to be decided by the Inter-agency and Expert Group on the Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) once the new development agenda was approved.

inequality. While vertical inequality was the focus of target 10.1,⁹ targets 10.2 and 10.3 interpreted inequality reduction as the social and political inclusion of disadvantaged groups, promotion of equal opportunity and elimination of discrimination (UNDP, 2020).¹⁰ In addition, SDG 10 explicitly mentions both between-country and within-country inequalities (and, as we discuss in the next section, the two aims require different measurement and policy approaches).

The movement from a draft discussion document (General Assembly Resolution 68/6), where the negotiations recognised that ‘No target will be considered met unless it is met for *all* economic and social groupings’, to the final outcome document in 2015 (General Assembly Resolution 70/1), which instead focused on ‘Goals and targets met for all nations and peoples and for all *segments of society*’,¹¹ highlighted the decision to disentangle vertical from horizontal inequality.

The resulting Agenda 2030 document described ‘leave no one behind’ as a principle that covered *all goals*, but its focus was mainly on groups and people at the bottom of the distribution. The wider inequality between the bottom and top of the distribution only survived in education target 4.5.¹² Inequality of wealth was not present at all, even in discussions of

funding and national taxation to achieve the SDGs.

As noted in Chapter 1, UNGA resolution 70/1 pledged to leave no one behind, which it interpreted as a commitment to ensure that the SDGs would be met for all people and all countries, and to prioritise the needs of the ‘furthest behind’. The Agenda goes on to provide a list of categories of people that it considers need the most attention within Agenda 2030 – e.g. children, PWDs, refugees and internally displaced persons – but it also explicitly urges countries to determine which characteristics merit focused attention within their national contexts.

The outcome document thus guided signatory governments to ‘an obligation to pay special attention to groups that are relatively disadvantaged’ (UNICEF, 2020a: 22), narrowing the focus of the inequality agenda to group inequalities rather than expanding it to include a focus on measures directed at the top of the income distribution (Fukuda-Parr, 2010).¹³ Moreover, as we show below, despite acknowledgement of the wider and more radical interpretations of the LNOB agenda and its links with vertical inequality, most international donors – who are active in implementing or advocating for the implementation of the 2030 agenda – highlight

9 The final OWG submission containing Goal 10 of the SDGs had as its core target ‘achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40 per cent of the population that is higher than the national average’, taken from the World Bank’s definition of ‘shared prosperity’, a vertical inequality approach (Basu, 2013). This was adapted to form Target 10.1: ‘By 2030, progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40 per cent of the population at a rate higher than the national average’.

10 Target 10.2: By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status. Target 10.4: ‘Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality’.

11 Emphasis added.

12 Target 4.5 stipulates: ‘By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations’. This is measured by indicator 4.5.1: ‘Parity indices (female/male, rural/urban, bottom/top wealth quintile and others such as disability status, indigenous peoples and conflict-affected, as data become available) for all education indicators on this list that can be disaggregated’. Note the comparison of bottom with top, rather than the bottom with the average or median.

13 It should be noted, however, that the language under Goal 10 does not prevent a more transformative approach to LNOB. Target 10.2, for instance, urges promotion of social, economic and political inclusion of all regardless of their status, and Target 10.4 urges adoption of progressive fiscal policies that will help achieve greater equality.

group targeting as the main means of achieving LNOB. For instance, UNDP (2018), in fleshing out the LNOB agenda, notes specifically that:

Practically, the pledge [to ‘leave no one behind’] means all governments must chart a new course aimed specifically at curbing inequalities between people, groups and places; correcting for legacies of discrimination and exclusion both between and within countries; and prioritizing and fast-tracking progress among the furthest behind (p. 8).

While the LNOB concept could clearly be interpreted in myriad ways, in this report, which seeks to outline the contours of the LNOB debate five years into the SDGs, we aim to advance the focus on group-based inequality outlined in the UNGA resolution. In the remainder of this chapter, we first discuss the key elements of LNOB in MICs and how they translate into measurement, before moving on to showcase how key stakeholders have defined the LNOB approach over five years into the 2030 agenda.

2.2 Key analytical elements of LNOB in MICs

LNOB can be applied to inequalities between countries, as well as inequalities within countries. Indeed, SDG 10, focused on inequality, explicitly mentions both aspects. While in normative terms the SDGs regard both elements as equally important, they have very different conceptual, measurement and policy implications.

This report focuses on within-country inequality: on deprivation concentrated in certain groups within countries, and how these groups fare over time relative to others. We focus particularly on absolute and relative deprivations within MICs, which account for some 70% of the global population and 62% of extremely poor people globally (World Bank, 2019). The poverty profile and responses to poverty in MICs differ from those in LICs in several ways. In LICs the level of absolute poverty is so high that issues of inequality require a distinctive approach, mostly focusing on disparate SDG progress,

inequality among the poor and reaching the ultra-poor. In contrast, many MICs have high levels of inequality but also house a large share of the global poor. We focus on the specificities of SDGs and within-country inequality in MICs for several reasons.

First, that ‘**substantial “pockets” of extreme and moderate poverty can persist**’ while:

remaining poverty is increasingly about socio-economic inequalities such as spatial and group/horizontal characteristics and – potentially – a structural outcome of specific patterns of growth and distribution and their interaction with sub-national/spatial inequalities and horizontal/group inequalities (Sumner et al., 2012: 2).

Second, the role of inequality. Although there is little empirical foundation for the popular view that relative inequality is higher and rising among countries that have transitioned to middle-income status (Hoy et al., 2016), where rising average income is accompanied by increasing inequality ‘this may impede future and more extensive poverty reduction and shared prosperity. Furthermore, inequalities may play a particular role in the reproduction of chronic poverty’ (Sumner et al., 2012: 4).

Third, because of the relative and culturally specific nature of poverty (Townsend, 1979) associated with high levels of inequality. The low threshold for absolute extreme global poverty of \$1.90 purchasing power parity (PPP) does not apply in the same way to MICs. Indeed, Chen and Ravallion (2012) argue that ‘weakly relative’ poverty measures that incorporate relative deprivations assume more importance as countries become richer, as context-specific social norms stipulate what poverty means, and to reflect differing costs of social inclusion. These should not replace absolute considerations as it is illogical to assume only relative consumption matters. Sen (1983: 6) summarises the danger succinctly: ‘A sharp fall in general prosperity causing widespread starvation and hardship must be seen by any acceptable criterion of poverty as an intensification of poverty’. In MICs, the SDG absolute poverty perspective needs to

be complemented with a relative approach to poverty and broader issues of inequality.¹⁴

Fourth, the pace of poverty and deprivation reduction tends to slow as countries progress.

Even under the MDGs, analysis of trajectories for a range of indicators demonstrates that progress was harder to achieve when levels of deprivation were low (Rodríguez Takeuchi and Samman, 2015).¹⁵ Ravallion (2020: 4) provides a more recent illustration of this argument for income poverty, showing that:

for both East Asia as a whole and on average for the 18 countries that have been relatively successful against poverty over the longer-term, there has been a slowdown in the pace of progress for the last 3%. The poverty rate is falling more slowly and the floor is not rising much, if at all. This suggests that ‘business as usual’ – even by the standards of countries doing well against poverty – will not be sufficient to eliminate this form of extreme poverty.

Finally, middle-income status also affects the ability of countries to address poverty using national fiscal resources and borrowing (Sumner, 2011; 2013; 2016). According to Glenday et al. (2019) domestic revenue accounted for 30% of GDP in upper-middle-income countries (UMICs), on average, compared with 25% in LMICs and 15% in LICs. It follows that LICs are more reliant on ODA. For example, in 2010 overall tax revenue was around 157 times the amount of ODA in UMICs and 14 times the amount in

LMICs; only in LICs is the pattern reversed, with ODA contributing 1.2 times the amount of tax revenue (Hanna and Olken, 2018).

For all these reasons, more inclusive ‘pro-poorest’ growth and redistributive social policies will be needed within MICs (Sumner, 2013; Ravallion, 2020).

The focus on deprivation associated with group-based inequalities that underpins LNOB predates the SDGs. Indeed, LNOB is best understood by building on and incorporating previous concepts and measurement approaches that have been used to categorise deprivation – namely poverty and inequality, poverty dynamics, social capital/cohesion and social inclusion and exclusion. Highlighting the importance of group membership and of equity to these approaches adds value in a more nuanced and ‘triangulated’ understanding of deprivation and helps identify granular and appropriate policy responses. The need to mitigate group inequalities also aligns with the emphasis of welfare economics on maximising utility (or indeed capability¹⁶): horizontal inequalities are not justifiable on these grounds, though some vertical inequalities may be (Stewart, 2013). The literature on ‘inequality of opportunity’ provides a minimum understanding of which inequalities should be dismantled, through its insistence that differential achievements reflect people’s choices and efforts, rather than characteristics such as parental background, place of birth or ethnicity (see Ferreira and Peragine, 2015).

Horizontal inequalities refer to inequalities between groups associated with aspects of identity, geography or experience (Stewart, 2005;

14 The World Bank’s societal poverty line encapsulates this logic in taking the absolute poverty line as a minimum threshold in the poorest countries and adjusting it upwards in line with each country’s median consumption (or income). Applying this measure underlines how poverty differs in richer countries. The number of ‘societally poor’ people has remained largely constant since 1990 even as the number of extremely poor people has fallen markedly; whereas the global societal poverty rate of 45% was one-quarter higher than the extreme poverty rate in 1990, it is presently three times as high (the figures are 28% and 10%, respectively) (World Bank, 2018: 8–9).

15 They showed that different functional forms used to measure progress embodied this assumption, including logarithmic and ‘S-shaped’ functions, which recognised that a change closer to the upper bound was harder to achieve than one in the lower part of the distribution (Hailu and Tsukada, 2012; Karver et al., 2012; Klasen and Lange, 2012, all cited in Rodríguez Takeuchi and Samman, 2015: 10).

16 A capability is a person’s opportunities to achieve ‘functionings’ (valued beings and doings).

2016; Langer et al., 2007; Stewart and Langer, 2008).¹⁷ For example, recent analysis finds that rural areas house some 80% of the world's poor (World Bank, 2018: 38) and that children are more than twice as likely as adults to live in income-poor households (Newhouse et al., 2017). Horizontal inequalities can be challenging to measure and respond to. Stewart (2016: 3) hints at the complexity:

People can be categorized into groups in many ways: by ethnicity, religion, race, region, gender, or age-group, for example, with frequent overlaps in group membership ... Dimensions of inequality include economic elements (income, employment, wealth), social elements (access to education and health and social networks), political elements (notably power at many levels, central government and local government, the bureaucracy, the army and the police), and cultural elements (recognition and respect for language, religion, dress and mores). Given this range of identity groups and of dimensions of inequality, it is clearly possible for inequalities to be increasing between some groups but not others, and similarly for some dimensions but not others.

Overlapping group membership or so-called 'intersecting inequalities' identify the complex ways in which multiple forms of discrimination combine to influence welfare. The usual approach is to consider cumulative and amplified deprivation from intersections (Kabeer, 2010; Norton et al., 2014), but, of course, not all interactions will have such amplified effect, and the level of amplification will not be purely arithmetic (if an intersectional group has three underlying categories of group membership they may not be three times worse off than their three separately categorised peers). A growing

number of empirical studies demonstrate how overlapping group characteristics matter. UNESCO (2020: 67) reports that, in at least 20 countries, 'hardly any poor, rural young woman completed upper secondary school'. In Bolivia, ethnicity and place of residence were found to explain around 25% of total inequality in women's educational outcomes, but close to 40% when taken together (Lenhardt and Samman, 2015). Similarly, Rao et al. (2019) document that being poor, living in a rural area and having limited education result in health outcomes far worse than groups with any of these characteristics considered independently.¹⁸

We identify key analytical elements of the LNOB approach. A first element is its emphasis on identifying and profiling '**the most vulnerable, the poorest, marginalised and disadvantage groups**' (Di Francesco and McDonnell, 2018) as defined by monetary metrics and/or other dimensions of well-being. The aim is to **redress the absolute and relative deprivations** the most disadvantaged groups face by **reducing inequality** between them and others within society. This means prioritising these groups in the reform and financing of social policy: '**putting the furthest behind first**' (Stuart and Samman, 2017; Di Francesco and McDonnell, 2018; Government of Ireland, 2019).

Other aspects particular to LNOB are its understanding of group-based inequalities and of how these connect to persisting deprivation. LNOB is relational in that groups or individuals are left behind in relation to others, driven by factors including unequal power relationships, active discrimination, a lack of action, disparities in resource allocation or inequality in access to services. Goals and measurements may focus on trends that compare the bottom with the national average, but differences result from established social relationships and interactions among the various social and economic groups within a society. Furthermore, LNOB is a dynamic state. Being 'left out' may

17 Stewart and colleagues largely focus on how inequalities arising from ethnicity, race or religion increase the risk of conflict.

18 Other recent studies of intersecting inequalities include Kabeer (2016), Kabeer and Santos (2017), WHO (2019) and Jones et al. (2020).

be a temporary or one-off phenomenon, but being ‘left behind’ reflects persistent or repeated disadvantage.¹⁹ This dynamic state is identified over time by following the same population sub-group in trend data (e.g. repeated cross-sectional national surveys) or from following people over time using longitudinal surveys or administrative or ‘big data’. We focus on repeated nationally representative survey data in Chapter 3.

Operationalising the approach requires further discussion on how group inequalities have been understood, and the implications for measuring who is being left behind and how their status changes over time.

The measurement of group-based inequality relies on identifying and quantifying the ‘difference’ or ‘gap’ in well-being that a group has relative to the rest of society (or a reference group). Groups that are further away from a reference group, e.g. the national average, can be said to be left behind – thereby linking the emphasis the concept places on ‘the poorest’ and on horizontal inequality. One way to identify disparities in well-being is through absolute thresholds of what constitutes an acceptable level of well-being. Monetary well-being can be measured using income poverty lines, while poverty measures that assign extra ‘weight’ to the depth or intensity of poverty will be useful in profiling the poorest within the poor.²⁰ Multidimensional poverty approaches allow for a non-monetary approach and for the depth and intensity of poverty to be profiled, but also enable an assessment of the extent to which people or households are experiencing overlapping deprivations.²¹

The size of the left behind group should be shown in both absolute numbers (population size) and as a proportion of the population (e.g. the headcount of people below a poverty line or the average income shortfall of the total population from the poverty line). The number of people is not necessarily central to the concept of being left behind, but demographic trends in fertility and life expectancy may alter the absolute number of people at risk (e.g. high fertility may increase the number of poor children even if the proportion who are poor is stable or falling). This has occurred in Nigeria, where the number of multidimensionally poor people has risen as their proportion falls (see Section 3.1).

Once disadvantaged groups have been identified, the trends and trajectories that inform LNOB can be discerned. These are mainly relative: groups can be identified as left behind in relation to a comparative reference group that demonstrates ‘inclusive progress’. This reference group is typically considered to be the average or median within a society (though not exclusively; see footnote 12 on SDG target 4.5 on education). Because of LNOB’s focus on the ‘poorest’ or ‘most disadvantaged’, it is most consistent and logical to compare the groups at the bottom of the distribution (when considering vertical inequality) and the ‘most disadvantaged’ groups (when considering horizontal inequality) to the national average (mean or median or modal group).

Ravallion (2016; 2018) illustrates this focus with reference to the consumption floor experienced by ‘the poorest stratum of society’ – approximately \$1 in 2011 PPP.²² He finds

19 This aspect draws on a large body of literature focused on chronic poverty and poverty dynamics (e.g. see Baulch and Hoddinott (2000), Carter and Barrett (2006), CPRC (2014), Diwakar and Shepherd (2018)).

20 For example, the FGT-1 (depth) and FGT-2 (severity) measures in monetary poverty (see Foster et al., 1984) and the ‘intensity’ component of the Alkire and Foster (2011) adjusted multidimensional poverty metric.

21 Multidimensional indices include the OPHI Multidimensional Poverty Index (Alkire and Santos, 2014), the World Bank Multidimensional Poverty Index (World Bank, 2018) and the Individual Deprivation Measure (Bessell, 2015), as well as many national multidimensional poverty indices: <https://mppn.org/>.

22 Technically, this is ‘a weighted mean of consumption or income below a threshold no less than \$1.90 a day, with highest weight on the poorest. If poverty has been eliminated, then the floor will have reached \$1.90 a day’ (Ravallion, 2020: 4). The \$1 floor aligns with Lindgren’s (2015) estimate of the ‘biological floor’ (p. 6).

that this has changed only modestly since 1980, despite sharp rises in average consumption, and that, at this very slow rate of progress, extreme poverty would not be eliminated until 2278:

The reason is clear: the developing world is not making enough progress in reaching the poorest – well below the \$1.90 line. Numbers of poor (by this frugal standard) are falling, which is undeniably good news. But the progress is not being shared enough by the developing world's poorest. They are not exactly being 'left behind' but pretty close to it (Ravallion, 2018: np).

This analysis highlights key elements of the LNOB approach – a focus on the poorest members in a society and their absolute progress, as well as how that progress compares to average consumption growth.

There is a risk of over-reliance on relative progress if reductions in absolute states (monetary well-being or deprivations) are not also observed, and they are likely to be insufficient to reduce absolute inequalities (Hoy, 2015).²³ It is therefore important to highlight the implications of a given trajectory in relative and absolute terms so that governments can make the most appropriate choices.²⁴ Take the example of income poverty among Afro-Brazilian and white populations in Brazil (Rodríguez Takeuchi and Mariotti, 2016). Between 2004 and 2012, while the probability of being poor fell for both groups, Afro-Brazilians were still 1.6 times more likely to be poor than the white population.

It follows, as we illustrate in Chapter 3, that the goal of closing gaps is compatible with multiple additive criteria, which we list in ascending order of stringency:

1. **All groups make absolute progress and meet the SDG target**, even if inequalities increase.
2. **Disadvantaged groups do not fall further behind: they progress at least at the same rate as the national average**; if they progress at a higher rate, they may 'catch up' with the national average, reducing relative inequality.
3. **Absolute inequalities close between the most and least disadvantaged groups**: as the most disadvantaged groups progress at a higher relative and absolute rate than the most advantaged groups.

To some extent, the appropriate goal will depend on the indicator being considered. We underline that, for so-called basic capabilities²⁵ – including being nourished and surviving early childhood – eliminating absolute gaps (the strictest condition) is essential for realising basic human rights and the promise of equal life chances.

LNOB is perhaps most similar to the concepts of social inclusion and exclusion, which are concerned with the situation of disadvantaged individuals in relative and absolute terms, but we argue that LNOB's dynamic character adds an explicit concern with trends and pathways into inclusion. However, LNOB, as it has been interpreted to focus on group inequalities relative to the average, is not exempt from criticism. From an analytical perspective, these criticisms address the tendency to focus on the bottom of the distribution relative to the average and thereby overlook the broader inequalities within countries, how they are created and how they persist. In this, LNOB may be akin to social exclusion, which has been criticised for 'deflecting attention from ever-increasing income inequality and class conflict ... [and whereby] analytically separating the included and excluded

23 Per Hoy (2015), reducing absolute inequalities within a society would require that the incomes of the bottom 40% grow at twice the country average.

24 As noted above, Ravallion and Chen's 'weakly relative' poverty measure, which incorporates absolute and relative poverty, weighting the former for poorer countries, is one example.

25 According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2016), a basic capability is 'the ability to satisfy certain elementary and critically important functionings up to certain levels' (Sen, 1992: 45, fn. 19), or in other words 'the freedom to do some basic things considered necessary for survival and to avoid or escape poverty or other serious deprivations'.

may disguise the conflict between them’ (Daly and Silver, 2008: 554).

The compromises inherent to the consensus in forming the LNOB agenda, discussed earlier, meant that many of the more progressive interpretations were not incorporated into the SDGs. The concept remains controversial to many who suggest it is at best ineffectual, and at worse damaging to a progressive agenda.

The most substantive critique of LNOB is that it is insufficiently transformative. It can be argued that, from its inception in Agenda 2030, the aspiration to ‘leave no one behind’ was detached from a radical basis in systemic inequality and divorced from any discussion of trade-offs, power relations and challenges that might need to be overcome. One implication is that LNOB enables a side-step away from substantive action (Kharas et al., 2019: 2):

despite the growing resonance around the LNOB phrasing, it is not yet clear the world is implementing relevant policies with corresponding seriousness ... there are still too few signs of decisive gains in addressing the concerns of people feeling marginalized or left behind.

The criticism that LNOB is selective and unambitious follows: it encourages countries to opt for inclusion ‘at the margins’, within the existing system, while leaving intact structural inequalities that drive disparate outcomes, and ignores ‘the dynamics, policies and practices that push many behind’ (Adams et al., 2020; see also Elson, 2018). Per Labonte (2004: 117):

how does one go about including individuals and groups in a set of structured social relationships responsible for excluding them in the first place? Or, put another way, to what extent do efforts at social inclusion accommodate people to relative powerlessness rather than challenge the hierarchies that create it?

‘Rich countries and corporations are pushing everyone else behind ... “leave no one behind” is SDG-washing’ (Byanyima, in Adams et al., 2020).

The LNOB approach has antecedents in human rights conventions, where the term ‘progressive realization’ is used in the context of prioritising the access of poor, marginalised and disadvantaged populations to basic economic, social and cultural rights under national and international agreements (OHCHR, 2008, cited in Stuart and Samman, 2017). Human rights advocates have mapped how certain SDG goals match specific international human rights standards, and highlighted that non-discrimination and equality are overarching human rights principles that relate to these standards (OHCHR, 2018). Nevertheless, this motivation – which might serve to increase the agenda’s political traction – is often insufficiently acknowledged.

In SDG documents, the framing of LNOB leaves a focus on the political economy of exclusion to country governments’ discretion when implementing inclusive policies. Taking the agenda seriously may require measures such as positive discrimination (which we discuss in Chapter 4), or different forms of distributive justice, which seek to remedy the structural discrimination facing marginalised or disadvantaged groups. Excluded groups by definition often have little political capital, giving rational political actors little incentive to champion their cause. Some political parties may seek to build their political capital through explicitly discriminatory policy, ‘prototyping minorities as a burden to the mainstream society and as a cause of societal problems’ (Ciaian and Kanacs, 2016: 21). In both scenarios, political leaders may resist the types of measures an LNOB agenda advocates. A final set of critiques relates to the complexity of LNOB – that it is difficult to articulate clearly, complicated to implement and costly – and that there is ambiguity around how to operationalise and monitor an LNOB agenda. In this, critiques also chime with thinking around social exclusion, which has been described as a term ‘that is so evocative, ambiguous, multidimensional, and elastic that it can be defined in many different ways’ (Silver, 1994: 536).

Countering this criticism is the focus of the remainder of this report: how can LNOB be technically optimised through measurement and policy, even if it is politically imperfect in approach and implementation?

Our central claim is that LNOB has the potential to bring about transformative changes for disadvantaged groups and is feasible to implement, but it needs to be well-operationalised. Watkins (2013: 1) asserted that LNOB offered the potential to ‘put social justice and equity at the heart of the wider agenda for eradicating extreme poverty by 2030’. Irrespective of being able to upend fundamental structural factors that marginalise some groups, we argue that it is possible to take steps to improve their circumstances and ensure greater equity in the short term, and these smaller impacts can accumulate over time. Moreover, its limitations notwithstanding, the international architecture designed to advance LNOB has fostered monitoring and accountability. We now explore ways in which LNOB has been applied at the international and national levels.

2.3 How has LNOB been interpreted and applied?

2.3.1 International community

International organisations’ conceptions of LNOB recognise the importance of horizontal group inequalities, as well as the role of different drivers of inequality and a range of policy responses. Box 1 sets out core features of a selection of international agencies’ and donors’ definitions and interpretations of LNOB. The organisations selected have been active and visible in publishing on the LNOB agenda. In line with the approach of the UN outcome document, the cited stakeholders define the LNOB agenda as one that focuses on group inequalities and discrimination against disadvantaged groups. The language that they

use reveals consensus around the three elements of the approach highlighted above:

1. The focus on the poorest and most disadvantaged and characteristics that define this status (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, race, religion).
2. The re-prioritisation of these groups ahead of others.
3. An implicit concern with reducing group-based inequalities, with the exception of UNDP (2018) where this is stated as an explicit intention.

In the documents that inform Box 1, most donors recognise that groups they work with – characterised by gender, location, religion or ethnicity – tend to be towards the bottom of the income distribution. However, very few donors or international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) specifically make commitments that address income inequality as a primary factor, although the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (2018: 26) suggests that progressive taxation and inclusive growth that focuses on women in the workforce would reduce inequality across countries.

Donors, such as USAID (2019), do not specifically mention LNOB but, as Hayes and Caria (2019) discuss, the organisation follows the spirit of the mandate in its focus on inclusion as one of its seven core principles.²⁶ While the World Bank is partially aligned with the LNOB agenda through its focus on ending extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity (World Bank, 2016), the commitment does not specifically cover group-based inequalities and discrimination, two key features of LNOB (Lucci et al., 2019).

In discussions of how programme-level work was aligning with LNOB objectives, project staff from donor organisations highlighted that LNOB commitments were considered – at the management level in a programme – to be met by

26 The seven core principles are passion for mission, excellence, integrity, respect, empowerment, inclusion and commitment to learning.

Box 1 Key international development actors actively advancing an LNOB agenda**United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2018)**

- Definition: ‘The pledge to “leave no one behind” is a commitment to end extreme poverty in all its forms and to act explicitly to ensure that those who have been left behind can catch up to those who have experienced greater progress. Practically, the pledge means all governments must chart a new course aimed specifically at curbing inequalities between people, groups and places; correcting for legacies of discrimination and exclusion both between and within countries; and prioritizing and fast-tracking progress among the furthest behind’ (p. 8).
- Drivers/causes of being left behind: Geography, discrimination, vulnerability to shocks, governance, socio-economic status.
- Policy responses:
 1. Examine: disaggregated and people driven data and information;
 2. Empower: civic engagement and voice; and
 3. Enact: integrated, equity-focused SDG policies, interventions and budgets.

UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) (Herbert, 2019)ⁱ

- Definition: FCDO understands LNOB to mean that:
 1. Every person counts and needs to be counted.
 2. Every person should have a fair opportunity in life no matter who or where they are.
 3. The people who are furthest behind, have least opportunity and are the most excluded must be prioritised.
- Drivers: Disability, gender, infrastructure, markets, trade, and supply chains, nutrition and digital development.
- Policy responses: FCDO articulated three pillars:
 1. Understand for action. Strengthen understanding and analysis of who, where, and why people are being left behind. Improve data capacity and use of disaggregated data to inform decisions and continue to build evidence of what works in different contexts (as a minimum expectation for all ODA spend).
 2. Empower for change. Empower those people who are furthest behind to be agents of change. Enable their voices to be heard and acted upon and work with others to challenge discrimination and harmful social norms and promote opportunities to hold governments and implementers to account.
 3. Include for opportunity. Support inclusive growth, institutions, and services. Include the furthest behind in development and growth processes, and deliver targeted programmes and services to particularly hard to reach populations.

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ/BMZ) (2019)

- Definition: GIZ/BMZ deploys the UN’s definition from the SDG outcome document.
- Drivers: Uneven distribution of power and resources, as well as equal opportunities and discrimination – including gender-specific discrimination and social stigmatisation
- Policy responses:
 1. Overcoming discrimination and promoting empowerment.
 2. Provide access to services and justice for all.
 3. Creating an enabling environment.

ⁱ FCDO has no publicly available material on LNOB. Herbert was commissioned by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) (before it merged with the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office to become FCDO) to write a report based on interactions with then-DFID personnel.

Box 1 Key international development actors actively advancing an LNOB agenda (continued)**Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) (2019)**

- Definition: The SDC considers as ‘left behind’ those individuals or groups who are excluded from sustainable development or who do not enjoy minimum standards of living.
- Drivers: Multidimensional poverty and exclusion (religion, race, disability, economic status, ethnicity, origin, age, sex and gender, other exclusions).
- Policy responses:
 1. Anchor ‘leave no one behind’ in all its strategic documents, programmes and partnerships including multilateral organisations.
 2. Actively support efforts to identify those who are (or are at risk of) being left behind using multidimensional measures that include the perspective of the poor.
 3. Prioritise and formulate appropriate objectives. This depends on the context and on the strategic choices.

Norad (Greenhill and Engen, 2018)

- Definition: Two populations are especially at risk of being left behind: members of specific vulnerable groups such as women, children, indigenous people or people with disabilities (PWDs); and individuals living in fragile countries and/or who are extremely poor.
- Drivers: Exclusion from health care and education.
- Policy responses: Norway addresses ‘leave no one behind’ in key sectors including education, health, business development, the environment and humanitarian aid.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2018)

- Definition: As defined in the UN outcomes document.
- Drivers: Individual countries choose their own.
- Policy responses: OECD determines a general trend towards focusing on:
 1. Geography – countries most in need (e.g. least developed countries, fragile contexts and small island developing states) and targeted programmes in middle-income developing countries, notably to poorer regions and marginalised people.
 2. People and groups with a strong emphasis on eradicating poverty, reducing inequality, promoting social and economic inclusion and respect for human rights.

Gates Foundation (2019)

- Definition: Draws on UNDP (2018) definition of LNOB.
- Drivers: Geography and gender.
- Policy responses: Human capital investments should be designed to reach girls and prioritise those countries and districts that are furthest behind. For health, the priority needs to be primary care. In education, the priority is to make sure that all schools provide a high-quality education.

Government of Ireland (2019)

- Definition: Draws on Agenda 2030 to define LNOB as ‘those that have been left furthest behind – and people who are at risk of becoming ever more marginalised’.
- Drivers: Gender, humanitarian crises, climactic shocks, abuse of human rights.
- Policy responses: Prioritising gender equality, reducing humanitarian need, climate action and strengthening governance are key strategies for directing our development cooperation to the furthest behind first.

reframing existing priorities to benefit traditional categories of marginalised groups (Sarwar, forthcoming). Given the constraints imposed by budgets as well as on scale and value for money, approaches remained reliant on targeting specific population sub-groups (women and girls; children and youth; people and children with disabilities) alongside the assessment of household income level – increasingly done through ‘proxy means tests’. Prioritisation within categorical population groups rarely considered intersectional status (e.g. poor people with a living with disability, the poorest among ethnic/religious minorities) within these population groups.

Project staff within development agencies acknowledge the unique challenges of operationalising the LNOB approach, and have identified constraints that are likely to exclude those who are most deprived – from the lack of capacity within a programme to identify people facing intersectional deprivation; lack of time allocated in the project cycle for investing in the area/community of intervention; and the pressure to scale an intervention, therefore reaching those who would most easily and readily access the intervention (Sarwar, forthcoming).²⁷

However, donor organisations such as SDC (SDC, 2019; Guha and Itty, 2018) and GIZ (Bennett, 2018) are notable in their creation of separate departments to integrate the LNOB agenda across their organisational processes. Five years on from the SDGs, both organisations are investing in mainstreaming the concept of LNOB through project activities by developing practitioner guidelines across the project cycle.

2.3.2 National governments

National governments present their interpretation and implementation of the SDGs, and LNOB in particular, through VNRs at the HLPF in July every year. So far, 209 countries

have volunteered to present a VNR, with some presenting multiple times.²⁸

VNRs are supposed to present country progress on all 17 SDGs and are meant to highlight both successes and failures, together with diagnostics. They are also meant to reflect national-level consultation with civil society and other stakeholders. In practice, most describe success and countries do not engage meaningfully in documenting the challenges (IISD, 2020a; 2020b). Civil society groups have noted that VNRs remain a cursory attempt to look at SDG implementation, with little accountability through stakeholder consultation and involvement (in particular by disadvantaged people). They also question how feedback from the forum would be integrated into national implementation efforts (WEDO, 2017; Viana and Perera, 2018).

Prior to 2019, VNRs expressed high-level political commitments to the SDGs but there was little evidence of how the LNOB agenda was being institutionalised or tackled (Fukuda-Parr et al., 2018). Countries largely focused on a narrow range of groups: women and girls, children and people in rural areas (Sarwar and Nicolai, 2018). Since 2019, greater attention has been paid to the principle of LNOB (the number of countries mentioning it grew) because of UN DESA guidelines to improve consistency in reporting (UN DESA, 2020). Overall, profiles of LNOB remain weak (Adams et al., 2020) on both the underlying drivers of LNOB, and on a sufficient range of disadvantaged population sub-groups.

Countries showcase LNOB in the preparation of VNRs, in evidence of prevalence of the term and in policies and their implementation (Sarwar and Nicolai, 2018). Most countries document a stakeholder dialogue involving civil society, but details on these processes are often vague (ibid.), with attendance perceived as tokenistic and reserved for traditional CSO partners who already work with government (Centre for

27 For example, those living in geographic proximity to an infrastructure programmes or those already literate in training/livelihood programmes.

28 As of 2020, 23 countries had conducted a VNR at least twice: Argentina, Armenia, Bangladesh, Belize, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Honduras, India, Jordan, Kenya, Morocco, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Panama, Peru, Samoa, Slovenia, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

Economic and Social Rights, 2018; Treers, 2018; Madiz, 2019).

Furthermore, when VNRs do report on policies and actions undertaken to improve the well-being of vulnerable groups (typically women, girls, children and rural people), countries often mention interventions that had been initiated or were already underway before 2015, rather than live progress and outcomes, or direct links to the LNOB agenda. It is noticeable that, for the most part, countries have steered clear of mentioning ethnic or religious minorities or the poorest income poor, perhaps reflecting domestic political sensitivity to these types of inequality.

An overview of the 2020 VNRs shows that they included efforts to collect data (e.g. violence against women and girls in Malawi, forms of poverty in Nepal); measures to promote social inclusion (in public services in Papua New Guinea) and social protection (for the elderly in Uganda, on employment in Slovenia); and policies, programmes and efforts that address the needs of vulnerable groups (on gender equality in Austria, laws for PWDs in Bangladesh, and measures for the elderly in Bulgaria). However, commentators on the 2020 HLPF, Winnie Byanyima and Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, highlighted that this greater emphasis on LNOB still did not engage with the causal dynamics of exclusion (Adams et al., 2020).

Overall, the empirical impact of concepts and practices associated with LNOB remains largely opaque at a national level. Evidence on how LNOB has been operationalised and evaluated relative to national programmes that address poverty, inequality and social exclusion/inclusion remains extremely patchy and inconsistent. While the ability to rhetorically interpret LNOB to match national contexts is one strength of the concept and underlies its acceptance as an international approach to inequality, the

resulting empirical and applied policy vagueness lies behind key weaknesses in understanding how policy ‘on the ground’ has changed, and to what effect. We return to this in our conclusions (Section 4.5).

2.3.3 Civil society organisations

At the international level, CSOs held dialogues around the LNOB agenda in the post-2015 process (Senit, 2020) and at national level, and many have actively shaped its interpretation, as in Ghana.²⁹ The Leave No One Behind Partnership – including CIVICUS, Development Initiatives, Project Everyone and partners from the Action for Sustainable Development platform³⁰ – organised stakeholder dialogues in over 30 countries during 2016 and 2017 (Bhushan et al., 2018). Since then, international CSOs and think tanks have played a considerable role in advancing the definition and operationalisation of the concept (e.g. Save the Children, 2012; Stuart and Samman, 2017; Munroe, 2018; PAL Network, 2019; Southern Voice, 2020) and advocating successfully for its adoption by donors in countries including the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Germany.

As noted above, in theory local CSOs are meant to be key stakeholders with national governments in the production of VNRs. However, in practice the degree of engagement has varied across countries (TAP Network, 2019). Successful examples include Costa Rica, where the government carried out consultations with older persons, LGBTQ+ persons, PWDs and indigenous peoples; Costa Rica’s VNR includes a section under each SDG on the challenges these groups identified, with outreach including seminars, workshops, bilateral discussions and online channels (ibid.). Broadly, though, national-level CSOs are hampered in their engagement by ‘low levels of awareness of the agenda by the public, civil society

29 ‘The highlight of the VNR process was the effective collaboration between civil society and government prior to and during the presentation of the voluntary national report’ (Ghana National Education Campaign Coalition (GNECC), cited in Mangenot, 2019).

30 This is a global platform supporting civil society and citizen action for delivery of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change: <https://action4sd.org/>.

and government, limited finance, insufficient participation and lack of government alignment' (Kindornay, 2019: 69).

Clearly, LNOB could be given greater traction in international processes in various ways. Our

aim is to establish some clear measurement and policy approaches that can help to operationalise the concept at the international and national levels and promote an optimal if not perfect approach to reducing inequalities.

3 Identifying and profiling the ‘left behind’

Chapter 2 identified three core concerns of the LNOB agenda: 1) the poorest and most disadvantaged; 2) closing gaps in life chances; and 3) putting the ‘furthest behind’ first. We highlighted the importance of group characteristics and intersections among them in explaining persisting deprivation. This chapter presents simple ways to find and profile the ‘left behind’ to inform the LNOB approach, using straightforward metrics that help to identify who is left behind, to what extent and how this is changing over time. To highlight the possibilities available to most countries to advance an LNOB agenda, we base our analysis on commonly available data and group characteristics associated with inequality in many countries: gender, race, ethnicity, geography and socio-economic status (and, data permitting, age). We focus on key SDG indicators: monetary and multidimensional poverty (SDG1), stunting (SDG2), child mortality (SDG3), school attendance, attainment and literacy (SDG4) and income inequality (SDG10).

Throughout the analysis, we use evidence to consider illustrative LNOB profiles in Brazil (2002–2015), Nepal (2006–2016) and Nigeria (2008–2018). Brazil is a UMIC (its 2019 per capita gross national income (GNI) was \$14,890 in 2011 PPP), while Nigeria and Nepal are LMICs (with incomes of \$5,190 and \$3,610 respectively). The latest poverty headcounts according to the \$1.90 PPP extreme poverty line are 4.4%, 39.1% and 15.0% respectively (World Bank, 2020d). The three countries all have pronounced group-based inequalities (Kabeer, 2016: 56). Focusing on these three countries helps to ground the analysis and highlights important contrasts between them: Brazil shows reasonably inclusive development

progress; Nepal shows rapid progress coupled with some narrowing of group-based disparities; and Nigeria shows stagnation amid growing disparities in life chances.

The approach responds to four core questions:

- **Which groups are at risk of being ‘left behind’?** We present ways to identify the poorest sub-groups within a population, moving beyond profiles based on national averages.
- **How are gaps in opportunities and life chances changing?** We analyse trends in poverty and inequality to assess whether the disparities that disadvantaged groups face are widening or narrowing.
- **How do overlapping group disadvantages affect gaps and trends?** We evaluate how being disadvantaged in two or more areas affects inequality and poverty, the extent to which ‘intersectional’ inequalities compound and how far they influence progress.
- **How does service access and quality influence inequality?** We explore how access to services affects outcomes for disadvantaged groups, relative to others, and how their quality and broader circumstances mediate the relationship between access and outcomes.

Our approach to these questions examines relative and absolute differences between groups, on average, and in some cases by comparing the distribution of an attribute between groups. We also look at progress experienced at different levels of the welfare distribution to assess the performance of the poorest and most disadvantaged. We propose several criteria to determine whether a group is being left behind. In examining trends, our foremost concern is whether the most deprived groups are

experiencing improvements in absolute terms (i.e. are their incomes growing or malnutrition rates falling, on average?). This is an essential precondition for not being left behind. Second, we explore how disadvantaged groups are progressing relative to the national average, or in some cases relative to more advantaged groups; an equal or higher rate of progress is a second condition for not being left behind. Third, we focus on absolute inequalities – again, between disadvantaged groups and the average, or in some cases more advantaged groups. For so-called basic capabilities – having adequate nutrition, surviving early childhood and attaining a basic level of education – the eventual aim is for the absolute differences between groups to close entirely over time, indicating greater equality in life chances. For income this is not fully feasible, or necessarily desirable; trends in absolute differences are nonetheless useful in designing policies that avoid extremes of inequality.

As discussed in Chapter 2, there are various possible interpretations of what it would mean to fulfill the LNOB agenda by 2030, under increasingly strict conditions.³¹ We revisit the three criteria, outlining how we will measure them:

1. **All groups make absolute progress and meet the SDG target:** Under this scenario, though all groups will meet a given SDG target, inequality may increase if more advantaged groups progress more.
Metric: Distance or shortfall between group performance and the target.
2. **Disadvantaged groups progress at least as quickly as the national average:** Under this criterion, there are two possible trajectories: disadvantaged groups progress at the same pace as the national average, in which case the absolute or relative gap may not close; or disadvantaged groups progress at a higher rate than the national average, such that the relative gap (and potentially the absolute gap) closes.
Additional metric: Difference in the average

rate of progress for and in attainments of the most disadvantaged subpopulation compared to national average.

3. **Absolute inequalities in life chances between the most and least disadvantaged groups close:** Gaps between the most and least disadvantaged groups close. The expectation is movement towards parity, especially in life chances in the so-called basic capabilities (health and education).

Additional metric: Difference in the attainments of the most disadvantaged subpopulation compared to the most advantaged subpopulation. Summary measures of group inequality.

Our analysis focuses on publicly available household surveys: the National Household Sample Survey (PNAD) for Brazil, and Demographic Health Surveys for Nepal and Nigeria (Box 2). We also use public data on income poverty from the World Bank and multidimensional poverty data from Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI)/UNDP. Where we depart from the use of descriptive statistics to construct summary indicators of inequality or undertake more complex multivariate analysis, we aim to explain the analysis in intuitive terms, and relegate the technical detail to an annex, published separately alongside this report.

3.1 Ending poverty in all its forms (SDG1)

Persisting deprivation amid widespread progress renders it imperative to identify and craft appropriate strategies for communities and areas that are ‘left behind’. Many analyses focusing on left-behind groups begin with an assessment of monetary poverty (Kabeer and Santos, 2017; Ravallion, 2016) or multidimensional poverty (Alkire et al., 2017). To begin creating our LNOB profile, we analyse income poverty from Brazil, in order to then focus on multidimensional poverty in Nepal and Nigeria.

³¹ These conditions may be independent of one another: e.g. even though relative gaps narrow, groups can move apart in absolute terms; relative progress can slow as absolute gaps close.

Box 2 Methodology highlights

Countries: Brazil, Nepal and Nigeria are illustrative rather than representative of a small number of MICs with available data over a relevant period.ⁱ For each, we use three nationally representative surveys covering a period of roughly 10 years, ending in or after 2015. Data quality was an important criterion together with coverage of core areas on education, health and economic welfare. For Brazil we use the National Household Sample Survey (PNAD) for 2002, 2008 and 2015.ⁱⁱ For Nepal and Nigeria we use Demographic Health Surveys (DHS).ⁱⁱⁱ Nepal covers 2006, 2011 and 2016. Nigeria covers the years 2008, 2013 and 2018.

Capturing disadvantaged population sub-groups: All surveys allow us to identify gender and age, and urban and rural areas and subnational regions/provinces that will differ between countries (and possibly over time). We also include national ethnic and racial population sub-groups. Income data is only available for Brazil. For Nepal and Nigeria, the DHS provides a socio-economic ranking based on an asset index.^{iv} These indicators allow us to look across household socio-economic status and other markers of group identity to explain gaps and trends. Other groups of interest to the agenda are not included in these surveys (e.g. LGBTQ+, PWDs).

SDG-related outcomes: We choose indicators that directly or indirectly map onto the SDG framework: 1) income poverty; 2) multidimensional poverty; 3) stunting among under-fives; 4) under-five mortality; 5) school completion at primary and lower secondary levels; 6) the Composite Coverage Index of RMNCH services; and 7) income inequality. Given data limitations, it is impossible to compute all measures in all three countries. Rather, we use country examples selectively to illustrate the techniques we propose.

Measuring inequality: In the SDG framework, being ‘left behind’ is commonly interpreted as a static or growing gap between the relatively poor and the average. In contrast, Goal 4 aims at parity between the most and least advantaged groups, e.g. girls and boys, urban and rural residents, households in the top and bottom asset quintile. We apply simple and popular inequality measures: an indicator of relative inequality, the ratio between groups; and an indicator of absolute inequality, the difference between groups. Where useful, we incorporate summary measures of inequality between groups; in our discussion of inequality in education, we introduce a decomposition technique to better understand group-based difference.

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- i Access to longitudinal survey or administrative data is recommended. Long-term trends are more likely to be practicable from existing cross-sectional data sets than panel surveys and their larger sample sizes may also increase possibilities for disaggregation.
 - ii Kabeer and Santos (2017) and Rodríguez Takeuchi and Mariotti (2016) use the same dataset to analyse group-based inequality in Brazil. Access the PNAD via: www.ibge.gov.br/en/statistics/social/justice-and-security/20293-supplements-pnad4.html?=&t=o-que-e.
 - iii DHS is a key data source for SDG monitoring. For a list of SDG indicators derived from this data, see <https://dhsprogram.com/Topics/upload/SDGs%20in%20DHS%2016Apr2019.pdf>. Access the DHS via: <https://dhsprogram.com/>.
 - iv The asset index is a metric used in the DHS (and UNICEF’s MICS) to classify households into quintiles according to their relative socio-economic status. It is commonly referred as a ‘wealth index’ even though it captures ownership of basic goods (e.g. a television, refrigerator, telephone, water source, sanitation facility or housing materials). This indicator is much simpler to collect than an income or consumption profile, leaving more room to focus on the health outcomes that are the primary concern of DHS (Alkire and Samman, 2014).

3.1.1 Income poverty and group-based inequality

To understand who is being left behind and to what extent, we seek to identify the groups where poverty is most severe (Figure 1). As noted, Brazil is the only one of the three countries for which we have access to household income or consumption data. The absolute income poverty headcount refers to the share of individuals who do not command sufficient resources to afford a minimum basket of goods and services deemed essential within a society. We adopt a poverty line of \$5.50 PPP per capita per day (in 2011 PPP), following the World Bank's proposal for UMICs (World Bank, 2018).³²

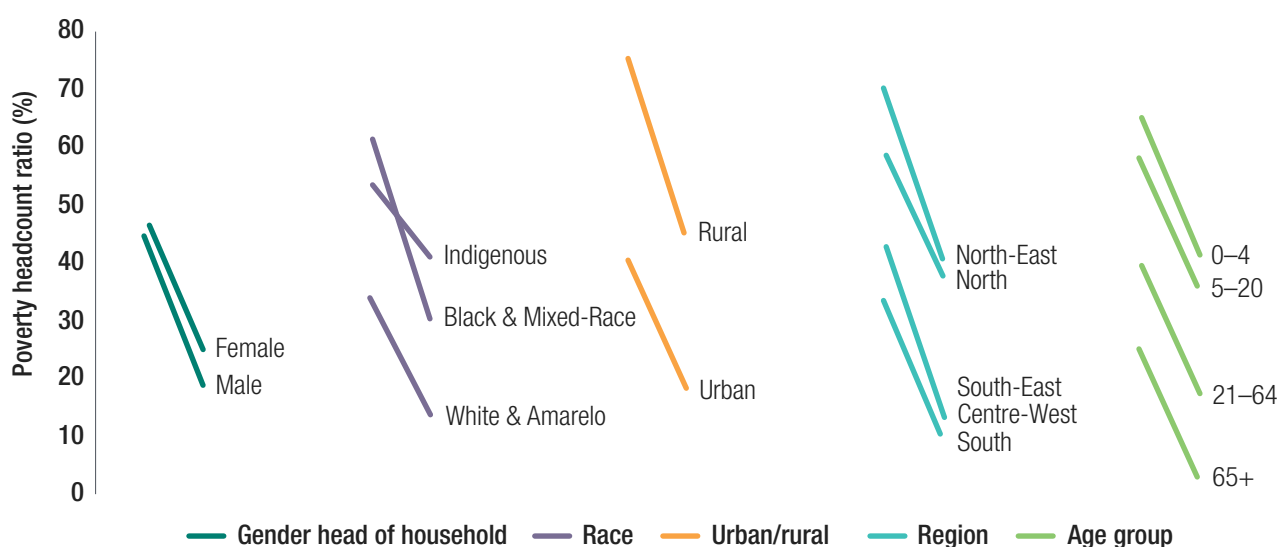
Groups with the highest poverty rates include those in rural areas and the North and North East regions, as well as Black, Mixed-Race and Indigenous people, and children (Figure 1). Inequalities are sizeable. In the North-East, in 2015 the poverty headcount was 41%, compared with 11% in the South, a 30-point gap. The headcount rate among the white and 'Amarelo' (East Asian-descent) population is 15%, while it

is above 30% among the Black and Mixed-Race population and over 40% among Indigenous people. In 2015 the headcount rate was 2.5 times higher in rural than in urban areas, and about twice the level among children as adults.

Between 2002 and 2015, the national poverty rate fell by half, from 46% to 23%. Poverty fell for all the groups we focus on, albeit unevenly. The most deprived groups, namely Indigenous people, those in the North and in rural areas and children under 15 experienced below-average poverty reduction, as did female-headed households (Figure 2).

As noted above, absolute differences provide another perspective on change. Indeed, although several disadvantaged groups experienced below-average rates of poverty reduction between 2002 and 2015, the absolute change in their poverty was typically higher than the change in the national average (Table 1). Even though poverty among better-off groups was reducing faster, the fact that it did so from a lower base translated into incrementally lower reductions in their poverty headcount. As a result, the absolute gap narrows

Figure 1 Changes in income poverty headcount ratio by group, Brazil, 2002–2015



Note: \$5.50 PPP poverty line.

Source: Author computation of PNAD data.

32 The \$1.90 PPP poverty line (which results in headcounts of 13% in 2002 and 4% in 2015) is too low for countries such as Brazil. It does not capture the extent of income deprivation in the country and provides little possibility for disaggregation across relevant population groups. While our analysis stresses the \$5.50 PPP poverty line, we complement this with some analysis of the \$1.90 poverty line and the depth and intensity of poverty at each poverty line. Because our measures reflect income rather than consumption, they may not reflect intrahousehold differences in consumption associated with gender and age. See World Bank (2019: Chapter 5) for gender- and age-sensitive poverty profiles for selected countries.

Table 1 Absolute difference in income poverty headcount between groups

	Absolute difference in poverty headcounts (%)				
	Gender	Race	Urban/rural	Region	Age group
2002	1	28	34	37	25
2015	3	27	26	30	22

Note: Figures refer to the gap between the best and worst performing group in each category.
Source: Author computation of PNAD data.

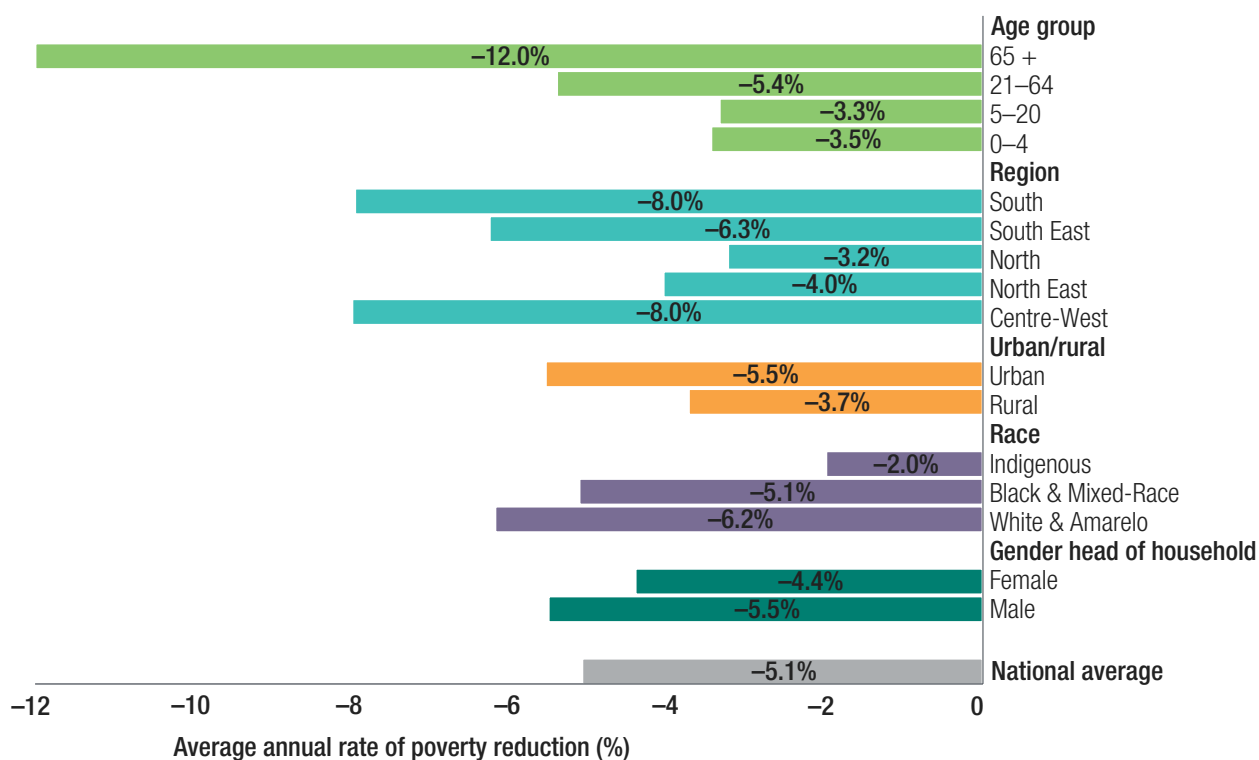
(see Table 1). This metric therefore reveals partial progress, though an optimal situation would involve a higher rate of poverty reduction as well as the reduction of absolute differences.

3.1.2 Poverty depth and intensity

Falls in the income poverty headcount may reflect improvements in the welfare of people close to the poverty line rather than those who are more intensely deprived. Measurement approaches that consider poverty as a binary variable overlook inequality in its distribution and therefore obscure a focus on the poorest population. This shortcoming can be addressed in various ways.

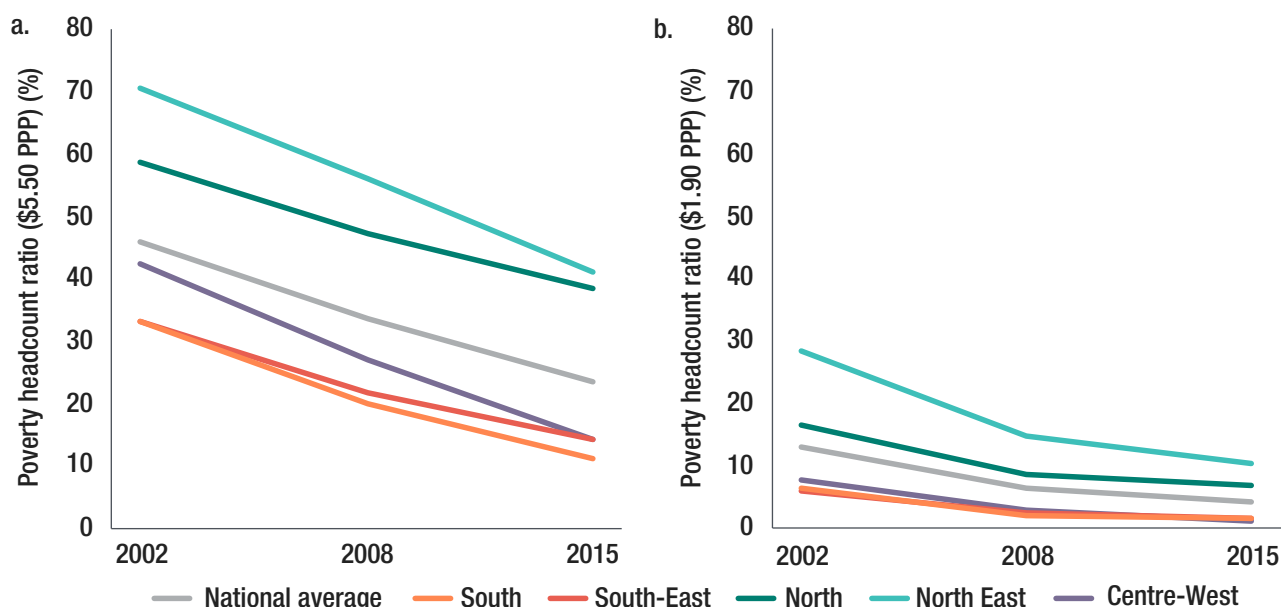
The simplest way is to monitor the income poverty headcount according to different poverty lines – e.g. changes in poverty over the 2002–2015 period in Brazil according to the \$1.90 PPP extreme poverty line and the \$5.50 PPP UMIC poverty line (Figure 3). The poverty headcount falls more sharply, at least in the 2002–2008 period, when measured by the lower poverty line. This is because poverty is more extreme in the country’s North East region, and it falls more quickly there than in other regions, even though this region remains significantly poorer than the rest of Brazil.

A second approach is to retain our original poverty line (\$5.50 PPP) and focus on the

Figure 2 Average annual rate of income poverty reduction by group in Brazil, 2002–2015

Source: Author computation of PNAD data.

Figure 3 Poverty trends by region and the national average in Brazil according to the \$5.50 PPP poverty line and the \$1.90 PPP poverty line in Brazil, 2002–2015



Source: Author computation of PNAD data.

distribution of poverty beneath it. In addition to permitting a more nuanced understanding of poverty, this approach – which draws on the Foster-Greer-Thorbecke (FGT) suite of poverty measures (Foster et al., 1984) – has attractive technical properties.³³ The ‘poverty gap’ expresses the average income level of the poor as a proportion of the poverty line. While it provides some information about the ‘depth’ of poverty within a population, it continues to obscure the situation of any very poor members, as it is concerned with the average income of poor people. The ‘poverty intensity’ indicator, in contrast, incorporates the income gaps among the poor by ‘weighting’ each income of a poor person depending on its distance from the poverty line, so that the incomes of the poorest matter most.

These measures conform with the normative imperative that LNOB focus on the poorest and most disadvantaged, and each provides distinct insights. In Brazil, the headcount, gap and intensity declined between 2002 and 2015 for the whole population and the Black and Mixed-Race population: not only were there fewer poor people in 2015, but poor people and the poorest people were less poor (Figure 4). The

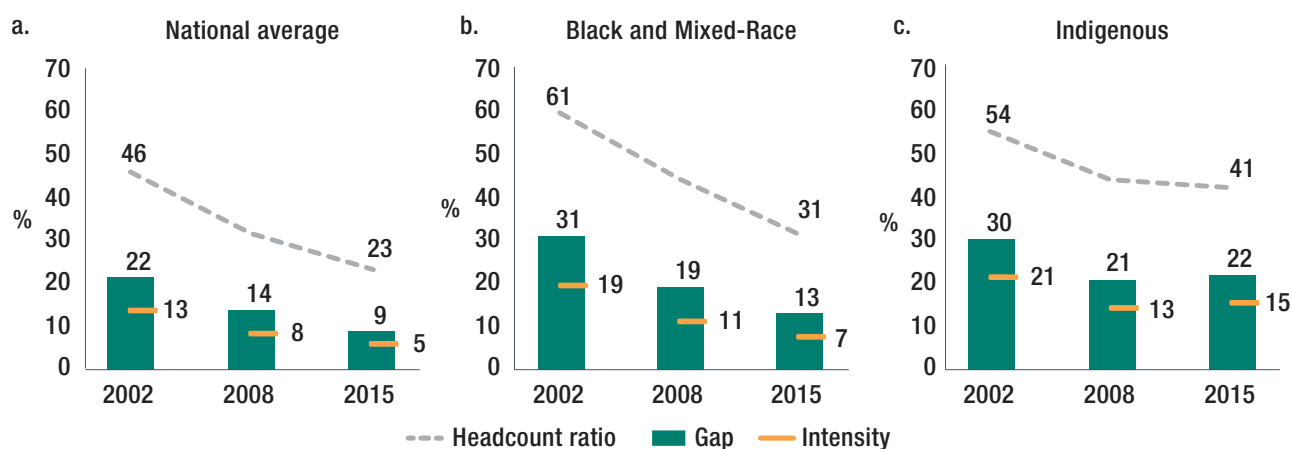
decline was particularly pronounced for Black and Mixed-Race people when measured by the poverty gap and intensity. All three measures show that, although this population still had above-average poverty in 2015, the gap with the population average had narrowed. For Indigenous people, the poverty headcount, gap and intensity declined between 2002 and 2008, while changes between 2008 and 2015 were not statistically significant. Interestingly, in 2002 the poverty headcount among the Black and Mixed-Race population was higher than the headcount for the Indigenous population, but the intensity of poverty was lower. In other words, while a smaller share of Indigenous people lived in poverty, the poorest were poorer, on average, than Afro-Brazilians.

3.1.3 A focus on multidimensional poverty

Under SDG 1, each country is encouraged to develop its own multidimensional poverty measure to monitor progress in reducing poverty ‘in all its dimensions’ (indicator 1.2.2). This section profiles left-behind groups using the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) based on the Alkire-Foster methodology (Alkire and

33 In particular: 1) the FGT1 and FGT2 measures permit statistical disaggregation of the incomes of people beneath the poverty line owing to the larger samples that result from the higher poverty line; and 2) the intensity measure can be applied consistently across monetary and multidimensional poverty; the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) is a version of this intensity approach for multidimensional poverty.

Figure 4 Poverty gaps and intensity for national average, Black and Mixed-Race and Indigenous populations in Brazil, 2002–2015



Note: Brazil PNAD has a large sample size (380,000, 387,000 and 355,000 respondents respectively in 2002, 2008 and 2015). The share of Black and Mixed-Race respondents is sizeable, constituting 50%, 54% and 57% of the successive surveys. The number of Indigenous respondents is smaller but sufficient for statistical analysis; they numbered 822, 1,212 and 1,632 respondents in 2002, 2008 and 2015 respectively.
Source: Author computation of PNAD data.

Foster, 2011; Alkire et al., 2015; see Box 3). The ‘global MPI’ is a composite measure of acute deprivations in living standards, health and education at the household level (Alkire and Santos, 2014; Alkire et al., 2020).

Using the MPI, we contrast trends among regions in Nepal and Nigeria over a five-year period.³⁴ In Nepal, the MPI fell from 0.207 in 2011 to 0.130 in 2016, an 8.9% relative annual reduction, and the share of MPI poor people fell from 43% to 30%. In contrast, Nigeria’s MPI fell from 0.287 in 2013 to 0.254 in 2018, a 2.4% relative annual reduction, and the headcount fell slightly, from 51% to 46%. Falling rates of poverty can hide the impact of growing populations: in fact, Nigeria’s small reduction in the MPI headcount resulted in a rise in the absolute number of MPI poor, from 88 million in 2013 to 91 million in 2018. In Nepal, by contrast, the absolute number of MPI poor people fell from 12 million to eight million over an equal period. In summary, Nepal is showing rapid MPI poverty

reduction, while Nigeria is reducing poverty much more slowly, and at a pace insufficient to keep up with its population rise.

Beneath these national trends, we consider regional variations within both countries. This analysis shows that Nepal not only experienced rapid poverty reduction, but also did this inclusively: the poorest regions, including the Far and Mid-West, achieved faster poverty reduction, and the gap between the poorest regions and the rest of the country narrowed (Figure 5a). In Nigeria, any poverty reduction occurred only in the least poor regions, so that the gap between these regions and the others widened (Figure 5b). In short, regions in Nepal are moving towards convergence, while in Nigeria the most populous and poorest regions are diverging from the rest.

As noted, the MPI combines the poverty headcount and the intensity of poverty among the poor. As with monetary poverty, changes in the intensity of poverty provide an indication of the circumstances of the poorest, and whether

³⁴ We follow a similar methodology to Alkire et al. (2017) using 2020 data from PI table 6 ‘Changes over Time (incl. subnational, rural/urban and age disaggregation)’, available at: <https://ophi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Table-6-Change-over-Time-2020-vs2.xlsx>. For Nigeria, OPHI publishes MPI figures for all 31 states. We group these into larger regions and compute the MPI as a state-weighted average using their MPI headcount. Brazil’s PNAD survey does not provide data on nutrition, so it is not included in the OPHI MPI figures.

Box 3 The UNDP/OPHI Multidimensional Poverty Index

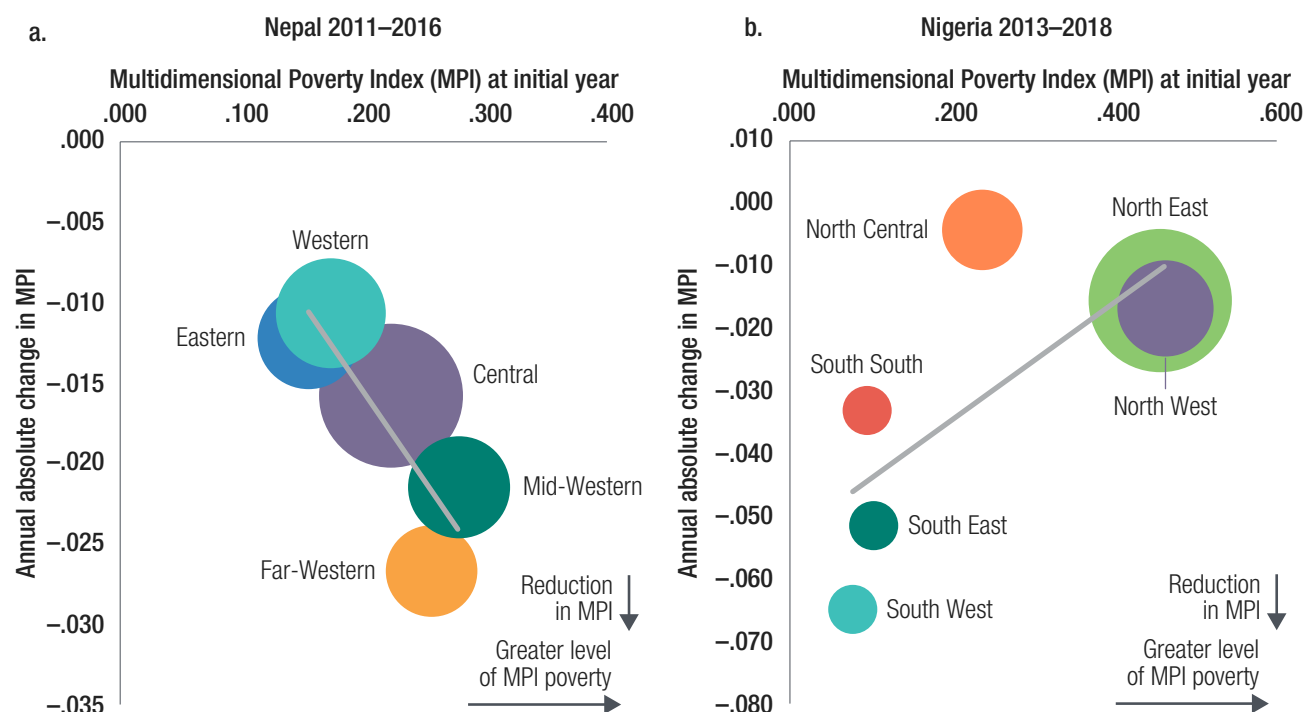
The MPI measures the joint deprivations experienced by individuals simultaneously. It is the product of the poverty headcount – the proportion of people within a population identified as poor based on the multiple deprivations they experience, adjusted by the intensity of that poverty – i.e. the average proportion of deprivations they experience. The MPI provides a summary indicator of how many people and which groups are poorest within a society, and how that poverty is changing. It can be decomposed by indicator and dimension and for sub-groups within a population, to show what share of poverty each contributes (and changes over time).

The global MPI consists of 10 indicators that are widely available in internationally comparable household surveys, grouped into three equally weighted dimensions: education, health and living standards.ⁱ A person is identified as MPI poor if they are deprived in at least one-third of the (weighted) indicators. This indicator has been computed for over 100 LICs and MICs and is presented annually in UNDP's Human Development Reports.

Source: Alkire et al. (2020)

- i The MPI includes data on education access (school attendance) for children and years of schooling for adults. The SDG framework includes both access and learning, but multi-topic household surveys do not yet include information on both.

Figure 5 Multidimensional poverty reduction by regions in Nepal and Nigeria



Note: The size of the bubble is proportional to the number of poor people in the first year of the comparison. For Nigeria, OPHI published the MPI figures for all 31 states in Nigeria. We group these into larger regions and compute the MPI figures as a weighted average across states using their MPI headcount.

Source: OPHI/UNDP (2020). We have made some adaptations and produce comparable graphs using a similar approach to Alkire et al. (2017)

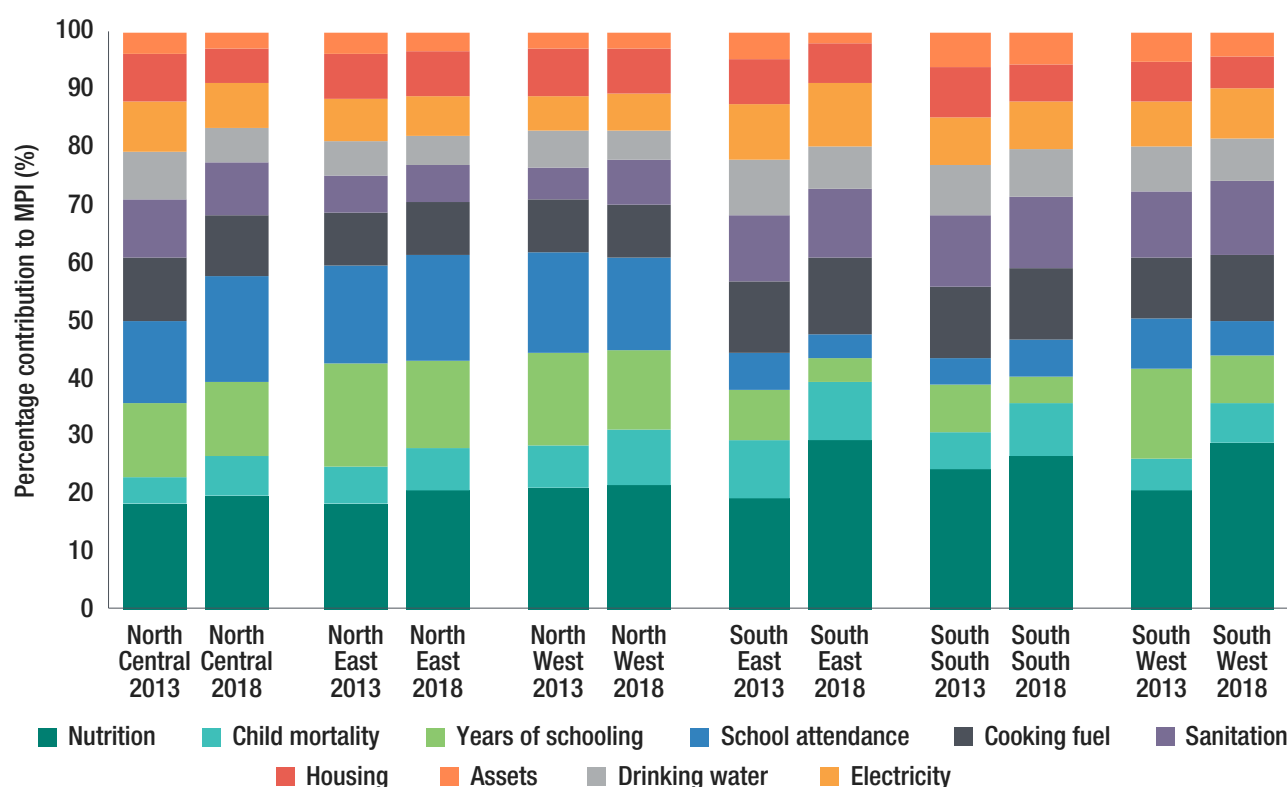
some were left behind (Box 4). In Nepal, the most intense poverty was observed in the Central region, where poor people experienced, on average, 49% of the weighted dimensions in 2011, a proportion that fell to 45% in 2016. Far-Western and Eastern regions had a similar intensity of poverty in 2011, 47% of the weighted dimensions, but respective poverty headcounts of 54% and 37%. By 2016, poverty headcounts in these two regions had converged (reaching 30% and 28% respectively), while poverty intensity had fallen to 41% and 43% respectively. In other words, although multidimensional poverty reduction was relatively inclusive in Nepal, the populations experiencing more intense multidimensional poverty, especially in the Central and Eastern regions, were being ‘left behind’.

Breaking down the MPI by dimensions enables us to assess the type of deprivations affecting the poor in different regions, and the specific areas that require policy intervention. For example, in Nigeria deprivations in education

contribute more to MPI poverty in the North, while deprivations in living standards contribute more in the southern regions (Figure 6). Child mortality has increased its contribution in all regions, while deprivations in years of schooling are falling in the southern regions.

Multidimensional poverty can be recalibrated by changing the thresholds of its constituent indicators to reflect the circumstances of the poorest people within a society, or ‘destitute’ people, in MPI terminology (Alkire et al., 2014). Repeating our analysis for Nepal and Nigeria using this measure shows similar national differences to the MPI. In Nepal, the destitution headcount fell from 19.3% in 2011 to 8.5% in 2016 (an annualised relative change of 15%). This drop is faster than the MPI fall over the same period, indicating a narrowing gap between the poorest and the rest of the population. This difference was not seen in Nigeria, partly because the country reduced multidimensional poverty less in this period.³⁵

Figure 6 Multidimensional Poverty Index dimensional decomposition, Nepal 2013–2018



Note: MPI, Multidimensional Poverty Index. For Nigeria, OPHI published the MPI figures for all 31 states. We group these into larger regions and compute the MPI as a weighted average across states using their MPI headcount.

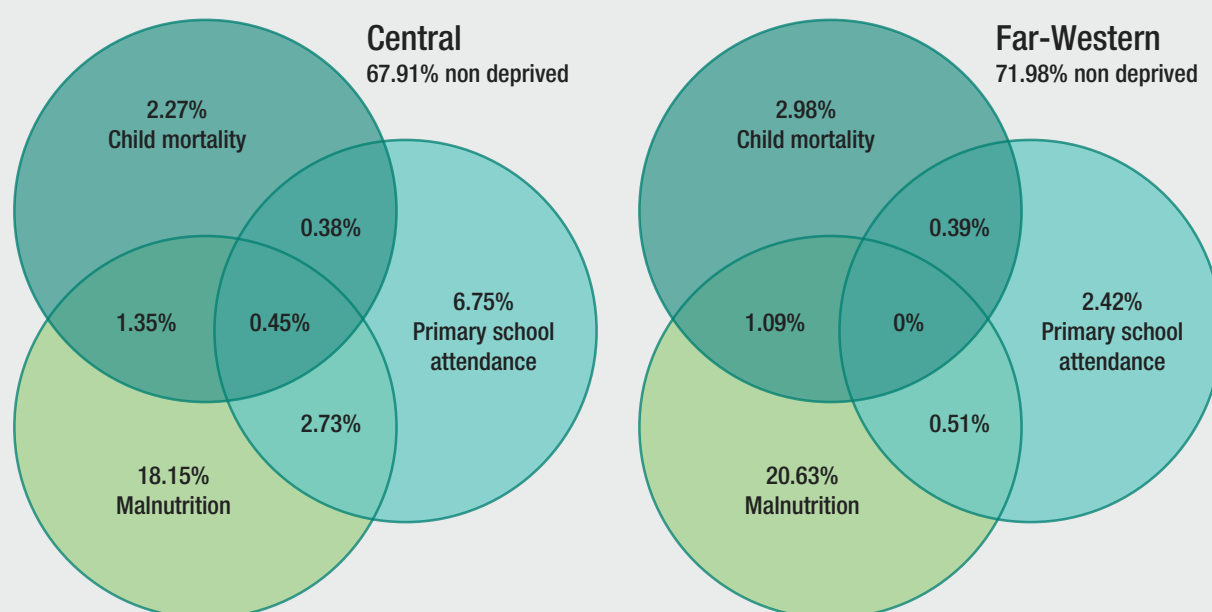
Source: OPHI/UNDP (2020).

³⁵ Results of these and other non-reported analysis can be obtained from jomaroche@gmail.com.

Box 4 Overlapping deprivations and the intensity of poverty

Poverty reduction may result from improvements in the living conditions of poor people who are deprived in only a few dimensions, leaving behind those experiencing multiple deprivations at once. We illustrate this possibility by comparing the joint distribution of deprivations in child mortality, malnutrition and primary school attendance in the Central and Far-Western regions of Nepal. Under a ‘union’ approach that adds deprivations across the three dimensions, the regions had fairly similar headcounts: 32% in the Central region and 28% in the Far-Western region. However, the joint distribution is quite different. In the Central region, about 5% are deprived in at least two dimensions simultaneously, compared with only 2% in the Far-Western region. In other words, the poor in the Central region experienced a higher intensity of poverty.

Overlapping deprivations among the Hill Dalit and Terai Dalit in Nepal, 2016



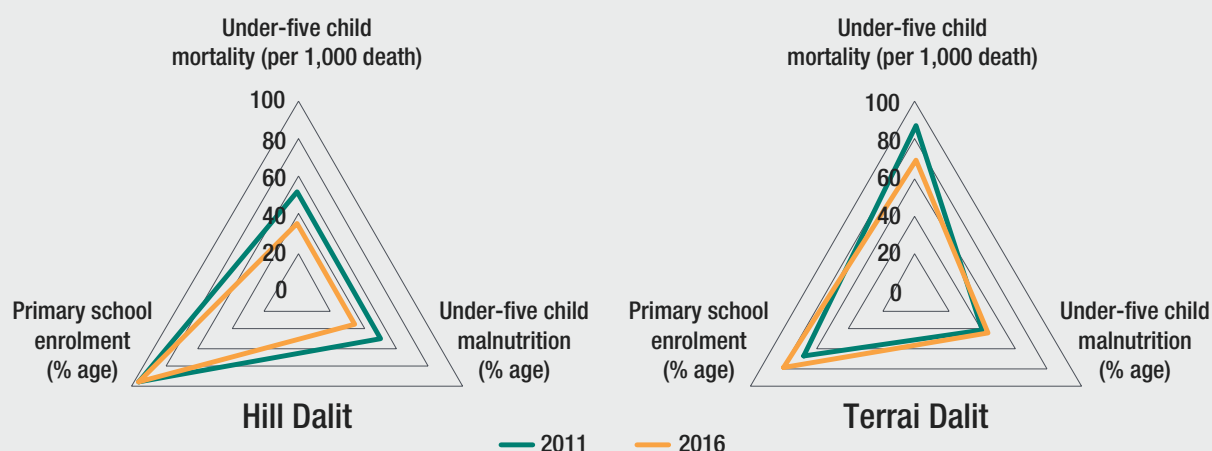
Note: The graph shows the percentage of people living in households that have experienced under-five child mortality in the last five years, that have a malnourished child, and/or where children of primary school age are not attending school. Source: Author computation of DHS data.

Spider web diagrams are an alternative data visualisation technique as they can include three or more dimensions and multiple points in time, and are easy to interpret. In the figure below, these provide information regarding the three indicators considered above. Spider web diagrams are less demanding than Venn diagrams, so can also compile data from various data sources and triangulate across profiles as they do not show the joint distribution of deprivations.ⁱ

i For example, the DHS does not provide information on learning outcomes among children, which is one of the SDG indicators for education. This information is provided by other data sources.

Box 4 Overlapping deprivations and the intensity of poverty (continued)

A dashboard approach to depicting multiple deprivations among Hill Dalit and Terrai Dalit in Nepal, 2011 and 2016



Source: Author computation of DHS data.

3.2 Inequalities in nutrition and health (SDG2 and SDG3)

On occasions, policy-makers will opt for an LNOB approach focused on a specific dimension. For example, assessing the impact of health policies or the performance of a health system is likely to require understanding differential progress in outcomes linked to SDG3. In addition, an LNOB assessment in different dimensions of well-being may yield insights into the causes of deprivation and how these vary by outcome, with implications for the design and targeting of policy.

Our LNOB profiles proceed with some illustrations based on levels of child malnutrition (stunting) and child survival (under-five mortality) in Nepal and Nigeria, and trends over time. Again, we identify disadvantaged groups and measure: 1) whether they are progressing (measured by mean levels of deprivation for each group); 2) their rate of progress relative to the average; and 3) whether the absolute gap between the most disadvantaged and the average is closing.

In analysing non-monetary deprivations, we take a further step to understand better how outcomes correlate with household levels of economic resources. This is important in crafting

more effective policy, for at least two reasons. First, stunting and child mortality are individual-level variables, whereas measures of monetary welfare are typically based on household income or consumption, translated into per capita terms. Therefore, understanding variation in stunting and child mortality within economically similar households can provide insights into intra-household resource allocation and the extent to which incomes translate into service access, and place-based health risks that may affect poor and non-poor households alike (Brown et al., 2017). Second, targeted policies are often allocated based on household economic characteristics – e.g. income or proxy means tests. Understanding the effectiveness of such policies in tackling non-monetary deprivations requires knowing the extent to which household-level variables correlate with non-monetary deprivations.

The disconnect between income and non-income measures can be sizeable, notably for women and children. For example, across 30 sub-Saharan African countries, Brown et al. (2017) find that around three-quarters of underweight women and undernourished children were not found in the poorest quintile of households, while about half were not found in the poorest two quintiles. They conclude: ‘To reach undernourished women and children,

policy interventions will require either much more individualized information or broader coverage than policies finely targeted to poor households’.

3.2.1 Being left behind: convergence and divergence

Between 2006 and 2016, stunting prevalence in Nepal fell by 13 percentage points, from 49% to 36%. In contrast in Nigeria, following a small reduction between 2008 and 2013 (from 41% to 36%), progress stagnated. Overall, over a 10-year period, the reduction in Nigeria averaged 1.1% annually, compared to 3.1% in Nepal. These contrasting figures notwithstanding, in both countries national averages hide unequal trends – most notably, slower progress among the most disadvantaged groups in Nigeria.

In Nepal, regional differences are evident. The Mountain zone had the highest level of child malnutrition in 2006: 61%, compared to a national average of 49%, a ratio of 1.2. By 2016, child malnutrition in the Mountain zone had fallen to 47%, an average fall of 2.7% a year, while the national average fell to 36%, an average fall of 3.1% a year. As a result, the relative ratio between the Mountain region and the national average increased from 1.2 to 1.3. However, the absolute prevalence of stunting fell, while the

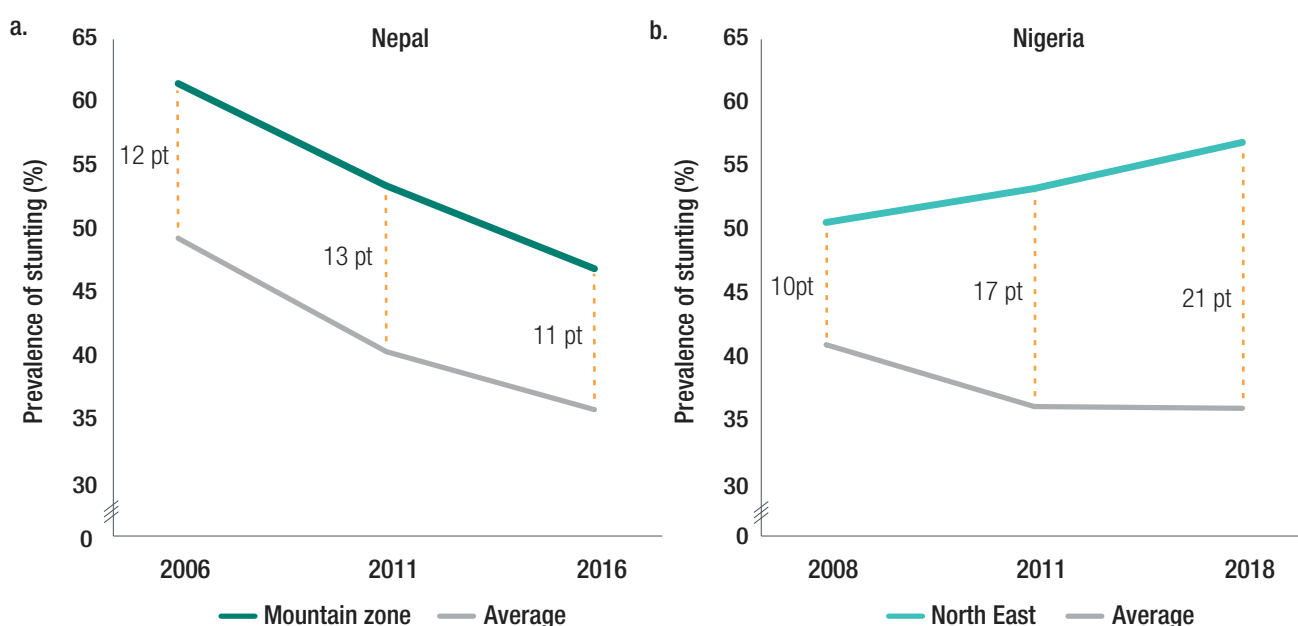
absolute gap between the Mountain zone and the average remained steady over time (Figure 7a).

In Nigeria regional differences widened. In 2008, the North East region had the highest incidence of malnutrition in the country at 51%, 1.3 times greater than the national average. By 2018 the ratio had increased to 1.6 and the prevalence of stunting in the North East region had risen to 57%. The life chances of children in the North East region fell in absolute and relative terms. They have a greater absolute chance of being malnourished compared to the situation in 2008, and are progressing more slowly than the average. The absolute difference between children in the North East and the average is also rising – it was 10 points in 2008 and 21 points in 2018 (Figure 7b).

3.2.2 Stunting by asset index quintiles: trends in Nigeria and Nepal

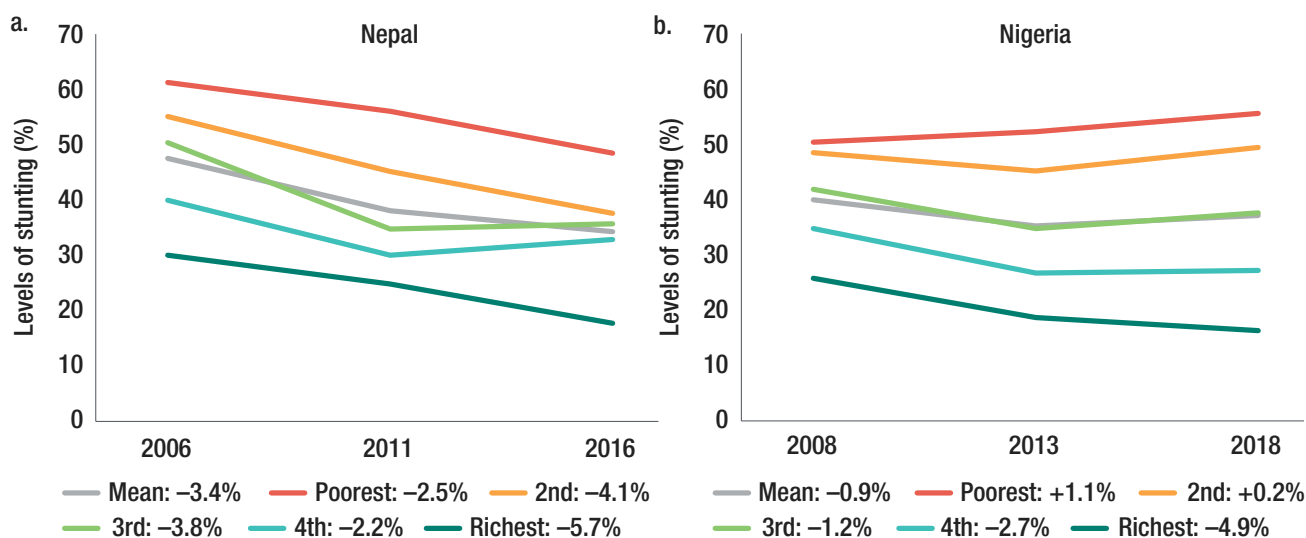
Our earlier analysis of stunting examined differences between population sub-groups compared to the average. We now explore how trends map onto household socio-economic status. In Nepal, children across the distribution are experiencing a decline in stunting, particularly those in households in the second and third wealth quintiles. Children from these

Figure 7 Absolute difference in stunting between most disadvantaged region and the average, Nepal and Nigeria



Source: Author computation of DHS data.

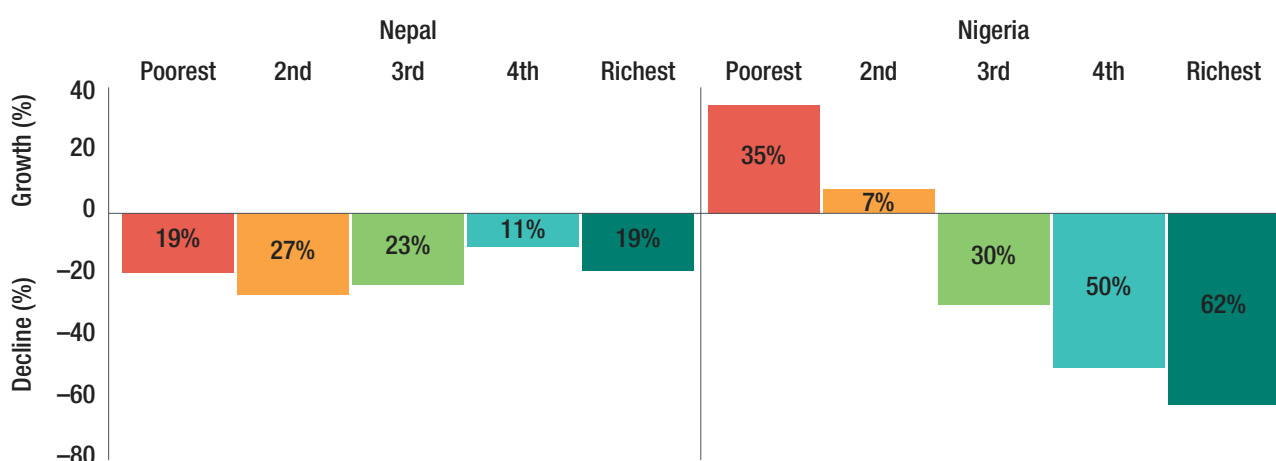
Figure 8 Levels of stunting for each quintile and the national average in Nepal and Nigeria



Note: The figures in the legend indicate the compound rate of change for each quintile over the 10-year period.

Source: Author computation of DHS data.

Figure 9 Percentage contribution of each quintile to average decline in stunting among children over a 10-year period in Nepal and Nigeria



Source: Author computation of DHS data.

households caught up with households in the top two quintiles in absolute terms (respectively, their levels of child malnutrition fell by 17 and 14 points, compared with declines of seven and 12 points for the two richest quintiles). However, in relative terms, they were outpaced by households in the top quintile. Again, based on lower initial levels, stunting declined at 5.7% a year, a much higher rate of reduction than for any other quintile (Figure 8).

In Nigeria, in contrast, stunting appears to be rising among children at the bottom of the distribution, while declining in its upper reaches. The stunting rate among children in the poorest quintile rose from 50% to 55%.³⁶ The absolute difference between the top and bottom quintile in 2008 was 25 points, whereas by 2018 it had grown to 39 points, driven by absolute declines among the poorest quintile and absolute increases among the richest.

³⁶ Changes for the second quintile were not statistically significant over the decade: stunting fell three points in the first period (from 48% in 2008 to 45% in 2013), then climbed four points in the second period (to 49% in 2018).

This demonstrates an inherent characteristic of LNOB: that a focus on ‘the poorest’ does not necessarily consider what is happening to the richest, and growing inequalities in life chances between the top and bottom of the distribution. In Nepal, the gap between poor and average, and between poor and rich, remained relatively unchanged, because the poor reduced stunting at least as well as the average. In Nigeria, inequality between socioeconomic quintiles widened over the period.

Another way to represent changes in stunting in the two countries is to apportion overall national-level change by the contribution that each quintile group makes to it (Figure 9). If each quintile were contributing equally, its contribution to change would be 20%. This presentation of the data makes clear that Nepal’s decrease in stunting overall was based more heavily in the second and third quintiles, that the fourth quintile contributed least, and that the richest and poorest quintiles made equal contributions. In Nigeria, a decomposition of the modest overall decline is very clearly skewed because the prevalence of stunting actually increased in the poorest two quintiles, while the third, fourth and richest quintile groups had monotonically rising contributions to the decline.

3.2.3 Relative inequality in life chances

We now look more widely at changes in inequality in life chances for disadvantaged groups within the population, focusing on the relative ratio of the bottom to the national average for a range of social and economic groups. We first examine changes in the relative ratio in Nepal and Nigeria for groups with above-average child malnutrition (Figure 10). The diagonal line shows the points along which the relative ratio between both years remain unchanged. Groups above the line moved further away from the national average, while those below are converging. Most of the ‘poorest’ groups in both countries diverged from the national average, either because they are progressing more slowly or because malnutrition is increasing at a faster pace. In other words, the relative gap in life chances is increasing.

In Nigeria, the most disadvantaged children are in households in the poorest quintile, those living in the North West region and/or Hausa people. In 2018, children in each of these groups were about 1.5 times as likely to be malnourished as the national average, up from about 1.25 in 2008. Moreover, in all three groups the incidence of child malnutrition increased in absolute terms. This finding affirms a wealth of literature documenting marked horizontal inequality in Nigeria, with ethnic minorities from the north of the country particularly lagging

Figure 10 Changes in child malnutrition relative ratio by group in Nepal and Nigeria



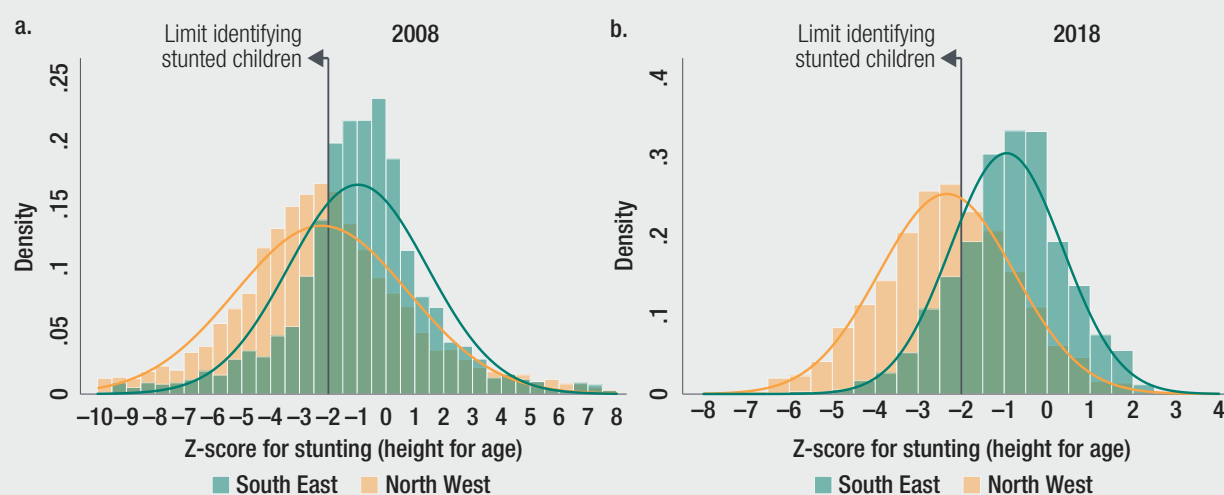
Note: Diagonal line represents no change in relative ratio, dots above the line increased relative ratio and dots below the line reduced the relative ratio.

Source: Author computation of DHS data.

Box 5 Monitoring group disparities throughout a distribution

The monitoring of group disparities can be enhanced by looking beyond group averages to compare the entire distribution of a characteristic. We demonstrate the difference this makes by considering the distribution of height-for-age in two regions of Nigeria, and how this changed between 2008 and 2018. The curves clearly overlap, but the most deprived region (the North West) is skewed towards the left, while the most advantaged region (the South East) is skewed towards the right. The vertical line indicates the stunting threshold (less than 2 standard deviations). In 2008, in the South East, the incidence of stunting is lower than in the North West (23% compared to 51%), and inequality widened thereafter. The incidence of stunting decreased from 23% to 18% in the South East, while it rose from 51% to 57% in the North West. While one distribution shifted to the right, the other moved to the left. Children in the North West were clearly left behind.

Distribution of stunting between the South East and North West regions of Nigeria, 2008 and 2018



Note: Y-axis values denote the probability density function for the kernel density estimation (probability per unit of the stunting score).

Source: Author computation of DHS data.

(Langer and Stewart, 2015; Lynch et al., 2016; Archibong, 2018; Uzochukwu et al., 2020).

In Nepal, fewer groups are diverging from the average: children in households in the poorest wealth quintile, those living in the Mountain Zone, and Terai Dalit. Two disadvantaged groups are closing the gap: children in the second-poorest quintile and Muslims. The contrast with Nigeria is clear – and is echoed in the broader literature on group-based inequalities in Nepal which, depending on the group and indicator, shows both progress (Mehata et al., 2017; Acharya et al., 2019) and regression (Angdembe et al., 2019, Nepali et al., 2019, Conway et al., 2020).

3.2.4 Inequality in life chances – child mortality

What about child mortality? Nepal and Nigeria both belong to the group of 81 Countdown countries that jointly account for more than 90% of child deaths and 95% of maternal deaths.³⁷ However, the two countries had very different mortality profiles at the start of the period. The under-five mortality rate was 79 deaths per 1,000 live births in Nepal and over twice that in Nigeria, at 171 deaths per 1,000 live births. Over the following 10 years, the mortality rate fell by an average of 5.3% per year in Nepal, compared with 2.8% in Nigeria. As a result, the difference between the countries

37 See www.countdown2030.org/about. The multi-institutional Countdown to 2015 and Countdown to 2030 initiatives have undertaken research and capacity-building aimed at galvanising improvements in maternal, newborn and child health.

grew: by the late 2010s, the under-five mortality rates were 46 and 129 per 1,000 live births for Nepal and Nigeria, respectively.

Examining mortality rates among disadvantaged populations reveals different trends in the two countries. Nepal shows much less dispersion in sub-national child mortality rates than Nigeria, with both negative and positive stories (Figure 11). Terai Dalit people stand out as an under-performing group given practically invariant levels of child mortality. Accordingly, a Terai Dalit child had a nearly equal chance of survival as the average Nepalese child in 2006, but was 1.8 times less likely to survive their fifth birthday in 2016. In contrast, the Hill Dalit people experienced above-average progress – a 7% annualised average reduction, compared to the 5.3% national average. This meant that the relative ratio for this group fell from 1.2 to parity over the 10-year period.

Children in the Far Western region and the poorest quintile also experienced below-average progress. In 2006, a child from the Far West was 1.3 times less likely to survive their fifth birthday than the average, a gap that increased to 1.5 by the end of the period. In contrast, in the Mountain zone and Mid-Western region, rapid progress was accompanied by greater equality in life chances. In 2006, a child from the Mid-Western region was 1.5 times less likely to

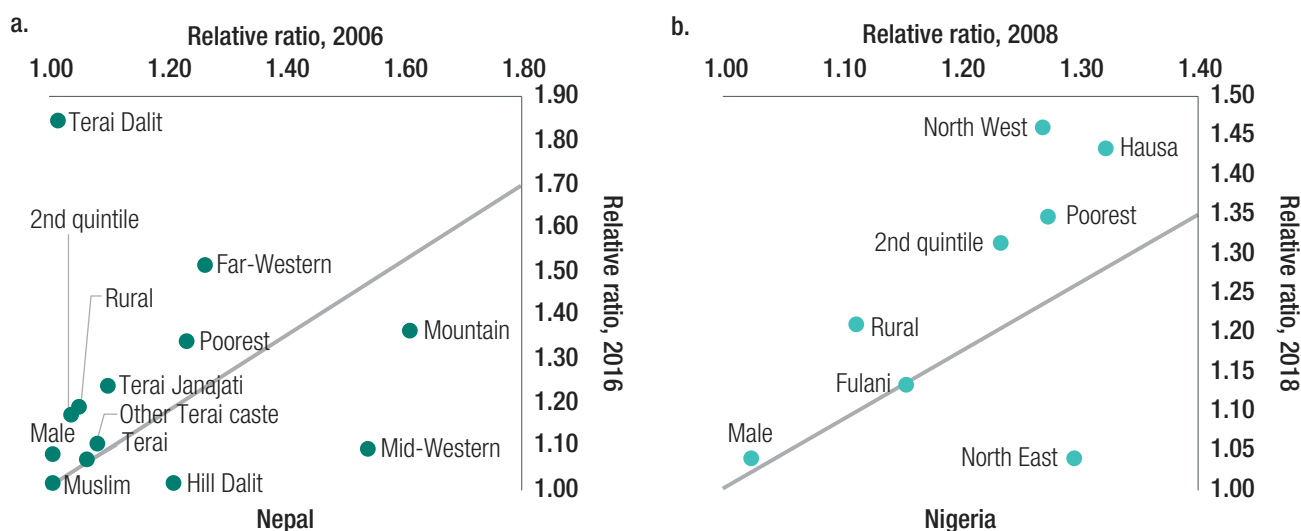
survive their fifth birthday than the average, a gap that disappeared by 2016.

Nigeria shows a contrasting pattern where the most deprived groups made slower progress and inequality in life chances widened (see Box 5). Consider the North West region and Hausa ethnic group, which experienced the highest child mortality, 217 and 227 per 1,000 live births, respectively. Mortality reduced by 1.5% yearly in the North West and 2% yearly among the Hausa, compared to the 2.8% national average. As a result, the relative ratio climbed from 1.27 to 1.46 for the North West, and from 1.32 to 1.43 for Hausa. The bottom two quintiles also experienced below-average progress. The positive story is that the North East region made fast progress, closing the gap in life chances. The North East had a child mortality rate of 222 per 1,000 live births in 2008, but progressed at an average rate of 4.9% annually. As a result, the relative ratio with the national average closed from 1.3 to nearly parity by the end of the period.

3.3 Intersecting inequalities in education (SDG4)

We consider next inequalities in education. SDG4 emphasises the reduction in gender inequalities in education, while also stating clearly the ambition to reduce inequalities affecting other vulnerable

Figure 11 Changes in the relative ratio of child mortality between disadvantaged population groups and the average in Nepal and Nigeria



Note: Diagonal line represents no change in relative ratio. Dots above the line increased relative ratio. Dots below the line reduced relative ratio.

Source: Author computation of DHS data.

groups (e.g. poor children, children with disabilities, geographically remote populations, PWDs, Indigenous communities, populations affected by conflict). Second, as discussed in Chapter 2, target 4.5 moves beyond an exclusive focus on how the bottom of the distribution compares to the national average to consider explicitly disparities between the worst-off and best-off groups. Moreover, SDG4 moves beyond service coverage (enrolment, attendance or school completion) to also assess the quality of education or minimum expected learning outcomes. This section illustrates the meaning of these emphases for monitoring the LNOB commitment.

We first examine changes in gender inequality with data from Nigeria and Nepal; in both countries, the attainment of boys and girls converges over the 10-year period. We then show variation in quality education across economic groups or geographies in these countries, emphasising how quality matters to an LNOB-centred analysis. So far, we have considered inequalities associated with membership of individual groups; we now examine how group-based inequalities may overlap in ways that multiply disadvantage. Finally, we show how simple multivariate analysis can help to disentangle the overlapping effects of multiple group identities. Decomposition analysis helps to identify the share of educational attainment

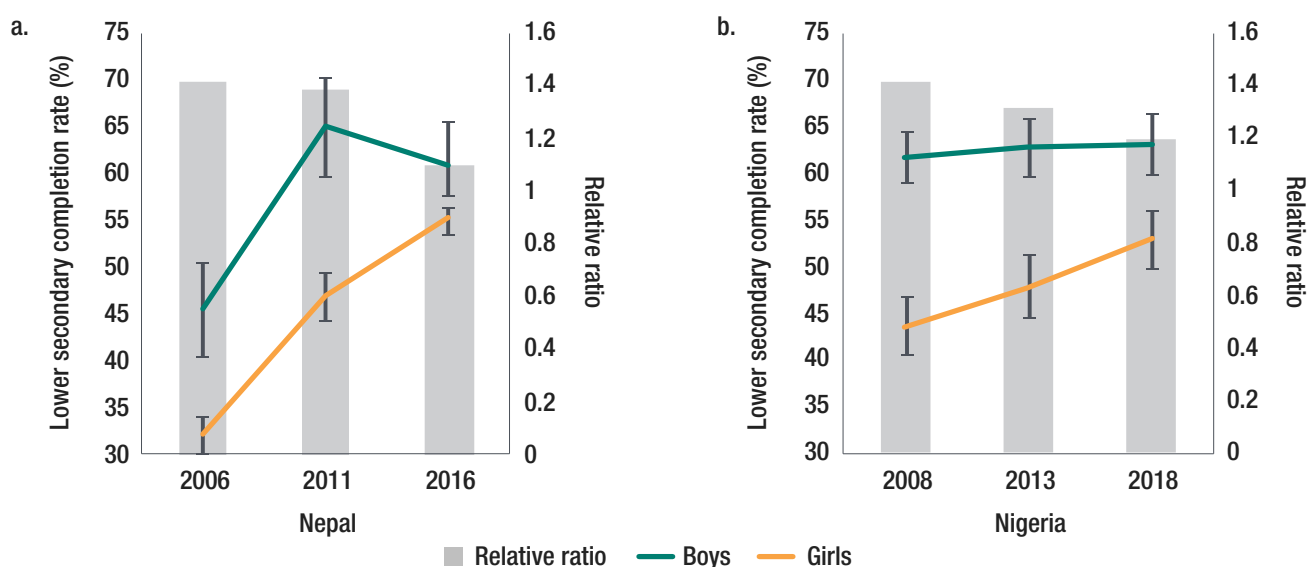
that can be attributed to changes in observable group-based differences such as gender, race and ethnicity, and which inequalities are more and less important in explaining changes in outcomes. We interrogate how different aspects of group identity interact and their cumulative effect using the Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition.

3.3.1 Educational attainment and gender inequality

Indicator 4.5.1 refers to parity indices for the top/bottom of the distribution on all indicators in SDG4. This is similar to the approach used in Section 3.2 for child mortality and nutrition, but instead of computing the relative ratio between the most disadvantaged groups and the national average, we compute it between the least and most advantaged groups: e.g. girls/boys, bottom/top wealth quintile, urban/rural zone and other relevant pairings. We use this disparate approach both to conform to the spirit of the targets within each SDG goal area, and to illustrate the two methods.

We first consider gender inequality in Nepal and Nigeria. Nepal shows rapid progress: primary school completion rose 15 percentage points over the 2006/16 period, to reach 88% in 2016, while lower secondary completion rose 20 points to 57% (Figure 12a). The gender gap closed for both primary and lower secondary completion:

Figure 12 Lower secondary completion by gender in Nepal and Nigeria



Source: Author computation of DHS data.

for the latter by more than half, from 13 points in 2006 to six points in 2016.³⁸ In 2006, boys were 1.4 times more likely to complete lower secondary education, a ratio that reached near-parity by 2016.³⁹ In contrast, primary and lower secondary school completion stagnated in Nigeria between 2008 and 2018, except for girls in lower secondary school, among whom it rose from 44% to 53% (Figure 12b).⁴⁰ Here too, the gender gap in lower secondary completion narrowed. Boys were over 1.4 times more likely to complete secondary education in 2008, a ratio that declined to less than 1.2 in 2018.

Gender is, of course, just one category associated with disparate educational outcomes in some countries; indeed, while gender parity has been reached worldwide in pre-primary through secondary education enrolment, significant gaps remain.⁴¹ Alongside gender, numerous other factors condition outcomes and merit this type of analysis – including parents' education, household geographical location, socio-economic status, ethnic or racial identity and/or religion.

3.3.2 Differential access to good-quality education

SDG4 is also innovative in its focus on the quality of education and learning outcomes. Indeed, completing primary or even secondary

education may mean little if quality is poor. A core problem is that quality is often sacrificed when coverage is expanded. Quality of education may differ among more and less privileged groups. In this section, we explore this issue in Nepal and Nigeria.

An additional point to stress is the possibility of using data that is available in new ways to provide additional insights into who is being left behind; in this case, following Pritchett and Sandefur (2020), we use DHS data on schooling attainment and literacy to give some insights into the quality of education, in the absence of more sophisticated measures of learning outcomes.⁴² Again, we argue that a lack of data is not a sufficient reason to postpone analysis and action on this important agenda.

Presently, indicators of school quality remain extremely limited, especially for LICs and LMICs. Learning outcomes are measured principally through national school assessments or household-based learning assessments (such as UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey or the citizen-led initiatives that comprise the PAL Network).⁴³ We proxy education quality using the primary school completion rate, adjusted for whether respondents who have completed this level of schooling can read a short sentence. The picture varies across

38 The increases in female primary and lower-secondary completion are statistically significant at a 95% significance level.

39 The increases in male primary and lower-secondary completion are statistically significant at a 95% level. By 2016, the gender gap in lower secondary completion was no longer statistically significant.

40 Nigeria has a high primary completion rate, above 90% for boys and about 87% for girls. The small fluctuations over the whole period are not statistically significant. The quality of education also varies significantly compared with Nepal: after adjusting the 2018 completion rate by whether children were able to read short sentences, primary school completion decreases to less than 70% for both girls and boys.

41 For example, according to UNESCO (2020: 256), 'in one-quarter of low-income countries, for every 100 males, fewer than 87 females are enrolled in primary education and fewer than 60 in upper secondary, at which level only 25% of countries have achieved parity'.

42 Important initiatives are seeking to produce comparative data on learning outcomes. UNESCO's 2013/2014 Global Monitoring Report initially used the DHS direct assessment to study literacy among young women across West Africa, but did not combine this indicator with completion rates. The World Inequality Database of Education (WIDE) from UNESCO provides a set of indicators on learning achievements disaggregated by population sub-groups, but only for countries that are part of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). UNESCO and the World Bank have produced a dataset harmonising scores from major international and regional testing programmes as part of the Human Capital Project (HCP), but this data is not disaggregated by population sub-group.

43 <https://palnetwork.org/what-we-do/>.

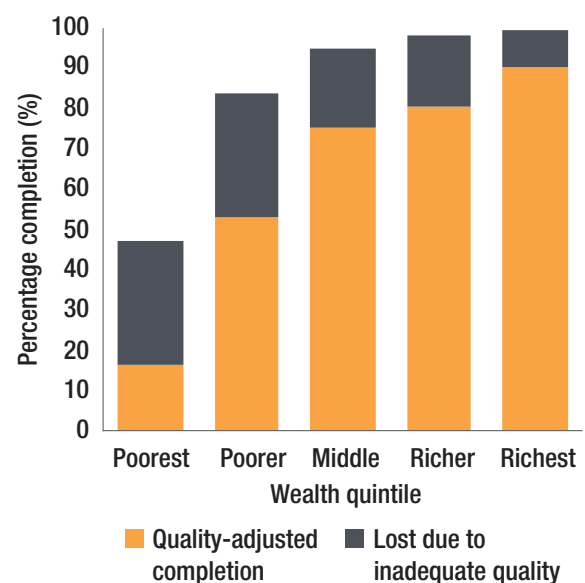
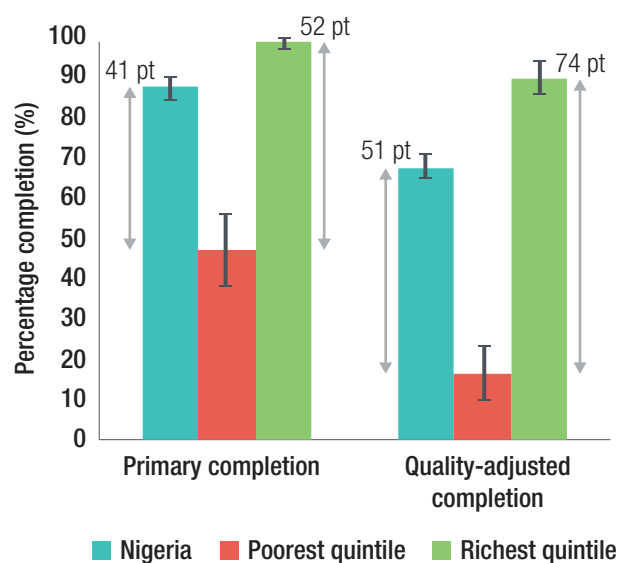
countries, highlighting wide disparities in educational quality, which reproduce inequalities in opportunities and life chances.

In Nigeria (2018), the average primary completion rate drops 20 points after adjusting by quality, from 88% to 68%. The adjustment is larger for households in the poorest quintile than for those in the top quintile (Figure 13a). In the poorest quintile, primary completion drops by 31 points, from 47% to 17%, while

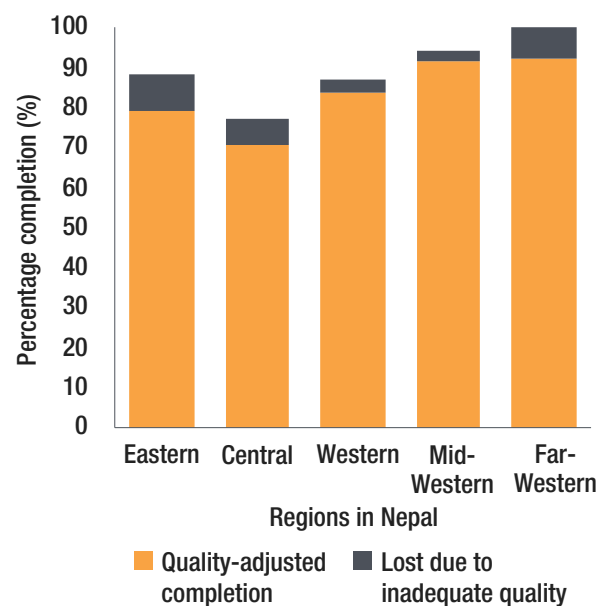
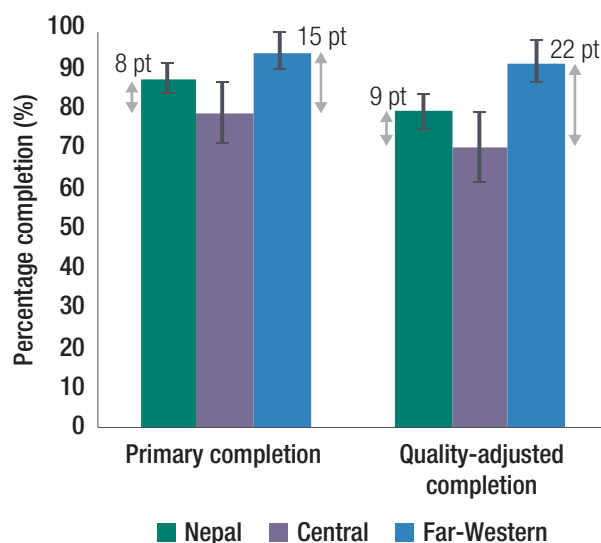
for households in the richest quintile, it falls only nine percentage points, from 99% to 90%. As a result, inequality among wealth quintiles increases once education quality is accounted for: the gap between the poorest and richest wealth quintile climbs from 52 percentage points to 74. Expressed in terms of the parity index, children from the richest quintile are more than twice as likely to complete primary school than those from the poorest quintile; after adjusting

Figure 13 Differential access to good-quality education

a. Nigeria



b. Nepal



Source: Author computation of DHS data.

the data for quality, the parity index increases to 5.4. The comparison against the national average is also striking. The poor were 1.9 times less likely to complete primary school before the adjustment, and 4.1 times less likely afterwards. In short, disparities in the quality of education are exacerbating inequalities in coverage between economic groups.

The situation in Nepal is different in that the adjustment for quality has much smaller effects (Figure 13b). The national primary completion rate declines only eight points, from 88% to 80%, post-adjustment. Inequality increases slightly between the most advantaged Far-Western region and the most disadvantaged Central region, from 15 points to 22 points, and the parity index increased slightly, from 1.2 to 1.3. In short, the quality of education is higher in Nepal than Nigeria, and it exhibits less group-based inequality in this indicator.

3.3.3 Intersectionality in education

As discussed in Chapter 2, accumulating evidence suggests that group-based inequalities may overlap in ways that multiply disadvantage for left-behind groups. For example, Lenhardt and Samman (2015) show that not only do factors such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and rural residence contribute to inequalities in educational and health outcomes for women in 16 LICs and MICs, but that each intersection of these characteristics also contributes to unequal outcomes. In Ghana in 2008, they find that the average woman had six years of education compared with less than one year for the poorest women from the Gruma ethnic group. More broadly, UNESCO's World Inequality Database on Education (WIDE) presents a comprehensive mapping of inequalities in education indicators relating to wealth, gender, ethnicity and location, and combinations thereof.⁴⁴

In Nigeria, economic status, geography and gender jointly shape average years of schooling in 2008 and 2018 (Figure 14). People from the North West region have fewer years of

schooling than those from the South South (or Niger Delta) region, but this geographical difference is much less pronounced among the rich. Gender inequality is also higher in the North West, especially among people from the top quintile.

The positive story is that gender gaps fell between 2008 and 2018. This was especially pronounced in the poorest quintile in the South South region, where the parity ratio fell from 1.5 to 1.2, but also evident in the top quintile in the North West, where it fell from 1.3 to 1.2. In contrast, the gender gap among the poorest in the North West increased slightly. However, perhaps more notable is the persistence of inequality between households in the richest and the poorest quintiles, and between the two regions.

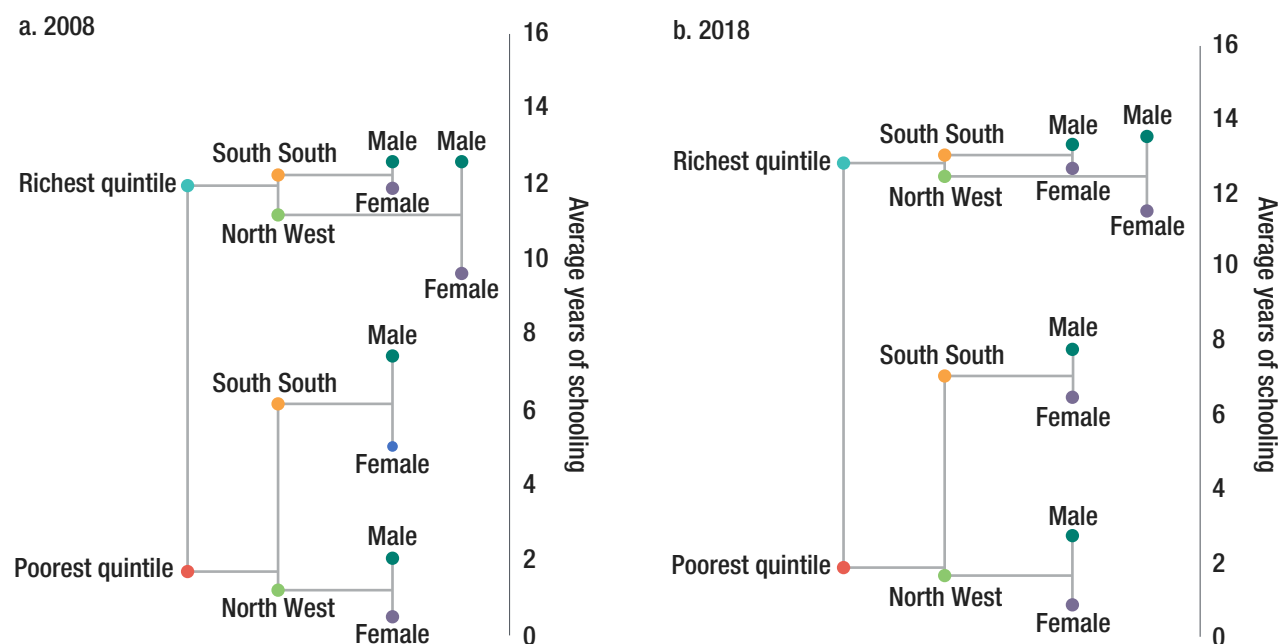
For illustrative purposes, the previous analysis only displays two regions and two quintiles in Nigeria. The diagrams would of course become much more complex if further groups – and interactions between them – were included, and small sample sizes would become problematic (Box 6).⁴⁵ A different approach to assessing the extent to which group membership and intersections among them matter is to use multivariate statistical analysis.

A signal benefit of multivariate analysis is that it addresses the high correlation or overlaps between group affiliations (for example, in Nigeria most people of the Igbo ethnicity live in the South East region, while Hausa live in the North, making it difficult to disentangle how ethnicity and region separately influence well-being). The problem is that simple arithmetic differences can overstate the effect of each individual difference if there is a large effect from correlation. This means that policy-makers may want to know the 'net effect' from differences by category to help design programmes and fund them efficiently. Hence, any assessment of 'net differences' between categories should assess how far they overlap as well as differ (intersectionality), to increase disadvantage.

44 www.education-inequalities.org/.

45 Kabeer and Santos (2017) provide detailed analysis on intersectionality for Brazil through a series of tables and graphs focusing on the intersections that matter most.

Figure 14 Intersecting inequality in education, Nigeria, 2008 and 2018



Note: Sample sizes become smaller when computing intersections. We conducted t-tests to assess gender disparities in each year and differences over time. Gender disparities were all statistically significant at 99% level, except among the richest quintile in South South and the poorest quintile in 2018 (for whom it is significant only at 97.5% level). Changes in gender inequality are significant at 99% level for people from the poorest quintile in North West (where the gender gap increased), and significant at the 97% level among households in the richest quintile in North West (where the gender gap declined). Differences are significant for the poorest quintile in South South (where the gender gap declined) at only an 87% level. There is practically no gender inequality among the richest quintile in South South region; differences are only significant at a 70% level.

Source: Author computation of DHS data.

Box 6 Issues with small samples in LNOB analysis

A commitment to data disaggregation underpins the LNOB agenda, given wide disparities within countries that national averages hide. However, the number of respondents in household surveys belonging to particular subpopulations may be small – e.g. where the interest is in identifying the experience of overlapping disadvantages (see Box 4) and/or challenges that typically affect relatively few people, such as living with a disability.

The statistical analysis of data for small groups can pose technical challenges. The more data is disaggregated to consider small population groups, the less precise the resulting estimates will be. It is good practice to report standard error and confidence intervals to ascertain the level of uncertainty associated with various estimations. More importantly, it is advisable to conduct hypothesis tests to evaluate the statistical significance of any observed differences.

3.3.4 Within and between group inequality

How can we assess how much inequality is attributable to differences between groups in the population? Some inequality measures decompose inequality into ‘within-group’ and ‘between-group’ components. We use the

Theil index (Theil, 1967; Cowell, 2003; Foster et al., 2013) to demonstrate how to identify the proportion of inequality attributable to differences between groups in Brazil, and how these have changed between 2002 and 2015. It should be noted from the outset that policy

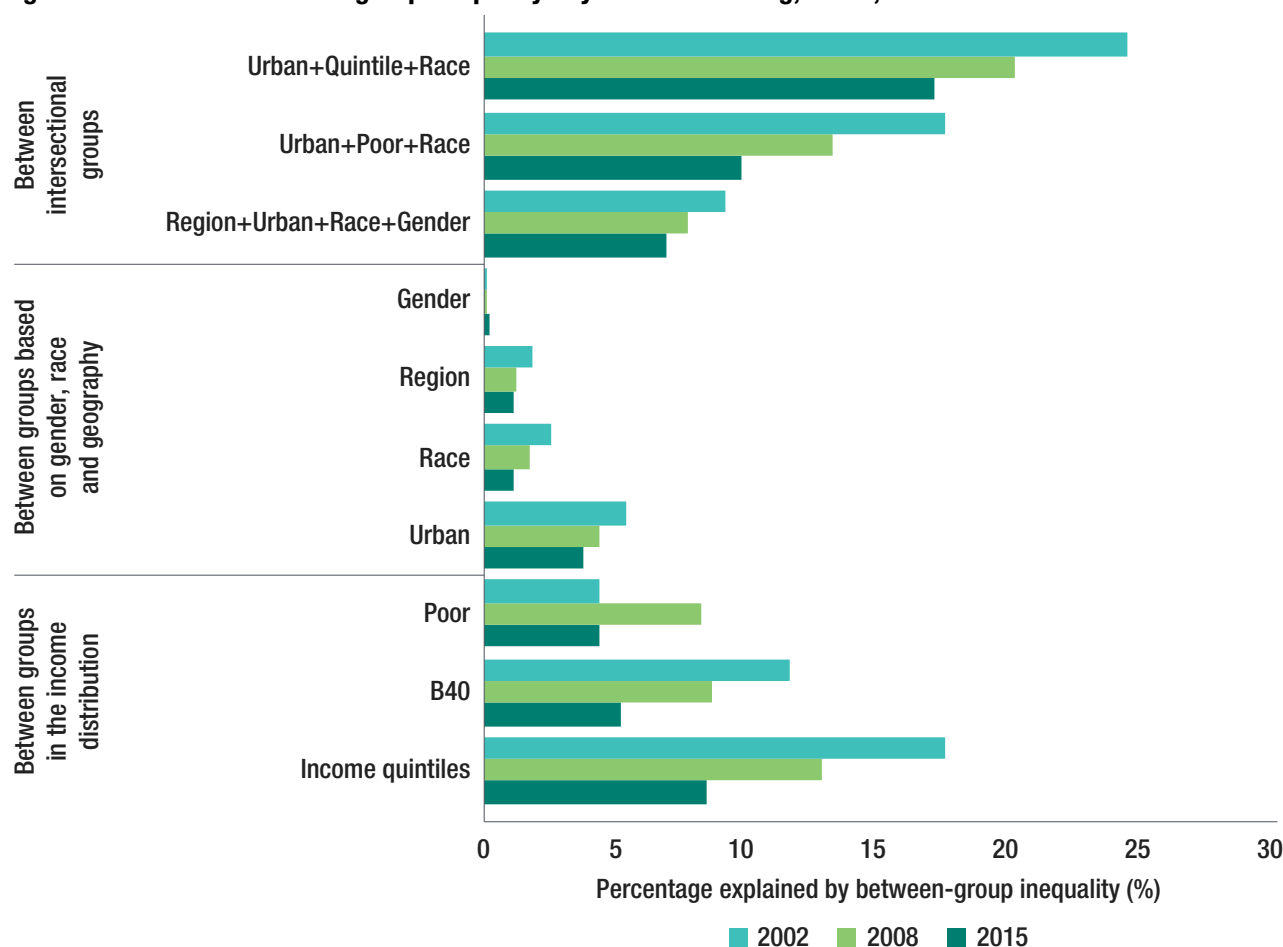
should respond not only to the degree of inequality between and within groups, but also to the social weight accorded to each; between-group inequality may be a higher priority for this reason, even if it is a small share of the total (Kanbur, 2006).

Between-group inequality is in part a function of how many groups there are – it tends to be higher where the number of groups is larger. In Brazil, differences between income groups (quintiles and poor-non poor) accounted for relatively more inequality than difference between groups defined by race or geography (Figure 15). At one extreme, between-group inequality across income quintiles accounted for 17.5% of total inequality in 2002; at the other, differences between men and women accounted for less than 1% of the total. Where inequality is considered jointly across two or more groups, the share of inequality accounted for by

between-group difference rises. At most, 25% of the index is explained by between-group inequality (in 2002, when analysing the joint effects of urban/rural, quintiles and race). The joint effect of gender, race and geography, in contrast, accounted for 9% of overall inequality in 2002, and 7% in 2015.

The Theil index indicates a reduction in inequality in years of schooling (it was 0.146 in 2002, 0.127 in 2008 and 0.104 in 2015). Moreover, the share of inequality attributable to differences between groups fell for all groups and time periods with the sole exception of differences between poor and non-poor people between 2002 and 2008, during which period the poor were left behind with respect to schooling. Inequality between groups defined by race, region and urban/rural zones also declined at a lower rate than inequality between income groups, but from lower initial levels.

Figure 15 Share of between-group inequality in years of schooling, Brazil, 2002–2015



Note: B40, bottom 40%. The analysis is based on decomposition of the Theil generalised entropy inequality measure. Decomposition analyses are computed separately for each variable or combination of variables.
Source: Author computation of DHS data.

3.3.5 Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition

The ability to decompose inequality between groups can be extended to consider how group-based inequalities interact with vertical inequalities (e.g. for the poor or by quintile group). Such a decomposition can help policy-makers determine the weight that needs to be given to programmes targeted in different ways to respond to inequalities. This approach to decomposing differences between groups and over time can help. Decomposition exercises enable assessment of which factors contribute to inequality in income, health or education, and the extent of their contributions. The aim is to identify the factors that generate the inequality while controlling for overlapping factors – such as race, geography and poverty. The Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition (Blinder, 1973; Oaxaca, 1973) is helpful in studying group inequality (e.g. Finn and Leibbrandt, 2018; Oh, 2019; Vu and Yamada, 2018) because it can assess the net effect of group membership (independent of other or overlapping groups) and control for other drivers of difference, such as poverty. In this way it is possible to decompose factors that lie across vertical and horizontal differences in group-based inequality. This regression-based technique breaks down the difference (in the mean averages of a dependent variable, typically wages or incomes) between groups into two parts: the contribution of differences from group characteristics, often referred to as ‘endowment effect’, and the difference in the unexplained factors associated with those characteristics, referred to as the ‘coefficient effect’. The difference in returns is unobserved and could reflect unequal service access and/or discrimination (Baulch et al., 2009).

We adopt this method to show its value in assessing changes over time, focusing on years of schooling in Brazil. The model decomposes differences between 2002 and 2015, showing how much of the difference in attainment can be explained by group characteristics (gender, urban/rural zone, region, race, ethnicity or poverty status). In the absence of group-based

inequality, the only difference will be the change in average years of schooling over time independently of group characteristics (Box 7).⁴⁶

What did we find? Mean years of schooling improved by 1.6 years, from 6.4 in 2002 to 8.3 in 2015. Nearly one-quarter (23%) of this difference can be explained by changes in group inequality. Improvements among income-poor

Box 7 The Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition

In its traditional form, the Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition explains the change in the gap in an outcome variable (in our case, average years of education) between two or more groups (e.g. poor and non-poor, females and males). This change is attributed either to group differences in the magnitudes of variables associated with the outcome, or group differences in the effects of the associated variables. An ‘unexplained’ component contains the contribution of those factors not included in the model, and the change in the outcome of interest independently of group characteristics.

Our model explains instead changes in average years of education between 2002 and 2015 where group affiliations are the independent variables associated with the outcome. So, we explain how much of the overall change is due to changes in the magnitude of a particular group, or changes in the effect of the group.

We use a two-fold model that distributes the variance of the interaction term between the explained and unexplained component. We restrict years of education to the lower secondary level (11 years) to focus on individuals situated nearer the bottom of the distribution, and our analysis to the 20 to 49 age group, to capture more recent experiences of education.

⁴⁶ Note this is not a traditional application of the Blinder-Oaxaca method. It is more common to decompose wages or income between two groups (i.e. men and women), given a set of endowments. We consider multiple groups and their intersections (to identify the relative risk of being left behind) and assess changes over time.

people made the greatest contribution (Figure 16, ‘Group characteristics’ column). Indeed, their average years of schooling increased by 1.8, from 5.2 to 7.0, an average annual improvement of 2.3%, compared to 1.6% for Brazil as a whole. The second part of the graph (‘Coefficient’ column) indicates the unobserved effect associated with each characteristic on years of schooling. It shows that the higher income resulting from increased years of education for poor people grows in importance over time.

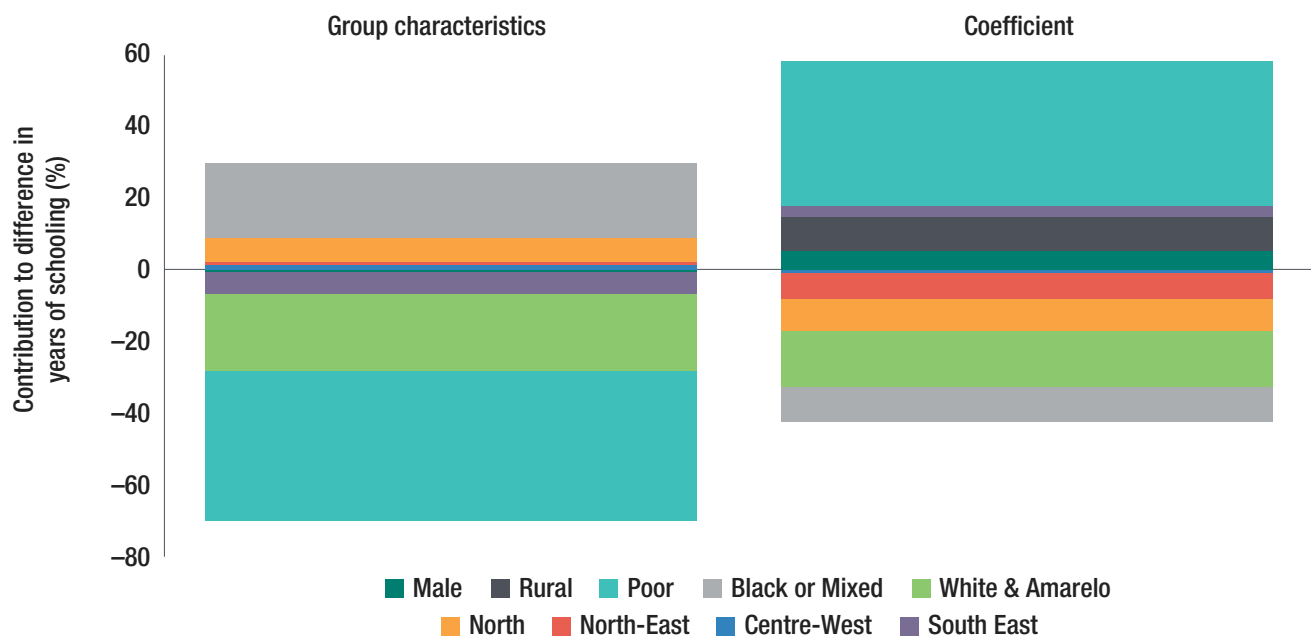
The second largest contributor to changes over time is race (relative to white and Amarelo). We know that race and poverty overlap considerably – 15% of the white and Amarelo population were poor in 2015, compared with 31% of the Black and Mixed-Race population – as do race and geography. The Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition considers then the multivariate effect. Still, a large proportion is explained by race. Indeed, the Black and Mixed-Race population improved at a relative annual rate of 2.2%, compared to 1.3% for the white and Amarelo population. As a result, the gap between these two groups fell from 1.26 to 1.13 over the 13-year period.

The third largest contributor is geographical region (relative to the South). Again, region of residence and poverty correlate highly; the North

East and North have poverty headcounts of 42% and 38%, compared to less than 15% in all other regions. There is also a racial geographical distinction: more than 70% of the population in the North and North East are Black or Mixed-Race, while 80% of the population in the South are white. The decomposition indicates that improvements in years of schooling across regions contributes less to overall improvement than progress among the poor or racial groups. The gap between the most and least deprived regions fell from 1.28 in 2002 to 1.16 in 2015.

So how does this analysis contribute to our understanding? Policy-makers will want to know how much inequality is attributable to group-based difference, the extent to which this share changes over time, and whether any changes are attributable to shifting group membership and/or the gains related to those memberships. Having this information could help to highlight policy drivers and priorities – for example, changes in returns to lower-income workers may result from a declining skills premium, as has been the case in Latin America over the last decade, and/or a minimum wage policy. Understanding better whether and how poverty and race and ethnicity contribute *independently and jointly* to outcomes could therefore inform

Figure 16 Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition changes in years of schooling, Brazil 2002/2015



Source: Author computation of DHS data.

the design and targeting of remedial policy and help clearly evaluate policies that address general and group-based disadvantage.

3.4 How group-based disadvantage is reflected in access to services and their quality

How can inequalities in treatment by services be assessed? Access to services is a necessary but insufficient guarantee of a reduction in inequalities between groups. This final section explores how absolute and relative disadvantage are reflected in both service access and quality. Service access may not translate into the expected outcomes (i.e. health clinic attendance and reduced child mortality), either because of quality deficits, discrimination at the point of service and/or other forms of structural discrimination (e.g. children from poor households will have a higher mortality risk if they are stunted, even if

exposed to the same health interventions as rich households). Information on interventions alone – e.g. skilled birth attendance or immunisation – therefore provides only partial information on whether people are being left behind. This section seeks to better understand group-based inequalities in access to various health services, how these changed over time and how they map onto inequalities in child mortality.

We focus on inequalities in child mortality and on interventions intended to reduce their incidence in Nepal (see Box 8). A recent analysis of child health inequalities in 88 Countdown and non-Countdown countries between 2000 and 2014 pointed to several stylised facts:

1. Children in the poorest households were three times as likely to die before age five than those in the richest households, a trend that worsened in most countries over the MDG period.

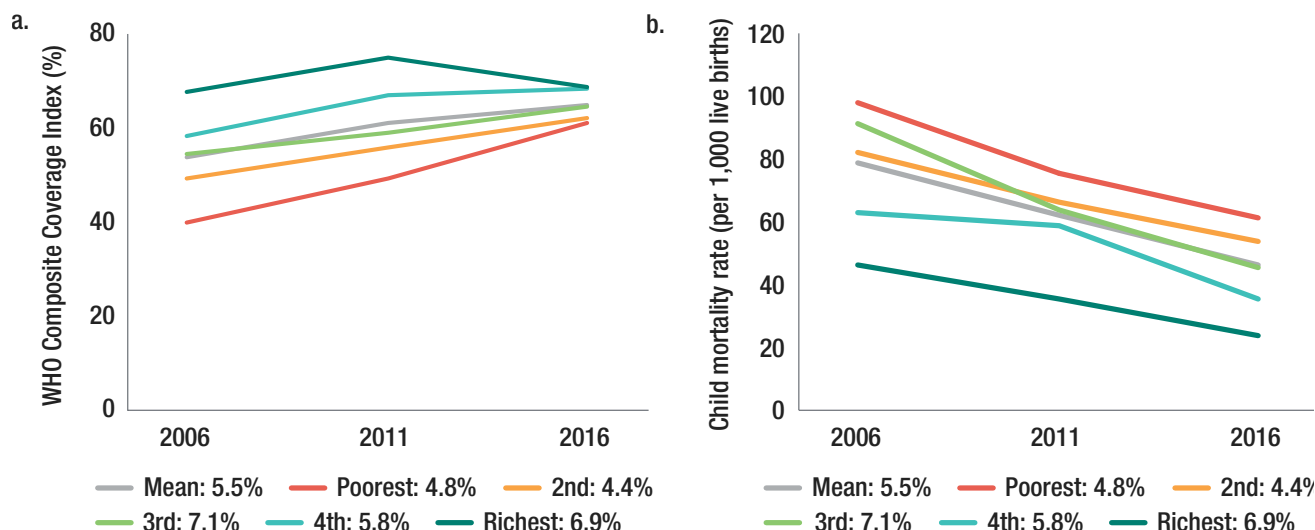
Box 8 Measuring disparities in service access: the Composite Coverage Index and concentration index

Interventions indicator: WHO's Composite Coverage Index (CCI) (Wehrmeister et al., 2016) is 'the weighted average of the percentage coverage of eight interventions along four stages of the continuum of care: reproductive care; maternal care; childhood immunization; and management of childhood illness'. The interventions are: (1) family planning coverage (SDG 3.7.1); (2) skilled birth attendant (3.2.1); (3) at least one antenatal care visit by a skilled provider (3.8.1); (4) bacille Calmette–Guérin (BCG) vaccination (3.b.1); (5) three diphtheria–tetanus–pertussis (DTP3) vaccinations (3.b.1); (6) measles vaccination (3.b.1); (7) oral rehydration therapy for infant diarrhea (proxy for 3.8.1); and (8) care-seeking for childhood pneumonia (3.8.1).ⁱ

Concentration index: This measures the extent to which health outcomes or interventions differ by individuals' socio-economic status; it is generated from a concentration curve, similar to Lorenz curves in inequality analysis, plotting the cumulative proportion of the health variable (e.g. child mortality) against the cumulative proportion of the population ranked by wealth (Kakwani et al., 1997; Li et al., 2017). The measure is analogous to the Gini coefficient except that individuals are ranked by the household's score on the wealth index, rather than by the health indicator (Wagstaff et al., 2014: 142). The index ranges from minus 100 to 100 with zero representing perfect equality. For negative indicators (e.g. child mortality), a higher negative value indicates that poor health outcomes are more prevalent among the poor; for positive indicators (e.g. the CCI), a higher value suggests more inequality.

ⁱ The CCI is designed to cover four intervention areas with different service delivery strategies: contraception, antenatal and delivery care, child immunisation and case management for common child illnesses (Wehrmeister et al., 2016). Analysing the distribution of these individual indicators would also be a useful exercise for targeting efforts to address any particular weaknesses, but this is beyond the scope of this report.

Figure 17 Trends in Nepal by quintile for Composite Coverage Index and child mortality rate, 2006–2016



Source: Author computation of CCI from WHO Global Health Observatory database and child mortality from DHS.

- Although child health and the coverage of interventions improved for almost all wealth quintiles, progress in reducing child health inequalities differs greatly by country.
- The deterioration in inequality among socio-economic groups was ‘heavily concentrated’ in Countdown countries (Li et al., 2017).

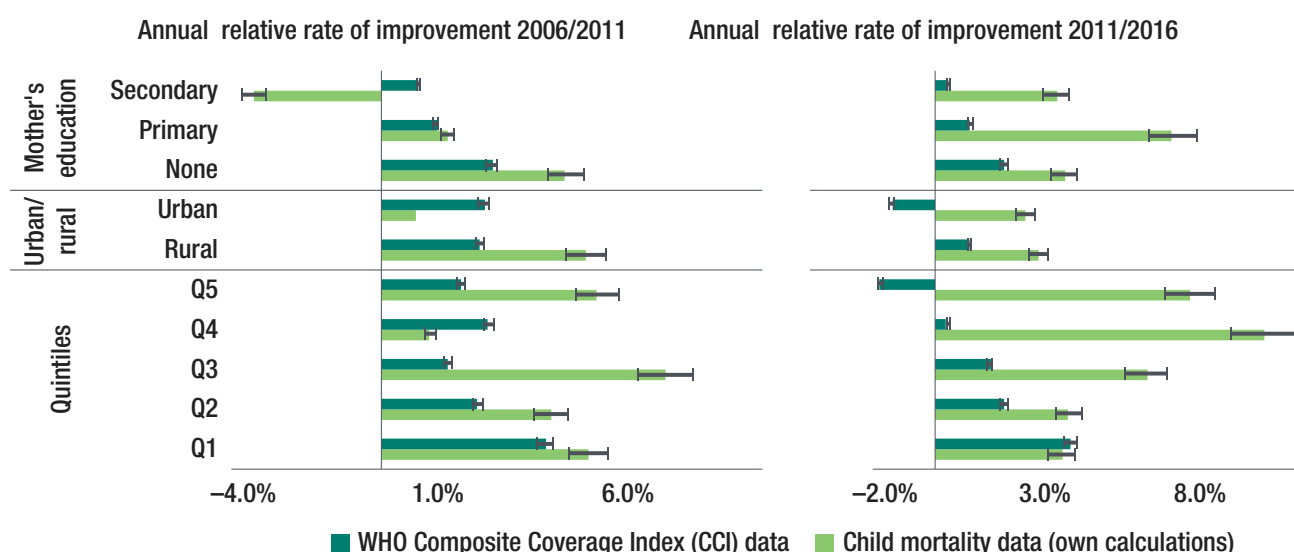
We explore trends by wealth quintile, given that ‘socioeconomic status is an essential factor associated with child health’ (ibid.). Indeed, Countdown analysis indicates: ‘child health interventions tend to reach the wealthiest children first in the absence of policy instruments for addressing inequality’ (Boerma et al., 2008). In Nepal, the child mortality rate is lower the higher the wealth quintile, and it fell for all wealth quintiles over the period 2006–2016 (Figure 17). The decline in inequality in Nepal bucks the trend for Countdown countries – more than 90% of countries with deteriorating inequality in the coverage of child health outcomes were Countdown countries (Li et al., 2017).

We examine the annual relative rate of improvement in the CCI and in child mortality for a range of social and economic groups (Figure 18). The near-universal improvements in both indicators are notable – with puzzling exceptions that include a rise in child mortality in 2006/2011 among mothers with a secondary education, and in 2011/2016 a decline in the

CCI among the top quintile and urban residents. In Chapter 4, we describe how a huge pro-poor and pro-rural push in health service expansion in Nepal may have compromised the health status of the urban poor. The pattern shown here appears to corroborate that account. The variation in the relative rate of improvement across groups also deserves comment. In the first half of the decade, the increase in the CCI seems to have occurred at an equal rate in urban and rural areas (though presumably, in the latter, from a lower base), and at a higher rate for the poorest quintile compared to the remainder of the population. In the second half of the decade, rural areas seem to have gained relative to urban areas, and the rate of increase across quintiles is highly progressive. However, for improvements in child mortality, between 2006 and 2011 the population with no formal education and rural residents appear to have experienced the largest improvements, as well as (counter-intuitively) those in the third and richest quintile. In the second period, people with a primary education appear to have experienced the greatest relative improvement in child mortality, changes in urban and rural areas were quite similar, and the fourth and fifth quintiles benefitted at a disproportionately high rate.

The concentration indices for both the CCI and under-five mortality show a reduction in inequality among the quintiles over time, reaching

Figure 18 Annual average rate of improvement in the Composite Coverage Index and child mortality in Nepal by social and economic group, 2006/2011 and 2011/2016



Note: Reductions in child mortality are plotted on a positive scale for ready comparison with improvements in the CCI. Confidence intervals are approximated, conservatively assuming 10% error, given that our group CCI estimates are from WHO (rather than computed directly from the microdata).
Source: Author computation of data on the CCI from WHO Global Health Observatory database and child mortality from DHS.

near-parity, especially in CCI (Table 2).⁴⁷ For the CCI, this decline in inequality is also reflected in the ratio of child mortality between the top and bottom wealth quintiles, and between the bottom quintile and the median (in both cases reaching nearly parity). For under-five mortality, the ratios tell a different story. The ratios between the top and bottom wealth quintile, and the median and the bottom, increase over time. This is mostly because the poor were making slower progress than the national average or progress among the rich. It is positive that child mortality was reducing among poor children, but relative inequalities between groups increased.

Tracing progress among the poorest 40% relative to the richest 60% of the population across 64 countries, for the period 1990–2011, Wagstaff et al. (2014) find that relative inequality in the intervention indicators fell, while in nearly half of the countries relative inequalities in outcomes grew.⁴⁸ In addition, in one-quarter of

these countries, the poorest 40% regressed in absolute terms on both the interventions and the outcomes. Wagstaff et al. (ibid.) posit that the disconnect between interventions and outcomes could be due to poorer-quality health care for lower socioeconomic groups or to widening inequalities in health interventions delivered outside the home. We would add to this the possibility that the social gradient in health may mediate between interventions and outcomes.

3.5 Shared prosperity and the incomes of the relatively poor (SDG10)

SDG10 introduces a different perspective to our discussion of LNOB because it is concerned with income growth and income inequality, rather than eliminating deprivation. We focus on the concept of ‘shared prosperity’. This was proposed by the World Bank (2015)

⁴⁷ The index for child mortality in 2011 is very low because of a swap between the second and third quintile.

⁴⁸ Wagstaff et al. (2014) explore inequalities in seven interventions and five outcomes. The interventions are antenatal care (more than four visits), skilled birth attendance, DTP (diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccination), measles vaccination, use of insecticide-treated bednets, condom use in risky intercourse and contraceptive prevalence. The outcomes they explore are under-five mortality, stunting, infant mortality, underweight and HIV.

Table 2 Trends in the Composite Coverage Index and in child mortality in Nepal, 2006–2016

	Composite Coverage Index			Under-five child mortality		
	Concentration Index	Ratio Top–Bottom	Ratio Bottom–Median	Concentration Index	Ratio Top–Bottom	Ratio Bottom–Median
2006	0.0188	1.36	1.70	–0.2583	2.1	1.1
2011	0.0173	1.20	1.53	–0.0154	2.1	1.2
2016	0.0084	1.06	1.13	–0.1455	2.6	1.3

Source: Author computation of data on the CCI from WHO Global Health Observatory database and child mortality from DHS.

and is at the core of SDG target 10.1, which seeks to ensure that the bottom 40% within societies experience income growth ‘at a rate higher than the national average’.⁴⁹ In this discussion, we revisit Brazil to take advantage of the information it offers on income and its distribution. Our analysis considers a broad range of groups.

3.5.1 Shared prosperity and the bottom 40%

In Brazil, as of 2015, the median income among the top 60% of the population was 3.36 times higher than that of the bottom 40% (B40). At least half of B40 are considered poor according to the \$5.50 a day (2011 PPP) poverty line.⁵⁰ In line with the World Bank’s principle of ‘promoting shared prosperity’, we compare growth in the median income of the bottom 40% of the income/consumption distribution with the national average (Figure 19). National incomes grew by 4.8% annually between 2002 and 2015. A first question we pose is how the income of the poorer population (B40) fared relative to the population average – i.e. whether it increased at the same rate, or more quickly or slowly. Figure 19 compares the rate of real (CPI inflation adjusted) household income growth for B40 relative to the national average over the

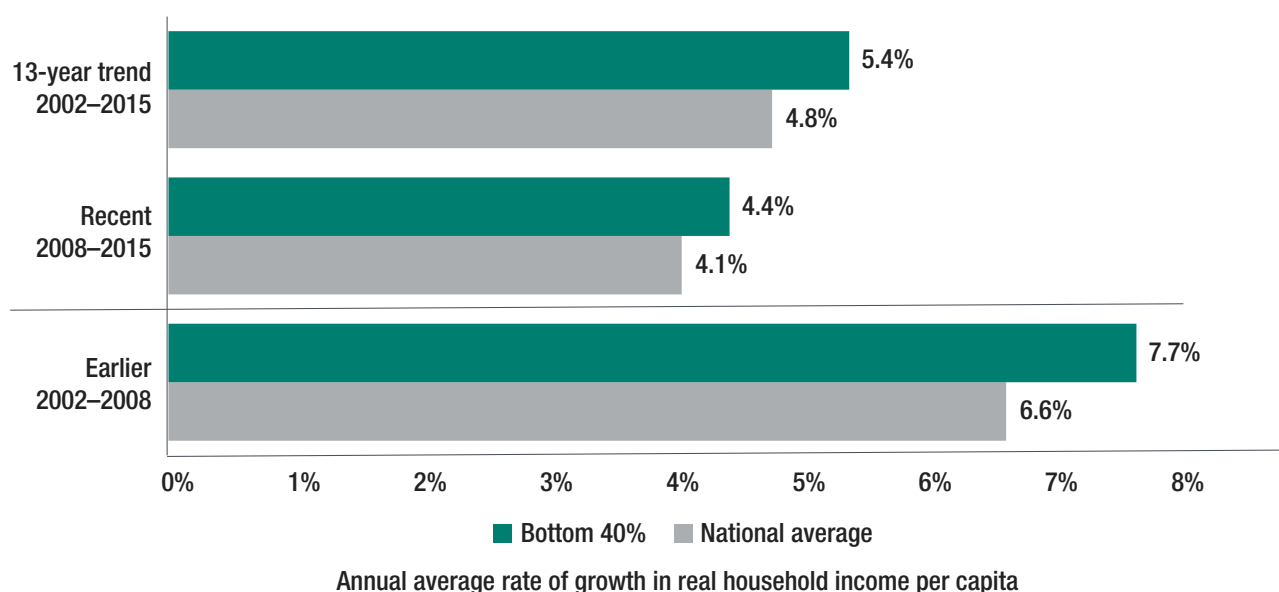
three survey years: 2002, 2008 and 2015. Over the whole 2002–2015 period, the growth rate of B40 income is somewhat higher than the average (5.4% and 4.8% respectively per year). However, the earlier 2002/2008 period saw much higher income growth for the poor compared to the average (7.7% against 6.6%), such that the gap between the poor and the rest of the population narrowed much more quickly during that period, which also had the overall higher rate of real income growth. A period of lower income growth since 2008 has seen the growth rates of B40 and the average equalise. The growth incidence curve confirms that B40 performed above the national median, indicating a solid decline in inequality (Figure 20). This pro-poor growth in the early 2000s accords with the broader evidence on Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva’s presidency from 2003, propelled by its flagship *Fome Zero* (Zero Hunger) policy (e.g. Hall, 2006; Love and Baer, 2009; Neri, 2014). The gains are primarily attributable to minimum wage rises alongside the expansion of social assistance transfers (Lustig et al., 2012; Barrientos, 2013). Evidence indicates a similar equalising pattern in Latin America in the 2013–2018 period, whereby the relative income growth of households at the bottom of the income distribution was in most countries significantly higher than those at the top.⁵¹

49 For antecedents and technical discussions on measuring shared prosperity, see also Ferreira et al. (2018) and Rosenblatt and McGavock (2013).

50 The poverty line of \$5.50 a day (2011 PPP) in 2015 was 360 (local currency), which is just above the limit of the bottom quintile (316.67). The median income of the bottom 40% is 139 (local currency), 38.5% the value of the poverty line.

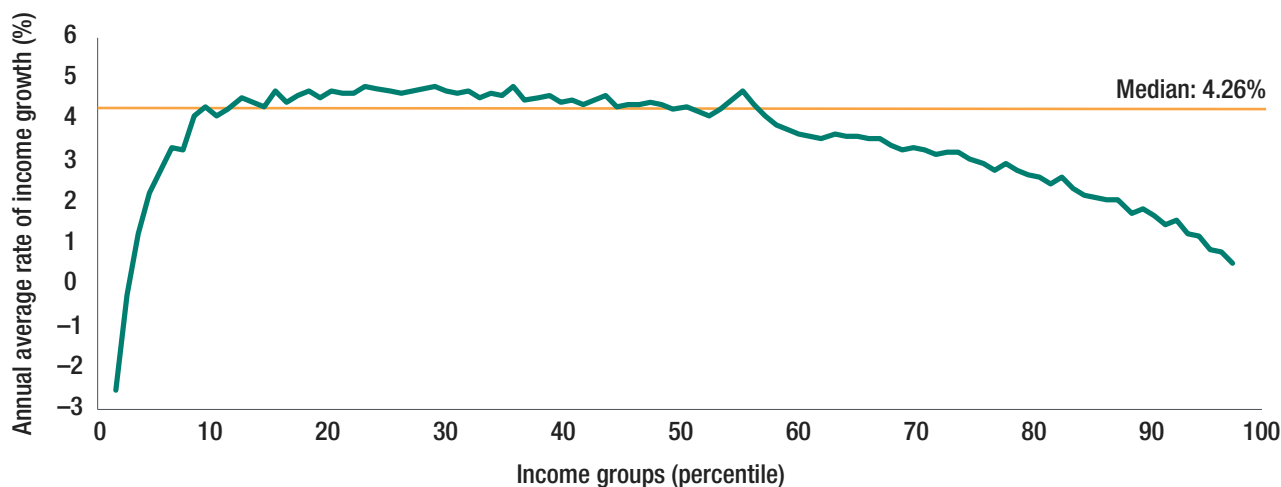
51 See figures from SEDLAC: www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/lac-equity-lab1/economic-growth/growth-incidence-curve.

Figure 19 Annual average rate of income growth of the bottom 40% and the national average in Brazil, 2002–2015



Note: CPI inflation adjusted (CPI = 2002).
Source: Author computation of PNAD data.

Figure 20 Growth Incidence Curve, Brazil, 2002–2015



Note: CPI inflation adjusted (CPI = 2002); 95% winsorisation.
Source: Author computation of PNAD data.

3.6 Group-based income inequality (SDG10)

We see that growth in household incomes has been relatively pro-poor in Brazil. But what lies beneath these aggregates? How have the incomes of a wider range of disadvantaged groups changed relative to the average? What are the absolute gains, and how are they distributed? First, we consider absolute changes between 2002 and 2015. All the groups we identify have

improved in absolute terms in that their real incomes have risen.

The comparison of per capita incomes between 2002 and 2015 for disadvantaged groups suggests a mixed picture (Figure 21; see also Rodríguez Takeuchi and Mariotti 2016; Kabeer and Santos, 2017). Some relatively deprived groups are improving at a faster rate than the national average, in particular people who are in B40, those in rural areas, in the North East region, and those who identify as Black

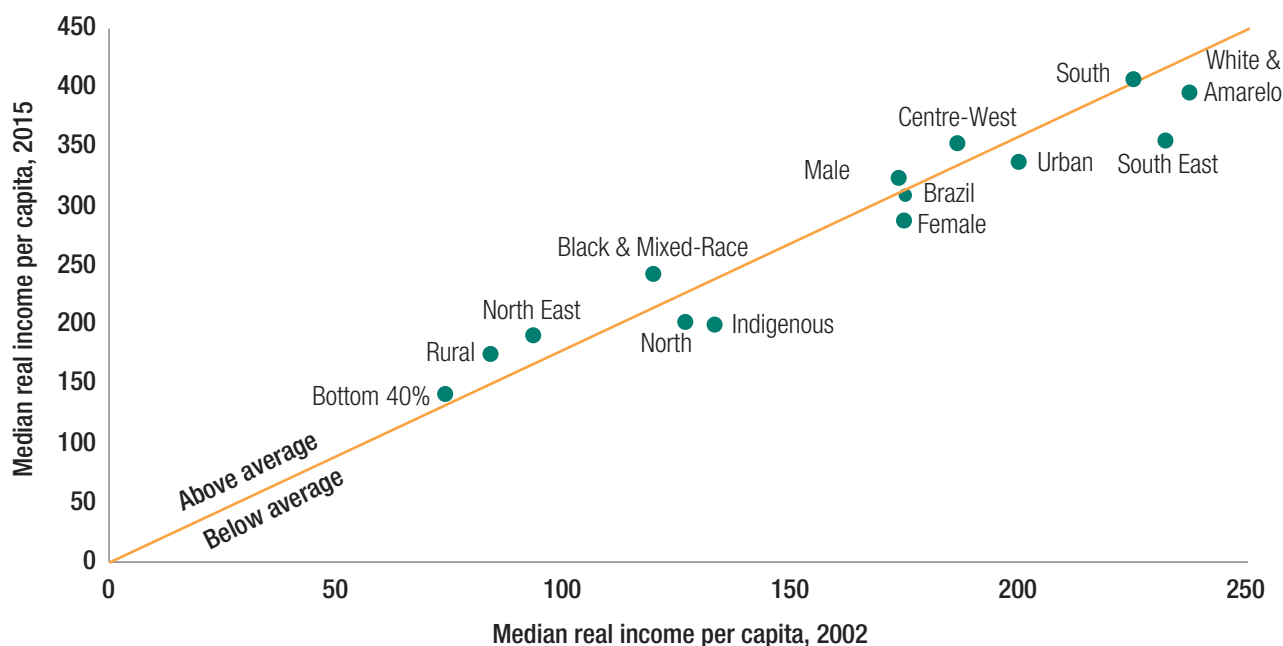
or Mixed-Race. However, other groups are clearly underperforming and therefore being ‘left behind’, notably Indigenous people, those living in the North and female-headed households.

Moreover, despite rapid overall progress, absolute inequalities between many groups are rising even where relative inequalities are declining. For example, in the North East region, the median real income more than doubled over the 13-year period, while in the South the median real income rose only 1.7 times. However, this ‘pro-poor’ growth notwithstanding, the average real income in the South rose by 170 real compared with 102 real in the North-East (Figure 21). Identifying who is left behind, therefore, depends on the approach adopted.⁵² In the strictest interpretation of the LNOB principle, the most deprived region would need to make faster progress in both relative and absolute terms to fully close the life chances gap (see the three interpretations at the beginning of this chapter).

Finally, we compare actual income growth over the 2002–2015 period with a proportionate (inequality-preserving) change and an absolute change in which consumption within each quintile increases by the same amount (following

Atkinson and Brandolini, 2010; Atkinson and Lugo, 2010). The measure highlights that inequality-neutral growth may not be sufficient to combat poverty. For Tanzania, Atkinson and Lugo (2010) report: ‘when considering the contribution of growth to reducing absolute poverty, it seems natural to measure inequality also on an absolute basis, and this highlights the fact that the poorest have benefited much less in absolute terms. The distribution of the absolute gains was far from neutral’. This tendency is also evident for Brazil (Figure 22). Indeed, the actual income gains were lower than a neutral rise in income (in which all incomes grew the same amount as the national average) would dictate for the poorest two quintiles, about equal for the third and higher for the fourth and fifth quintiles. In other words, growth led to an increase in the absolute gap between rich and poor. However, in relative terms, the actual change for all quintiles (and particularly the top two quintiles) was lower than would be dictated by a distribution-neutral shift in which all incomes grew at the same rate as the national average. The conclusion is that income growth was pro-poor with a reduction in relative inequality (indeed, the Gini index fell

Figure 21 Comparison of median income per capita between groups, Brazil, 2002 and 2015

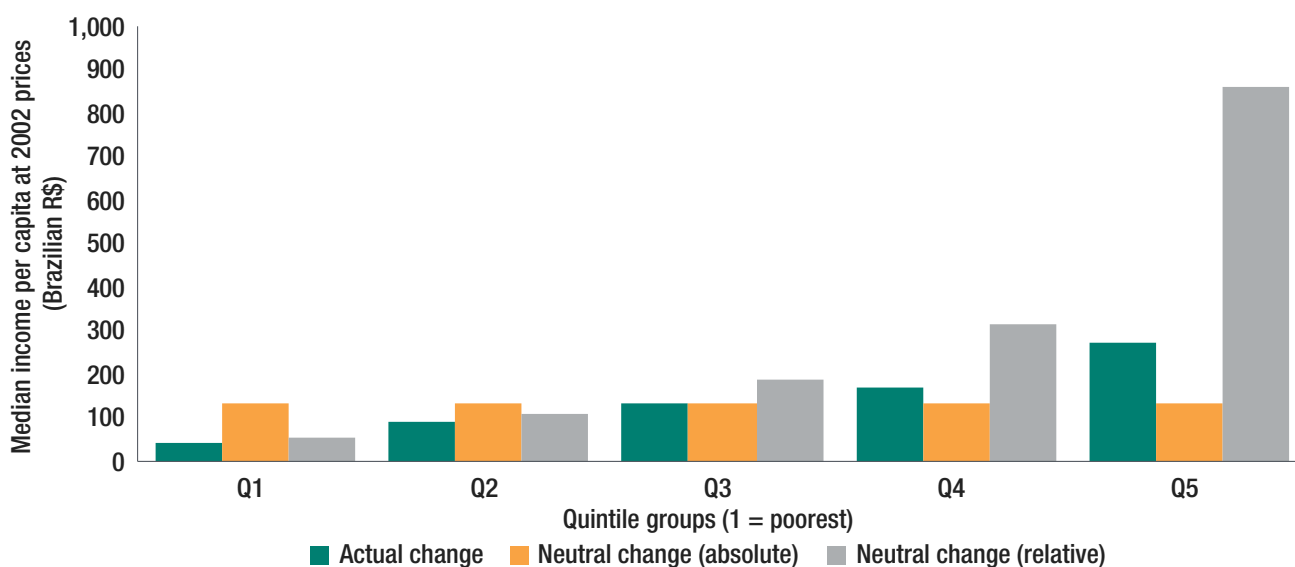


Note: CPI inflation adjusted (CPI = 2002). 95% winsorisation.

Source: Author computation of PNAD data

⁵² Median incomes in 2002 and 2015 by group are very highly correlated: $r(s)=.9522$, $p=.0000$.

Figure 22 Absolute increases in per capita income by quintile groups, Brazil, 2002–2015



Note: CPI inflation adjusted (CPI = 2002).

Source: Author computation of PNAD data.

from .58 to .51 between 2002 and 2015), but absolute inequality in incomes increased. In other words, the first two of our LNOB criteria are met (absolute progress for all groups and relatively higher progress for the more disadvantaged groups; but the third – which requires absolute inequalities to close – did not.

3.7 Extending these results

This chapter considered how LNOB populations can be identified and profiled. We gave illustrative examples of a range of approaches that can be used across different SDG targets and goals. These examples are purely that: they demonstrate how fairly simple statistical profiling

can tell a clear story of trends in differences between groups, and between the poorest and others. The methods we show are not fixed to the SDG targets we use – the analysis of trends over time, shown for poverty, can be used for any indicator. Similarly, the most complex approach we use, the Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition, can be used for differences at a point in time for any indicator, as well as decomposing changes in difference over time. Readers should consider how to use these approaches to develop clear empirical trends in LNOB that match the SDG goals they are focusing on. What approach best demonstrates the trends in difference for the most disadvantaged groups, for which services and programmes?

4 How can the agenda be taken forward?

What do we know about how policy can respond to LNOB? What does the evidence say? We have set out a theory of the approach and how this leads to the measurement and identification of trends in inequality and their composition. These provide the material for an evidence-based policy response to inequality under the SDG agenda to ‘leave no one behind’. In this chapter, we address what this response could look like: the options available to countries to formulate or refine their policy to address persisting group-based and vertical inequalities, and the implications for data and financing. We do not attempt to review the large literature on applied evaluation of programmes that have had impacts on inequality and poverty reduction, and which can demonstrate proven applied responses to LNOB. This is an area needing systematic review and analysis, but this is beyond the scope of this report. Instead, we highlight selected policy principles and give some examples of their operationalisation.

4.1 Operationalising LNOB through national-level policies

In this report, we have noted that different interpretations of LNOB call for different approaches to measurement and policy design. For example, an approach that views power imbalances as the structural basis for the

marginalisation of some groups will necessarily lead to an emphasis on power struggles prompting legislative and political shifts to explain change at the national and local levels (Box 9).

Given this report’s focus on how LNOB can be implemented within existing international and national policy architectures, this section will highlight principles and examples of promising policies that have been shown to reduce group-based disparities. Since 2015, INGOs and CSOs (and to a lesser degree country VNRs) have attempted to delineate the shape of the LNOB agenda.⁵³ Our observations on ways forward articulated by organisations and think tanks (see Chapter 2, Box 1) show that their recommendations often advocate for progressive universalism, addressing discrimination (through positive discrimination and anti-discrimination measures) and recognising intersectionality.⁵⁴ These approaches are also reflected in the scholarly literature on the reduction of group inequalities (Stewart, 2000; Stewart et al., 2010; Hankivsky and Cormier, 2011; UNDP, 2012; 2019; Anttonen and Sipilä, 2014; Carey and Crammond, 2017). We underline the need for further research to embed these principles within a broader array of policy approaches that includes both structural and incremental reforms.

First is **progressive universalism**. Undifferentiated universal policies typically give less weight to the needs of the most

53 We echo the limitation of Chapter 2, namely that the scope of this report precluded a review of national development plans or sector strategies within the 193 UN member states to note the degree to which domestic policy-making since September 2015 reflects the LNOB agenda. We relied on VNRs to assess how national governments are focusing on LNOB and to identify the policy options discussed in this chapter.

54 These range from specific social protection instruments (Blampied et al., 2016; UNDP, 2018) to policies aimed at specific populations, e.g. women’s economic empowerment programmes (UN Women, 2017; GIZ, 2019; Government of Ireland, 2019), to sector-specific mandates e.g. in education by The International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity (2016).

Box 9 Social movements and the reduction of group-based inequality

We highlight selected cases in which social movements have been pivotal in reducing group-based disparities:

Rural women in Bolivia and Brazil: Strong national-level rural women's movements were the main advocates behind women's land rights in both countries. Reforms were most effective in Brazil, under Lula, in part because of a 20-year period in which organised rural women demanded land rights with increasing intensity. In Bolivia, under Morales, reforms also benefited significant numbers of rural women, primarily through the joint titling of land to couples, the main demand of the autonomous rural women's movement. In Venezuela and Ecuador, in contrast, 'the lack of a strong and autonomous rural women's movement in an overall context in which the rural social movements are either relatively weak or divided has produced less tangible results' (Deere 2017: 259–260).

Domestic workers in South Africa: The South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union (SADSAWU), a long-standing union of current and former domestic workers, has lobbied for fair treatment. In March 2012, 22 SADSAWU leaders camped outside parliament overnight to press for South Africa to ratify the International Labour Organization (ILO) Domestic Workers Convention (C189) – the first international labour standard to guarantee domestic workers the same basic rights as those available to other workers. The Union held a candlelit vigil and publicly presented a letter of demands to the President's office, a cumulation of efforts that attracted significant media coverage and led to a pivotal meeting with the labour minister, helping to pave the way for the cabinet's approval of C189 in 2013. The Union continues to work to ensure the convention's terms (limits on hours of work, weekly days off, minimum wage, payment of overtime, social security and clear terms and conditions of employment) are implemented and enforced (HRW, 2013; Howard and Witbooi, 2018).

Marginalised groups in Nepal: In Nepal, Janajatis, Dalits, Madhesis and women have been at the forefront of social movements demanding equal rights for their historically marginalised members. These groups were central in the First People's Movement of 1990, which reinstated democracy and created a space for organised collective action, with strategies ranging from nationwide strikes to negotiations. The Second People's Movement in 2006 was crucial in bringing the different movements together to end the civil war and the monarchy. Consequently, the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) and the Interim Constitution affirmed a restructure of the state to end all forms of discrimination based on caste, ethnicity, gender and region, and began the process of inclusion in state policies and laws (adapted from Tamang, 2017).

disadvantaged populations. There is also evidence on Universal Health Coverage (UHC) (Victora et al., 2000; Nicholson et al., 2015) showing that, typically, the better-off benefit the most in the short term, for instance through the 'inverse care law' that says that those with highest needs often do not optimise their access to services. Accordingly, the principle of progressive universalism seeks to provide a service for all, *along with* targeted attempts to include the most disadvantaged and/or direct higher benefits to them. The social policy literature describes

different methods of extending such support to disadvantaged groups. For some (Brewer et al., 2002; Wilby, 2007; Gugushvili and Hirsch, 2014; Hillman, 2018), progressive universalism connotes making a basic/low-level provision for all (either a specific population e.g. all children or all women, or all citizens in a country), but with an emphasis on additional support for groups deemed to need it. This type of progressive universalism echoes the principle of 'selectivity within universalism' (Skocpol, 1991; Jacques and Noël, 2020), which, through recognition of the

specific needs of selected groups and a ‘bending’ of universal programmes, gives additional weight to the needs of the most disadvantaged.⁵⁵

A second variant of progressive universalism (Townsend, 2009; Gwatkin and Ergo, 2010; Bastagli et al., 2020) offers a different sequencing: policies reach specific groups first and are then gradually – over time – expanded to the larger group or to the wider citizenry in either/both scope and adequacy.

Such a phased roll-out aims to prioritise the neediest first, e.g. Mexico’s Popular Insurance and Brazil’s Family Health Program (Gwatkin and Ergo, 2010),⁵⁶ or child benefit programmes that progressively increase the age threshold of the recipient children and/or number of target children in a household (Bastagli et al., 2020).

Country decisions over which sequencing to use to channel benefits towards the poorest and most disadvantaged groups will often depend on both the existing system and breadth of policies, as well as financial capacity at a given time.⁵⁷ In both variants, policy interventions will rely on a degree of targeting – whether within or without a system of universal provision. For targeting to conform to the principle of equality and non-discrimination (in line with the LNOB agenda), the selection of recipients

must be justified on objective and reasonable fact (e.g. when evidence suggests that a particular group is poorer than the rest of the population) and pursue a legitimate aim under

human rights law (e.g. trying to benefit political supporters would not be considered legitimate) (Bastagli et al., 2020: 62).

Moreover, targeting is ideally used as one step towards achieving the goal of universal provision.

As an illustration, we will look at Nepal, one of our focus countries in this report but also a country where there is comparatively rich evidence on the link between policies and reduction of group inequalities. Nepali policy demonstrates how a ‘pro-poor’ programmatic approach has adopted the principles of progressive universalism in health. The 2006 national Free Health Care Policy Program marked the start of policy-makers’ focus on a gradual shift towards UHC. The Program began by providing free emergency and inpatient services at district hospitals and primary health care centres (PHCCs) for set categories of people: the ultra-poor, the poor,⁵⁸ the elderly, the destitute, PWDs and female community health workers (FCHVs). The Extended Essential Free Health Care (EFHC) programme, introduced in 2008, expanded the Program to cover all users at all health posts and sub-health posts (SHPs). In 2009, free essential health care services were offered through all district-level facilities (Witter et al., 2011; Blampied et al., 2016), accompanied by the Free Delivery Policy (2009), which provided women with cash incentives and transport subsidies to deliver babies in health facilities. All citizens are now entitled to access

55 The idea harks back to the larger tradition espoused by Enlightenment thinkers, and most clearly seen in the work of Habermas (Abraham, 1994), in the formulation that differences such as race, class and gender need specific and special attention in the creation of a universal community where every person is equal.

56 However, evidence from Mexico suggests that, while the measures have done well in reducing vertical inequality – the country’s Healthcare Access and Quality Index (Barber et al., 2017) rating rose from 49.2 in 1990 to 62.6 in 2015 – they have not been as effective in combatting horizontal inequalities. OECD (2016) has noted that, despite being considered universal, ‘Most critically, Mexico’s “health system” persists as a cluster of distinct sub-systems, each offering different levels of care, to different groups, at different prices, with different outcomes’. The study notes lower quality of services and outcomes in Oaxaca and Chiapas, which have the highest concentration of Indigenous populations.

57 Stuart et al. (2016) lay out how countries at different income levels can use distinct policies to move ahead an LNOB agenda. For instance, while LICs can pilot approaches to provide discriminated groups with labour market opportunities, MICs and HICs are better placed to expand minimum wage guarantees and employment quotas across industries for marginalised groups.

58 The ultra-poor were defined as citizens able to provide adequate food for less than six months a year, while the poor were defined as able to provide adequate food for between six and 12 months (Prasai, 2013).

PHCCs, SHPs, health posts and district hospitals for free outpatient, in-patient and emergency services, as well as free medication from a list of essential drugs (Conway et al., 2020).

Strategies to improve services and their uptake by remote populations concentrated on expanding the capacity of frontline grassroots FCHVs to support maternal and child health. The focus on FCHVs sat alongside the establishment of health posts in every village, as well as substantial investment in advocacy, especially for maternal health (Regmi et al., 2013; Engel et al., 2013; Blampied et al., 2016). Together, these policies had a strong positive impact on health outcomes in rural areas, particularly for the poorest wealth quintile over the period 2009–2012 (Prasai, 2013).

Progressive universalism, in this interpretation, requires moving from a focus solely on the poorest and most disadvantaged groups to their *prioritisation* within a universal model. Otherwise, countries risk creating new pockets of deprivation. For example, Nepal's concentration on rural primary health care was, until 2015, at the expense of the urban health service, particularly in poor urban areas (Blampied et al., 2016). Indeed, our analysis in Chapter 3 (Figure 18) shows the Composite Coverage Index (which measures interventions to support maternal and child health) declining in urban areas between 2011 and 2016, while expanding in rural areas. As such, we would argue that, where feasible, it is preferable to provide a minimum universal provision for all, with extra support for the most marginalised, rather than targeting the poorest first then moving towards universalism. As the case of Nepal shows, this latter interpretation risks creating new vulnerable populations, as well as increasing social tensions.

More recently there is evidence of countries adopting similar policies which show promise, although evaluations are not yet available to help us determine whether these have been

successful in reducing group disparities. In education, Indonesia promotes a model whereby children with special needs can choose to attend a mainstream school, special education unit or special school (UNESCO, 2020). The country has been investing in increasing the inclusiveness of its mainstream education system from pre-primary through tertiary education for students with disabilities (ibid.). Meanwhile, Kenya's approach to universalism in health is focused on geography: in December 2018, the country launched a programme as the first step in its goal to achieve UHC by 2022. The programme, known as *Afya Care – Eema Wa Mkenya*, began with coverage in four target counties – Kisumu, Nyeri, Isiolo and Machakos, counties with heavy disease burdens (Ministry of Health, 2018).

A second policy response to LNOB is **addressing discrimination** through positive discrimination (also known as affirmative action) and anti-discrimination measures.⁵⁹ Efforts to promote equity need to address horizontal inequalities between population groups. However, inequalities cannot be ended merely by providing equal opportunities, since the ability to utilise those opportunities is conditioned by structural disadvantages and historical discrimination, as well as different needs. For this reason, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities understands that the 'denial of reasonable accommodation' to account for different needs itself discriminates against those with higher needs. Therefore, achieving equity requires that extra resources be directed toward certain groups. In other words, positive discrimination also embodies the principle of targeting those most disadvantaged and the poorest. This is partly why, legally and conceptually, positive discrimination has been contested by those who see it as a challenge to the principle of equality.⁶⁰

In policy design, positive discrimination takes the form of quantifiable targets for access to

59 Also known as positive and negative discrimination; positive discrimination seeks to advantage people based on their identity/characteristics/background, while negative discrimination seeks to protect people from being disadvantaged or treated poorly on these bases.

60 For instance, in the UK, positive discrimination is illegal under the Equality Act of 2010, whereby an employer/company cannot hire a person based on a protected characteristic alone. The Act provides legal recognition of protected characteristics, i.e. age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

and treatment by programmes, for instance in education, the labour market and political institutions. For example, under a programme that awarded bonus points to applicants from public high schools, Estevan et al. (2019) found that the admission probability of targeted applicants significantly increased at UNICAMP, a large and highly ranked Brazilian university. The policy was also associated with a shift towards admitting students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

While positive discrimination allows resources to be targeted to a particular group, ‘this type of policy unavoidably increases the salience of identity difference, since individuals receive benefits because of their membership of particular groups’ (Stewart, 2016: 6). The case of Nepal highlights the positive outcomes of the use of quotas as well as their limitations in translating into meaningful participation and in fueling competition between members of minority groups.

In Nepal, the 2017 local elections ushered in 41% female representation in local governments, a considerable improvement from the 20% in the previous election in 1997. The country’s gender quotas mandate at least 33% female representation at the ward level, including a separate seat for a woman from the Dalit caste. In the 2017 elections, 47% of female local representatives were Dalits and 23% Khas Aryas, the dominant caste (Paswan, 2017). Despite this progress, men from the Khas Arya population continued to dominate decision-making posts: despite being only 16% of the total population, they made up 48% of mayors, 44% of chairpersons and 44% of ward chairs. Dalit men’s representation stood at just 2.6%, and Dalit women at 18.7% of the total (ibid.). These:

stark differences collectively reaffirm existing research findings that show how quotas increase inclusion of women but mostly at the cost of minority group men, not majority group men. Hence, it cannot be assumed that women’s political inclusion directly translates into reconfiguration of existing power

structures, in fact it may even reproduce and reinforce other forms of marginalisation (Limbu, 2018).

While quotas have opened up legislatures in Nepal to women and minority social groups, translating symbolic representation into meaningful participation requires substantial work. Political parties relied on personal and political connections to identify female candidates, which meant that ‘women who were situated in close proximity to men with political power benefited the most’ (Limbu, 2018). Moreover, women were not able to command the same resources as many male candidates, and in office women face discrimination in their attempts to carry out their electoral mandates or simply in being recognised as legitimate by other elected politicians from dominant castes (Uehara, 2019). Creating meaningful participation through quotas therefore, in Nepal as elsewhere, requires interventions to directly address inequality in labour market access for women and control over assets, and challenging networks of personal and political connections that hamper access to politics (see OECD, 2015; 2017).

Meaningful inclusion also requires moving beyond conflating all minorities as one. In Nepal, the quota system has been criticised for changing the civil service in a manner that pits one minority group against another. In 2019, a proposed amendment of the Federal Civil Servants Bill included two new reservation clusters – Tharu and Muslim – while reducing the reservation for Adiwasi/Janajati and Madhesi clusters (Panday, 2019). Similarly, quotas for women in politics recognise Dalit women as a separate and specific category that was historically excluded from leadership positions. However, there is no recognition for other women, who are largely placed within the monolithic category of ‘women in Nepal’, which has had the indirect effect of women from Janajatis, Madheshis and Muslims competing against each other for the same seats, reinforcing social tension in areas where there is no Dalit candidate (Huber, 2017).

A second and accompanying method of addressing discrimination is criminalising

discriminatory conduct through legislation. However, while anti-discrimination legislation is a significant entry point to tackle group inequalities, it is only enforced in areas where the institutional environment is supportive (Marcus et al., 2016). For example, in Tanzania the HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Act of 2008 protects against discrimination in the provision of health services. The Act has been used successfully to challenge stigma, but this success has depended on awareness of the Act and its implementation, access to resources to file a claim and a local court environment that has facilitated the application of the Act (Mdee et al., 2012). The presence of legislation itself in isolation from institutional supports is unlikely to be significant – as in Quezon City in the Philippines, where in 2019 a transwoman was attacked in the queue for the women’s toilets and incarcerated by the police despite the passage of a local Gender-Fair Ordinance in 2014, which prohibits discrimination against LGBTQ+ members (Rappler.com, 2019).

Anti-discrimination measures can also take the form of public and communication campaigns that seek to dismantle discriminatory attitudes and erode discriminatory practices. For example, between 2003 and 2006, the Hey Girls, Let’s Go to School campaign in Turkey used mass media and community-based mobilisation by volunteers and professionals targeting parents and households in a bid to boost girls’ enrolment. The programme was credited with encouraging the enrolment of 350,000 out-of-school girls (UNICEF, 2014).

As described in Chapter 3, evidence from LNOB profiles also enables policy to move beyond simple definitions of groups to allow intersectionality in programme design and outreach. Intersectionality has been used to recognise that individuals face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, which can reinforce their disadvantage. Within policy design, the focus on each marker of disadvantage separately has been shown to cause populations to slip through the cracks of social protection. For example, Mangubhai

and Capraro (2015) found that, in India, Dalit women are often excluded from work and higher education because there are two separate quotas they could be eligible for: a quota for women and a quota for Dalits. However, their attempts to access either quota are frustrated as they are directed to apply for the women’s quota when they try to access the scheduled caste quota, and vice versa, and there is no particular category that specifically recognises a Dalit woman.

Intersectional policies can provide an opportunity to recognise the combination of vertical and horizontal inequalities – e.g. geography and ethnicity and/or gender and age. However it is clear that focusing on one single identity as the only means of providing services/support to the poorest is unlikely to be enough for those facing multiple disadvantages.

How the principle of intersectionality transfers to policy design and implementation successfully is an understudied area. As Bhardwaj (2018) states: ‘Perhaps the most significant challenge is that, in its purest form, intersectionality theory focuses on unique individual experiences’, and thus defies umbrella characterisations of the recipient populations in policies or programmes. Similarly, in international development, intersectional thought introduces caution regarding any ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach (Chaplin et al., 2019).

However, we argue that a single broad approach has the potential to be intersectional when it simultaneously addresses the many root causes of multiple deprivations. It is also likely to be less stigmatising than an approach that requires poor individuals to sign up for separate programmes catering to one or more dimensions of deprivation. Additionally, such an approach can then be streamlined to ensure that, within groups, the most marginalised have adequate support to access the full benefits of the programme, thus incorporating principles of progressive universalism and positive discrimination. In policy design, both ultra-poor and ‘universal plus’ basic income supports are examples of

LNOB-sensitive programming in that their design recognises intersectional deprivations.⁶¹

Ultra-poor graduation programmes are designed to address the overlapping disadvantages and needs of the poorest by targeting the multiple deprivations they face, thereby illustrating one approach to intersectional programming. Ultra-poor people have been typically defined as:

those poorest section [sic] among the population with a few or no asset base, highly vulnerable to any shocks and mainly depending on wage labour. The main causes of their poverty, especially in the rural areas, are poverty inheritance, loss of income earner and ill health (Halder and Mosely, 2004).

The ultra-poor ‘graduation approach’ focuses on shifting the position of the poorest from economic insecurity to a sustainable livelihood. In six countries – Ethiopia, Ghana, Honduras, India, Pakistan and Peru – an ultra-poor graduation intervention aiming to address multiple causes of poverty provided households with an asset to enable self-employment, accompanied by other supportive interventions (including food security and health care).⁶² Three years after receiving the assets and a year after the programme ended, evaluations found that, across the six countries:

program participants on average had significantly more assets and savings, spent more time working, went hungry on fewer days, and experienced lower levels of stress and improved physical

health compared to those who did not receive the program. The program was also cost effective, with positive returns in five of six countries, ranging from 133 percent in Ghana to 433 percent in India. In other words, for every dollar spent on the program in India, ultra-poor households had \$4.33 in long-term benefit (IPA, 2020).

Proposals for universal programmes avoid the stigma of focusing on group characteristics (e.g. by using the label ‘ultra-poor’). For example, by providing ‘cash, unconditionally, and to everyone’ (Gentilini et al. 2020: 3), UBI programmes can guarantee the income security of the poorest. They can also minimise the administrative cost of applying for, meeting and gaining eligibility to multiple programmes, as well as being more affordable to administer for a government compared to multiple targeted programmes (Painter and Thoung, 2015; McLean, 2016). However, a policy such as a UBI will find it difficult to match the needs of the disadvantaged to a simple ‘universal’ transfer design. The level of such transfers will still be insufficient to meet the extra needs of some populations, and thus will have to be supplemented with additional monetary and other support (e.g. people with different abilities who cannot go about their daily life without support). The potential for UBI to subsidise low-paid work in the absence of controls on labour regulation and decent, context-specific minimum wage thresholds (Bastagli, 2020) is also a problem – particularly for low-skilled, ‘own account’ workers, who form large proportions of the workforce in developing countries. A UBI-plus approach, on the other hand, provides additional

61 Of course, the design of the programme itself is not a guarantee that it will be equitable and effective. The transfer amount and how it is financed are crucial considerations. For example, if financing is diverted from sectors such as health or education, then the overall impact of transfers can be affected by a dip in the supply of these services. Additionally, governance structures and relationships between national and sub-national levels, and governments’ ability to implement the policy and disburse transfers will be crucial to programme success.

62 Households randomly assigned to participate in the programme received multiple types of support at once: an asset (e.g. livestock or goods) to spur income generation; training on how to manage the asset; basic food or cash support to stabilise households and reduce the need to sell the new asset in an emergency; frequent (usually weekly) coaching visits to reinforce skills, build confidence and help participants handle any challenges; health education or access to health care to stay healthy and able to work; and a savings account to help people put away money to invest or use in a future emergency (IPA, 2020).

payments and support to reflect the extra costs and needs not met by a basic income (Warren 2016, cited in Bidadanure 2019; Richardson and Duffy, 2020). Under such a scheme, all individuals would receive a basic income, but an additional amount would be allocated to disadvantaged groups. Broadly, such an approach would conform to progressive universalism (by addressing the needs of specific disadvantaged groups as distinct from those of the general population), incorporate positive discrimination (by identifying groups of people who require additional support) and recognise intersectionality (in providing income and non-income supports to people experiencing multiple deprivations).

Most countries are likely to have in place a range of policies that target or provide direct/indirect benefits to different groups through different mechanisms. A system-wide approach, in the final analysis, is essential to understand the sum total of support that a particular group is getting, e.g. providing cash transfers to mothers for childcare or provision of childcare in the absence of paid maternal leave is likely to undermine long-term engagement of mothers in the workforce. As such, an LNOB approach benefits from a study of the overall system of policies, looking at the mix of targeting and universalism and the net benefits/support that accrue to marginalised groups.

4.2 Ways forward on policy-making: national and international

Stakeholders seeking to improve accountability of governments to the LNOB policy agenda have two options. The first is to work towards and advocate for a recognition of the distributional impacts of any proposed policy or reform on the poorest and most disadvantaged members of society. The second is to urge that the HLPF and VNRs lay out how countries can systematically report on the evidence of LNOB and of the effectiveness of policy responses to it. In this section we propose first-order shifts that can be made to increase the sensitivity of policies

and programming to LNOB. A comprehensive approach to move the LNOB agenda forward – particularly at the national level – will need to consider other factors (e.g. its financing and administration) and second-order effects such as its potential political consequences and any behavioural implications.

Within the **national context**, one proposal to advance this aim would be to develop tools that analyse, at the policy planning and design stage, the distributional impact of a reform on the well-being of the poorest and most disadvantaged groups in a country (or sub-national context). We highlight the need for a review of the tools and rankings intended to facilitate an assessment of the impact of fiscal systems on vertical and horizontal inequalities, and poverty, to identify those best suited to evaluate the distributional impact of reform on the most disadvantaged groups or areas and to benchmark localities' policies relative to one another.⁶³ This review should help make explicit the assumptions in the design of a policy and the pathways of influence on different populations, as well as highlighting possible unintended consequences.

Second, at the international level, the HLPF process would benefit from a track where countries can report specifically on how they are implementing the LNOB agenda. UN DESA's guidelines could be supplemented with specific examples of good VNRs, showcasing how countries can report on the agenda. To that end, we propose a dedicated section in the VNR (see Box 10) and a corresponding session at the HLPF that requires countries to identify those left behind in their contexts, as well as policies and programmes being implemented to reach these groups, and acknowledgment of populations missing from the data and programme outreach. For countries that are going to be submitting a VNR more than once, this would provide an opportunity to report on progress made from the previous VNR, rather than only reporting on policies and programmes begun recently.

However, it is likely that some country governments will have different incentives in

⁶³ For example, see analyses produced by the Commitment to Equity Institute (Lustig, 2018) and TaxDev (www.taxdev.org/about), as well as DFI and Oxfam (2018). Older approaches include OECD (2007) and Independent Evaluation Group (2010).

Box 10 A suggested template for reporting on LNOB in VNRs

Who are the most marginalised populations in the country along the dimensions most relevant to the country context (e.g. income poverty; food security; health outcomes; educational outcomes; decent work; access to water; decent housing; vulnerability to natural disasters; vulnerability to climatic change)?

Population name (consider intersectionality when relevant)	Key dimension(s) of deprivation	Intersecting dimensions of deprivation

What programmes are currently in operation, or how have they been adjusted, to meet the currently unfulfilled needs of the populations highlighted above or tackle the barriers that lead to their exclusion? These programmes or policies can include those that are general but have benefited vulnerable groups disproportionately and/or those specifically targeted to vulnerable groups. Please submit the name of the programme, the year of inception, the coverage of the programme and any data on outcomes. If the country is submitting a VNR for an additional time, please indicate in the last column on changes in programme from the time of the first report.

Title of programme/policy	Target population	Year of programme inception	Total enrolment in programme/uptake of policy	Available data on trend of outcomes	Changes observed since last report on the same programme

How did the populations identified above engage in the preparation of the VNR in-country?

Population name	Mechanism of inclusion	Number of participants	Agreed mechanism of feedback from HLPF VNR

How has the report and in particular analysis on LNOB been disseminated/shared/published?

Dissemination mechanism	Description	Audience reach	Feedback received

Please indicate if the country has published a shadow civil society report of the VNR.

Yes	No

reporting on those most left behind, e.g. focusing on the most left behind may go against validating the needs of the other disadvantaged groups that have political importance, while country governments actively marginalising or repressing these groups are unlikely to report on these groups in their VNRs. For example, as of 2020 Myanmar has yet to submit a VNR, and in 2017 the UN withdrew a report on food insecurity among the Rohingya population at the behest of the government (Holmes, 2017). Meanwhile, Pakistan's 2019 VNR, despite its focus on the LNOB agenda, does not mention treatment of religious minorities. To the degree that the 2030 Agenda depends on countries' goodwill, the LNOB agenda is likely to lack real power. A potential opportunity lies in international and national CSOs exploring the degree to which the 2030 Agenda and its commitment on LNOB can be made legally binding, identical to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

4.3 Collection and use of data to further the LNOB agenda

To direct attention to left-behind groups, governments must first identify them and understand their situation. This can be complicated. Per Atkinson and Marlier (2010: 18–19), 'the circumstances of those suffering poverty or social exclusion (for example, those at the bottom of the income distribution, the unemployed, those living in institutions and the homeless) are among the most difficult to measure statistically'. A need for better information to monitor the SDGs motivated the call of the High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Agenda for a 'data revolution' to bring together advances in information technology and official statistics. The Panel emphasised disaggregated data on 'the neediest ... to ensure that no group is being left behind' (United Nations, 2013).⁶⁴

Although inadequate data may explain a weak evidence base on LNOB, there often

exists considerable data that can be repurposed to profile current positions and trends – as we demonstrated in Chapter 3, using household surveys. Challenges notwithstanding (see Box 11), we propose that the data routinely collected in most MICs (from national household surveys, administrative records and informal sources) offers a reasonable foundation on which to launch an LNOB agenda that can be refined as statistical systems further improve and more information becomes available. Indeed, around three-quarters of MICs (74%), covering 96% of the MICs population, have had a nationally representative household survey within the last five years.⁶⁵ While perfect data will never exist, it is indisputable that data can be improved. Nonetheless, waiting for better data before making any attempts to analyse LNOB comprehensively is inexcusable. Moreover, optimising what is currently available is an essential and necessary step towards a better understanding of the improvements that are needed. Indeed, several existing initiatives have sought to compile and present this data in a way that sheds light upon the circumstances of the poorest (Box 12).

Various initiatives seek to improve the data ecosystem and availability of frequent, high-resolution information on disadvantaged groups that can inform an LNOB agenda – the Inclusive Data Charter is one such promising international effort (Box 13). Here, we outline five simple steps policy-makers can take to maximise the evidence base to inform an LNOB-focused agenda.

Combine data and survey sources to expand sample sizes to provide a better understanding of the characteristics of left-behind groups. Some methods of combining data sources require technical sophistication – e.g. experiments to link administrative registries with unit-level data from household surveys (see Jenkins et al., 2008 on the United Kingdom). However, there are other low-tech means of supplementing the existing evidence base – e.g. policy-makers

64 Its report observed: 'Data must also enable us to reach the neediest, and find out whether they are receiving essential services. This means that data gathered will need to be disaggregated by gender, geography, income, disability, and other categories, to make sure that no group is being left behind' (United Nations, 2013: 23).

65 For LMICs, the figures are 78% and 94%. For UMICs, they are 70% and 97% respectively. Author computation on the basis of data on survey coverage provided in the OPHI Global MPI database and World Bank PovcalNet database.

Box 11 Challenges to collecting household survey data on left-behind groups

The SDG indicator framework specifies that the indicators be disaggregated ‘where relevant, by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability and geographic location, or other characteristics, in accordance with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics’.ⁱ Improving the availability of disaggregated data requires attention to the administrative data, household surveys and national censuses that are the bedrock of SDG monitoring.ⁱⁱ Given our emphasis on the use of readily available cross-national household surveys to create LNOB profiles, we focus on the challenges they raise.

The exclusion or under-counting of at-risk groups.^{iii,iv} By design, household surveys generally omit populations living outside private households: ‘those living in institutions, such as students and the military, and those living in hostels, shelters or reception centres ... the elderly living in residential accommodation and children taken into care by public authorities, as well as those living on the streets ... [in addition to] non-nationals, or those living on boats or in caravans’ (Atkinson and Marlier, 2010: 21). In practice, surveys under-represent people in urban slums (because of difficulties in identifying and interviewing), dangerous places and fragile or transient households and within households, older women in Sahelian countries and ‘servants (slaves) in rich households’ (Carr-Hill, 2013; 2017).

Some empirical analyses estimate the extent of this undercounting and its potential impact:

- Globally, Carr-Hill (2013) estimates that up to 350 million people are not covered by household surveys, which may result in as many as a quarter more people living on less than \$1.25 a day than contemporary estimates suggested.
- Carr-Hill (2017) estimates that 14% of urban dwellers are missing from the DHS in Kampala, and by implication at least 369 million people in urban areas may be missing from the sampling frames of standardised household surveys.
- For Belgium, Schokaert et al. (2012) (cited in Bajgar et al., 2018: 4) find that the poverty rate in EU-SILC data was 72% for people without a home or residence and 96% for undocumented people, in contrast with an overall poverty headcount ratio of 15%.

i https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/Global%20Indicator%20Framework%20after%202020%20review_Eng.pdf. The explicit requirement to disaggregate occurs most frequently for sex and age, followed by rural/urban location and disability status. Indigenous status, ‘population group’, conflict status, socio-economic class and migrant status are also mentioned. Some indicators apply to some groups by design, such as maternal and child mortality; among these indicators too, sex and age specificity dominate. Population group (under target 16.7) is described as follows: ‘Nationally relevant population groups (groups with a distinct ethnicity, language, religion, indigenous status, nationality or other characteristics): The population of a country is a mosaic of different population groups that can be identified according to racial, ethnic, language, indigenous or migration status, religious affiliation, or sexual orientation, amongst other characteristics. For the purpose of this indicator, particular focus is placed on minorities’ (<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/files/Metadata-16-07-02.pdf>, p. 8).

ii Administrative sources and household surveys provide 33% and 26% of SDG data, respectively (Espey et al., 2015).

iii Carr-Hill (2013; 2017) argues that biased sampling frames underpin many household surveys: censuses undercount migrants without documentation and non-household groups (e.g. the homeless, pastoralists, street children); and intercensal population estimates in most LICs and MICs may be inaccurate, given incomplete civil vital registration systems.

iv ‘[N]one of the four main standardized household surveys – the DHS, the LFS, the LSMS, and the MICS – had anything to say about the coverage of the homeless, institutional populations, the mobile and/or any special arrangements to cover slum areas’ (Carr-Hill, 2017: 2).

Box 11 Challenges to collecting household survey data on left-behind groups (continued)

Selective non-response, particularly among stigmatised groups (e.g. PWDs in some settings (Groce and Mont, 2017)), and those fearing prosecution (e.g. sexual minorities, gender-non-conforming people, undocumented migrants). This means ‘fewer available cases, and therefore less efficient sample-based estimates, but more important is the possible underrepresentation of precisely those groups of citizens who are particularly at risk of poverty and social exclusion’ (Atkinson and Marlier, 2010: 22).

Difficulties in producing representative estimates for small groups. Oversampling groups known to be at risk may be an option, but the larger the sample, the more costly and difficult it becomes to secure high-quality data (Chavez-Villegas and Samman, 2015).

Limited questionnaire space and risk of respondent fatigue. Proxy reporting raises concerns around data accuracy (Bardasi et al., 2011). Moreover, some questions that are important for sub-populations are not typically asked in multi-purpose household surveys (e.g. the intra-household distribution of income or consumption in LSMS, or older women’s experiences of domestic violence in DHS/MICs).

While surveys can undoubtedly be improved, there are limits to what each can accommodate. Ensuring that LNOB is profiled across different surveys through an audited set of consistent and cross-validated modules and instruments can allow efficiency in profiling both across groups and across sectors of interest (e.g. education, health, employment). Any individual survey should avoid becoming too overloaded: data becomes costly to collect and its quality suffers.

might approach institutions such as correctional facilities, nursing homes and homeless shelters to seek their cooperation in data-gathering, and use this information alongside data from household surveys. For health and education, triangulation between administrative records and household survey data may be fruitful – e.g. see Sandefur and Glassman (2015), who find ‘systematic biases in administrative data systems’ arising from ‘incentives of data producers to overstate development progress’.

Ensure governments publish administrative data in a timely manner. In their study of subnational financing patterns, Manuel et al. (2019: 9) report that ‘data on how finance is allocated at the subnational level is extraordinarily lacking ... Simple improvements could be made. While technical and political challenges undermine the production of comprehensive, sufficiently detailed and timely subnational information, much would be gained by just publishing the data that is already gathered’. Along similar lines, ODI’s research on data systems for health in Nepal found that,

while the Health Management Information System (HMIS) data quality is generally good, it is less clear that the available data feeds into policy and planning efficiently. Partly, this reflects a lag between availability of data and widespread publication: although the Ministry of Health produces an annual report using HMIS data, it is published with an 18-month lag, meaning that stakeholders are typically unable to act on timely information. This is disappointing, as frontline health workers spend substantial time collecting data and compiling it into reports (Blampied et al., 2016).

Use well-known and tried and tested approaches to estimating small populations – e.g. poverty mapping techniques which draw on relationships estimated from household surveys to predict variables in census data. For example, this technique seeks to ‘explain’ income poverty in household surveys using a set of basic indicators that are also available in the census; the resulting model is then applied to estimate poverty at any spatially disaggregated level within the census (see Molina et al., 2019).

Box 12 Initiatives using available data to highlight group-based deprivation and commitment to LNOB

Data innovations that rely predominantly on the disaggregation of data in DHS and MICs to illustrate group-based deprivations (e.g. relating to geography, ethnicity or race, age, disability or migration status) include:

- OPHI's MPI and destitution index, described in Chapter 3, is available disaggregated by population sub-group,ⁱ and by dimension (health, education and living standards).
- UNESCO World Inequality Database of Education (WIDE) – Data on key indicators of education and learning outcomes disaggregated by wealth, gender, ethnicity and location.ⁱⁱ
- WHO Health Equity Monitor – Disaggregated data on more than 30 reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health indicators.ⁱⁱⁱ
- UNICEF's online data system contains a comprehensive set of indicators on children's rights and well-being, including disaggregated data from its Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS).^{iv}
- The DHS STAT Compiler allows for building tables, charts and maps from thousands of indicators across 90 countries. Indicators may be disaggregated by age, sex, wealth quintile, urban/rural zone, region, education level and other criteria, such as marital status or 'mother's age at birth'.^v
- Save the Children's Group-based Inequality Database (GRID) provides disaggregated data for key child SDG indicators, including survival and nutrition, child protection and education.^{vi}
- WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) – Data on inequalities in drinking water access, sanitation and hygiene disaggregated by sub-national region, rural/urban zone and wealth quintile, with future intentions to disaggregate for informal urban settlements, the affordability of WASH services and intra-household inequalities such as age and sex.^{vii}
- ILOSTAT – disaggregated labour force statistics by sex, age and rural/urban zone.^{viii}
- Development Initiative's P20 index. Aims to identify (to the extent publicly available data permits) the poorest 20% of people in the world through an innovative methodology combining distributional data on poverty (from the World Bank PovCalNet database) coupled with DHS/MICS and other household surveys (Development Initiatives, 2017).

Other initiatives depart from the analysis of inequalities through use of disaggregated data to measure other aspects of the LNOB commitment, or the extent to which different groups are left behind.

- ODI's Leave No One Behind index. Measures the LNOB readiness of governments in 159 countries, based on data, policy (focusing on women's access to land and employment, and universal access to health) and finance (Manuel et al., 2018b; Chattopadhyay and Manea, 2019).

i <https://ophi.org.uk/multidimensional-poverty-index/data-tables-do-files/>.

ii www.education-inequalities.org/indicators/edu4#?sort=mean&dimension=all&group=all&age_group=edu4_2024&countries=all.

iii <https://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.main.HE-1540>.

iv <https://data.unicef.org/>.

v www.statcompiler.com/en/.

vi www.savethechildren.net/grid.

vii washdata.org/monitoring/inequalities.

viii <https://ilostat.ilo.org/>.

Box 12 Initiatives using available data to highlight group-based deprivation and commitment to LNOB (continued)

- SDSN's LNOB index for Africa. Composite of (vertical) inequalities in income and wealth, access to public services and infrastructure, gender inequalities and access to food, health, education and other aspects of human development. The aim is to highlight inequalities that the average values that dominate their overall index of SDG performance may hide (The SDGs Center for Africa and SDSN 2020).
- DFI and Oxfam's Commitment to Reducing Inequality Index (CRII). Measures government commitments to reducing vertical inequality through public services, taxation and workers' rights (DFI and Oxfam, 2018).

Box 13 The Inclusive Data Charter and its impact on official statistics

At the international level, the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (GPSDD) launched an Inclusive Data Charter in 2018 to 'mobilize political commitments and meaningful actions to deepen disaggregation'.ⁱ One year later, IDC 'champions' had already recorded numerous accomplishments, including:

- The UN Population Fund (UNFPA)'s decision that all the censuses it had agreed to support in the 2020 census round should contain core questions on migration and disability.
- Colombia's National Administrative Department of Statistics' provision of additional SDG indicators disaggregated to a subnational level.
- Sightsavers Pakistan works with the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics to incorporate new data sources on PWDs into the Pakistan Living Standards Measurement Survey (Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, 2019).

i www.data4sdgs.org/initiatives/inclusive-data-charter.

Experiment with mobile phone-based methods of survey administration that offer regular and cost-effective data collection that can be mobilised relatively quickly – e.g. as the World Bank has shown in its monitoring of welfare following crises, most recently Covid-19 (World Bank, 2020e). Challenges include time lags between data collection and publication, its high-level representativeness and the need to ensure all groups, including PWDs, are able to participate in digital data collection (see UNICEF, 2020a). Similar initiatives might be considered to monitor the status of left-behind groups.

Invest in citizen-generated data that can be collected frequently and at low cost, which

has the additional benefit of empowering communities to influence policy. Per Stuart et al. (2015: 41): 'The ultimate in demand-driven development data is the poor or vulnerable gathering – and using – those data themselves'. Notable examples include:

- World Vision's Citizen Voice and Action database assembles data from community-based audits of public services in 15 countries, which is used as a basis for citizens, government and service providers to commit to an 'action plan' to improve the service being monitored (World Vision International, 2019).

- Citizen volunteers who are given basic training to administer NGO surveys on learning outcomes in India, Mali, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda (known as UWEZO in the three East African countries); Carr-Hill (2017) argues that such citizen-led surveys provide better coverage of hard-to-reach populations than standard household surveys because of the local knowledge of enumerators and/or their ability to move more freely in insecure areas.
- The Community-Based Monitoring System (CBMS) project, started in the Philippines and implemented in some 29 countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America, through which community members and local officials track poverty and development issues at the household level by conducting community-level censuses. This information has proved crucial in many locations for local budgeting interventions addressing specific group needs (see PEP, 2020).
- UNICEF's U-report, which gathers opinions and information from young people in 68 countries through simple phone-based interfaces and relays the information back to communities and policy-makers (UNICEF, 2020b).

Other more ambitious initiatives and data sources also have the potential to enhance the evidence base on the welfare of at-risk groups, but they will take time to materialise.⁶⁶ These recommendations notwithstanding, we underline once more that policy should not be held hostage to what is deemed a lack of adequate data.

4.4 Financing: levels, disparities and ways forward

Targeted spending is a core element of the LNOB agenda – however, as with data, we argue that most MICs already have the capacity to finance LNOB-oriented policy. In this section, we highlight four points related to financing: 1) on average, MICs have the ability to finance basic universal service coverage, that can be aligned with the LNOB agenda; 2) in practice, disparities in subnational financing mean that left-behind groups often receive fewer resources than better-off communities; 3) left-behind groups need more than average per capita funding owing to their special needs, but the returns may also be relatively higher; and 4) most countries have the possibility to raise new revenue and/or reallocate existing revenues to benefit left-behind groups.

4.4.1 Ability of MICs to fund universal policies

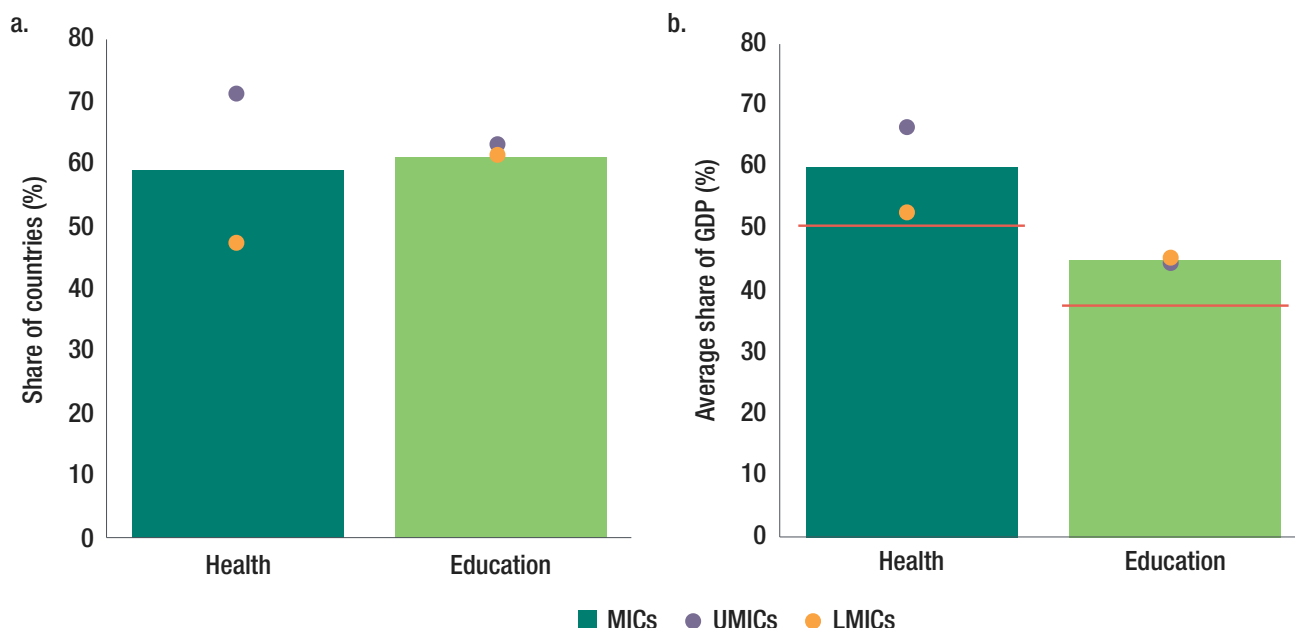
Our analysis of the data on actual social spending within MICs suggests that the progressive realisation of basic universal service coverage is likely to be a viable option in many of these countries. We examine spending on education and health in relation to recommended thresholds in each area reflected in international agreements or recommendations (Figure 23).

LIC and MIC governments committed to allocate 15–20% of their budgets, and 4–6% of GDP, towards education, with an emphasis on basic education, following on from the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action.⁶⁷ Per UNESCO (2015: 242), a threshold of 3.8% of GDP denotes a 'healthy' level of spending on education. According to the latest data, on average MICs directed 15.7% of their spending towards education (15.4% in UMICs and 16.2% in LMICs). Nonetheless, the 90 MICs reporting this data exhibit considerable variation: while 48 countries (53%) report at least 15%, 10 report levels below 10%, and 21 report

⁶⁶ Big data is a salutary example: it is innovating rapidly – e.g. with detailed satellite imagery being used to produce spatially disaggregated population estimates (Wardrop et al., 2018) and call data records producing granular poverty maps (see Steele et al., 2017) – yet is not yet in a position to inform official statistics in most countries, and there have been calls for greater attention to the ethical and political implications of its use.

⁶⁷ This specific target was proposed by UNESCO's High Level Group on Education for All (EFA) in 2006.

Figure 23 Share of countries meeting prescribed spending targets and average spending on education and health as a share of GDP



Note: The red bars in the second panel indicate international benchmarks, as described in the text (5.0% of GDP for health and 3.8% of GDP for education). All averages assign each country an equal weight.

Source: Author elaboration of data in WHO Global Health Database (n.d.); Chatham House (2014); UNESCO (2015); World Bank (2020d).

levels of 20% or higher. At the extreme, Costa Rica devoted 30% of its spending to education in 2017 (World Bank, 2020d). For GDP, the trends are broadly similar: the MIC average is 4.5% of GDP (4.4% in UMICs, 4.5% in LMICs), and 43 of the 70 countries with data (61%) spent 3.8% or more, while 11 countries (16%) spent 6% or more.⁶⁸

For health, following the 2001 Abuja Declaration, African heads of state agreed to allocate 15% of their budgets towards health. For 2017, average spending was 11% across 55 UMICs and 8% across 45 LMICs (computed from WHO's Global Health Expenditure Database); 11 UMICs and two LMICs (El Salvador and Nicaragua) report spending of 15% or more, while at the extreme, Costa Rica devoted 27% of its budget to health. Nonetheless, WHO (2019) reports that MICs are rapidly converging towards higher levels of spending, with health spending having grown

6.3% yearly between 2000 and 2017, above the rate of economic growth.

The same report also argues that an increase equivalent to 1% of GDP in public spending on primary health care would massively bolster public health spending per capita, by 37% for LMICs and 35% for UMICs (WHO, 2019: 41, Table 4.1). Per person spending would grow in LMICs from \$61 to \$84, and in UMICs from \$193 to \$261. To put this in context, Chatham House (2014), on the basis of WHO calculations, recommends that countries spend 5.0% of GDP or at least \$86 per person on essential health services each year, most of which are provided at the primary health care level; they note (p. x): 'Most middle-income countries should be able to reach both targets without external support'. At present, health expenditure accounts for an average of 6.0% of GDP in 100 MICs – 5.3% in LMICs and 6.6% in UMICs; 59 countries (59%)

⁶⁸ Computed from data in World Bank (2020d). The figures on the share of GDP spent on education assign each country equal weight. The corresponding population-weighted average for MICs is 4.1% (3.4% for LMICs and 4.7% for UMICs).

report levels of 5.0% or higher.⁶⁹ In other words, modest additional rises in spending in some countries, focusing on primary health services, could have sizeable effects.

4.4.2 Subnational disparities in spending

Within countries, the evidence points to significant subnational disparities in spending such that spending tends to favour wealthier and urban communities. UNESCO (2015: 258) reports that ‘many countries continue to disburse funding on the basis of equal amounts per child, thereby failing to take into account differences among schools, regions and the needs of disadvantaged groups’. There is thus an apparent need to review comprehensively public expenditure allocation formulae that address subnational disparities in order to ensure that public expenditures facilitate policies to address LNOB.

On the basis of a review of subnational spending on health and education in 82 of the world’s poorest countries, including all LICs, LMICs and LDCs, Marcus et al. (2019) find:

little evidence from the data that is publicly available that either government or donor funding allocations are responding to the distribution of poverty within countries ... On average, poorer regions receive 15% less than the national average for education and in only one of the six countries where data is available is education spending higher in the poorer regions. In other countries targeting is likely to be even worse, since countries which are trying to increase funding to poorer subnational regions are more likely to publish their data.

Nepal offers a positive example: the country’s budget allocation has been praised for its pro-poor emphasis – e.g. its government-financed development grants are allocated according to a formula that includes a weighted cost of services

index, while its health care system prioritised the needs of poor households in rural areas. Even so, budget allocations tended ‘to disproportionately favour some geographical groups over others, with seemingly little targeting of health outcomes’, and were directed towards remote populations ‘at the expense of other coverage-deprived populations in less remote zones’ (Blampied et al., 2016: 66, 68). Widely, it seems, there are gains to be made from more equitable subnational spending.

4.4.3 Higher returns in targeting marginalised groups through national spending and ODA

As noted earlier, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights requires governments to ‘take steps ... especially economic and technical, to the maximum of [their] available resources, with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of the rights’ embodied therein (cited in Picanyol and Silva-Leander, 2018: 15). There is also an instrumental logic. While targeting marginalised groups tends to be more costly than reaching other populations, some evidence points to the potential of such investments to yield relatively higher returns. Sources of group-based inequality are diverse. It follows that the needs of marginalised groups will differ, as will the costs of fulfilling these needs. For example, PWDs may require additional health care, while engaging in routine activities may incur higher costs owing to the need for assistive devices, additional services and/or care-givers (UNESCO, 2020). The evidence on the extra costs associated with living with a disability are mostly from HICs: in the United Kingdom, the cost was estimated at almost half of the income of PWDs (John et al., 2019), while historical information from Europe and North America suggests that it costs 2 to 2.5 times more to educate students with disabilities than other students (Chambers et al., 2004; OECD, 2000).⁷⁰ For ‘hard to reach’ populations, providing infrastructure and services can be costly. They tend to live in remote areas with

69 Computed from World Bank (2020d). The figures on the share of GDP spent on health assign each country equal weight. The corresponding population-weighted average for MICs is 4.7% (3.9% for LMICs and 5.6% for UMICs).

70 All sources here are cited in UNESCO (2020: 106).

a lower population density, making services less responsive to economies of scale and more expensive to supply (Greenhill and Rabinowitz, 2017), and may need additional support, such as transport, or interpreters where they do not speak the majority language (e.g. see McDonnell and Samman, 2020).

Making adaptations in the delivery of programmes to meet marginal populations' needs can raise the unit costs of programmes. For example, in the case of education, mobile and 'satellite' schools can be more resource-intensive than providing a mainstream education. Persuading teachers and health workers to live in remote areas through financial incentives, housing and access to electricity/water and/or training can impose additional costs (Tidemand et al., 2014; Greenhill and Rabinowitz, 2017). There is a perceived trade-off between equity and efficiency in public spending, whereby efficiency is measured by the average outcome or the average number of people reached, while equity is the outcome for a given population.

Although evidence on returns to investments directed towards left-behind groups within countries is scant (UNESCO, 2019; McDonnell and Samman, 2020), there is some evidence that targeted investments may yield relatively high economic and social returns. For example, returns to education are higher for girls than boys in most countries and all regions (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, 2018). Per UNESCO (2019: 86), for the Philippines the 'very poor' have five times the relative return of the non-poor on sanitation investments. According to Carrera et al. (2017), UNICEF investments in the health of the poorest children saved 1.8 times the number of lives as equivalent investments in the health of non-poor children. Sabates et al. (2020) report that the cost-effectiveness of a programme targeting the most marginalised girls in government secondary schools in deprived rural areas of Tanzania was similar to interventions designed for more advantaged populations, who were easier (and less costly) to reach. In a similar vein, Manuel et al. (2019: 32) use World Bank data for Tanzania to show that 'efficiency savings of 40% could be made by switching education funding from the best-resourced to less well-resourced

districts (that is, the same funding could achieve 40% greater outcomes)'.

Aid disproportionately benefits wealthier areas within countries (Öhler and Nunnenkamp, 2014; Custer et al., 2017; Öhler et al., 2017; Briggs, 2018a, all cited in Briggs, 2018b;). Briggs (2018b) shows that, conditional on population density, aid across a wide range of development partners targets the relatively wealthy within countries, as well as within regions. It may be that development partners defer subnational targeting choices to aid recipients and/or that aid is flowing to the places where it can be used most effectively; nevertheless, 'if donors are sincere about reaching first those who are furthest behind, then subnational aid targeting will have to change dramatically to achieve this goal' (ibid.: 204). In Nigeria, Kotsadam et al. (2018) report that aid projects tend to be established in areas with lower infant mortality than non-aid locations, suggesting that it may not necessarily reach those populations in greatest need. The converse – given average spending levels and the biased subnational distribution of spending – is that:

much more can be done to transform the prospects of those most at risk of being left behind by better targeting investment in human capital that both builds peoples' wellbeing and boosts their economic potential (Manuel et al., 2019: 8).

There is thus considerable evidence of 'elite capture' of state resources at the expense of disadvantaged groups. Charitable and philanthropic development assistance tends to be more focused on sectors that are integral to the LNOB agenda, notably health, education and humanitarian assistance (Greenhill and Rabinowitz, 2017), though this typically lags for education relative to health (Foundation Center, 2016, cited in Manuel et al., 2019: 15).

4.4.4 Ways forward on financing: national and international

The evidence highlights multiple possibilities for raising additional revenue or reallocating

existing revenues to benefit left-behind groups. Commonly cited proposals include taxation (direct taxation and the taxation of national and international corporations); the elimination of universal subsidies applied to consumer goods and services such as fuel and energy, from which higher-income groups typically benefit most; and ensuring stronger budget execution (including through reduced leakage) (Ortiz et al., 2017; Bastagli et al., 2020; Gentilini et al., 2020). Taxation schemes in particular offer opportunities for progressivity, for instance through a shift from indirect taxes on consumption to direct taxation, increasing the efficiency of tax collection and ‘taxing back’ some proportion of benefits from wealthy households (see Bastagli et al., 2020). Zubairi and Rose (2015) suggest that, to address unequal access to education, countries should ensure that at least 20% of GDP comes from taxes, and at least 60% from personal income taxes.

Two frequent constraints to greater public spending are the share of budgets allocated to defence and (especially) debt servicing (Greenhill and Rabinowitz, 2017). For MICs, debt servicing costs are considerable; UN DESA (2020) estimates that they account for almost a quarter of public revenues in the median MIC. The comparison between levels of spending on social sectors and military expenditure is often invoked (e.g. Greenhill and Rabinowitz, 2017; Bastagli et al., 2020). For example, in 2018 MICs allocated 1.9% of their GDP, on average, to military expenditure. The share was 3% or higher in 15 countries (17% of the 87 countries with data) and 5% or higher in three countries: Libya (15.5%), Algeria (5.3%) and Lebanon (5%) (World Bank 2020d). It follows that international support for reduced debt service and national reductions in defence spending could free up resources that could be reallocated to left-behind groups.

Greenhill and Rabinowitz (2017) outline several elements of a pro-poor financing strategy:

- **Sectoral allocations.** ‘The first way that financing can better support those left behind

is through allocation to the sectors that matter most for these groups’ (p. 15). This may require going beyond social sectors to recognise broader interdependencies – e.g. road-building can be integral to progress in public health (Kharas et al., 2015, cited in *ibid.*).

- **Sub-sectoral allocations.** Within sectors, governments should increase investment in primary services that are more accessible to, and used more by, lower-income households, such as pre/primary education and primary health care. However, in education and health, spending tends to be pro-rich – focused on tertiary education and secondary and tertiary health care.⁷¹
- **Allocations to sub-national entities and programmes.** When countries decentralise social service spending, national governments should ensure through funding formulae that poorer areas or communities receive a higher per capita allocation. Within programmes, governments should seek to ensure that the higher needs of disadvantaged and marginalised groups (including those facing intersecting inequalities) are covered.

One way to operationalise an LNOB perspective is to incorporate the principle of equity along with efficiency within budgeting tools. Equity budgeting frameworks help to focus the distributional impact of public sector spending by analysing its specific impacts on groups such as children (Cummins, 2016) or on racial equity (Alliance for Innovation, 2019). Meanwhile, Benefit Incidence Analysis (BIA) (UNICEF and OPM, 2015, cited in Picanyol and Silva-Leander, 2018) allows measurement of the distribution of a benefit or service across a population or against dimensions such as gender, geographical area and ethnic group.

As noted, ODA is a relatively small share of most MIC budgets. Nonetheless, it is argued that ODA should explicitly target the poorest communities because aid projects are ‘uniquely positioned to reach high risk areas with low economic returns’, and development partners have an ethical imperative to ensure this happens (Mosley, 1987; Chandy et al., 2014; Briggs,

71 For education, see Ilie and Rose (2017) and Mustapha and Krause (2016); for health, Davoodi et al. (2010), cited in Greenhill and Rabinowitz (2017).

2017, all cited in Custer, 2017: 11). Marcus et al. (2019: 9) recommend that, while development partners' record on education and health spending is mixed, they ought to commit to 'providing the poorest subnational regions with greater per-person spend than the national average, while recognising the need to address inequalities within regions'. Per Greenhill and Rabinowitz (2017: 21), development partners should also ensure that spending prioritises 'sectors and sub-sectors with the greatest impact on those left behind', namely social sectors, and pre/primary education and primary health care. Evidence from Nigeria points to the potential for targeted aid spending to reduce group-based inequalities and benefit left-behind groups (Box 14).

4.5 Conclusions

While international consensus formed the concept of LNOB, there has been little consensus since 2015 on investing in resources to guide and facilitate it. This is needed if agreement on a rhetorical principle is to be turned into measurable progress that can be empirically informed and evidence-based.

There have been some changes in donor recognition, while countries' VNRs point to very different and inconsistent realignment at the national level.

Our report has tried to scan and report on progress in a descriptive way, and be prescriptive on how to capture and respond to the LNOB

agenda. But we have been limited in what we can do in a single summary report. Clearly, more needs to be done to assist, recognise and reward national programmes that have demonstrated measurable results. A 'how to' approach to help policy-makers identify and respond to LNOB is only very weakly in place, if at all.

There are those who regard LNOB as an insufficient response to structural inequality, and there are those who think it is an imprecise call for change that can be interpreted so blandly to ensure only marginal change. We have aimed for the middle ground by demonstrating what is possible, optimal and doable for LNOB as it currently – and imperfectly – stands. The time for rhetoric has largely ended, and it is now five years into expected implementation. Wariness is understandable. LNOB's different interpretations can be complex and difficult to understand, but the agenda it sets up is simple: identify those who are falling behind or falling out of progress in human development, and respond with a reprioritisation of focus and resources.

Recommendations

Our recommendations span concepts, evidence, policy and future research needs. All are very general in nature and descriptive because they stand in place of a prescribed, detailed and well-resourced approach to making LNOB actionable and evidence-based, at international and national levels.

Box 14 Can aid reduce group-based inequalities? Evidence from Nigeria

Nigeria is a major recipient of ODA, and has what have been described as 'the most extensive group inequalities documented on the continent' (Østby and Urdal, 2014). Drawing on a wealth of geographical aid data and extensive DHS data from 1953 to 2013, Kotsadam et al. (2018) seek to document how ODA affects neonatal, infant and child mortality. Their results 'indicate very clearly that geographical proximity to aid projects reduces neonatal, infant, and child mortality. Moreover, aid contributes to reduce systematic inter-group, or horizontal, inequalities in a setting where such differences loom large. In particular, we find that aid more effectively reduces infant mortality in less privileged groups like children of Muslim women, and children living in rural, and in Muslim-dominated areas' (p. 59). They also report that aid has effects on wealth, female employment and education for Muslim mothers.

Concept

- Interrogate further the relevance and use of the LNOB approach as a means of bridging debates about vertical and horizontal inequalities and links between inequality and poverty.
- Clarify the insights that an LNOB focus adds to well-established debates around social exclusion, poverty dynamics and chronic poverty.

Evidence

- Bring together existing evidence and invest further in constructing:
 - A centralised repository that contains an inventory of datasets, indicators, methodological work, practitioners' knowledge and advisory notes, to advance the identification and measurement of LNOB.
 - An evaluation database and meta-evaluations on 'what works, for whom, and where?'
 - A compilation of 'political resources'. These might include human rights basis and foundations for LNOB that can be used by governments and CSOs; case studies on political economy (e.g. how change happened, how governments have decided to and been able to take forward the needs of marginalised communities with little political capital, how they have been able to dedicate financing towards LNOB sectors and communities); and evaluations of VNRs (inclusions and omissions, quality considerations, etc.).
- Invest in 'quick wins' to increase the evidence base on left-behind groups, particularly through making administrative data accessible and through citizen-generated initiatives that collect community-level data and strengthen the accountability of local governments by supporting communities to use the data they collect to hold policy-makers to account.
- Raise awareness of what we already know about which groups are most at risk of being left behind in each region or country, or within each SDG goal area. This would ideally take the form of a recurrent UN-sponsored report that explores different approaches to applying the LNOB concept across the world,

what effects it has had and what would be an 'acceptable' level of progress by 2030.

Policy

- Embed LNOB concerns in national and international policy processes:
 - Review of tools and rankings intended to facilitate study of the impact of fiscal systems on vertical and horizontal inequalities, and poverty, to identify those best suited to evaluate the distributional impact of reform on the most disadvantaged groups or areas and to benchmark countries' policies relative to one another.
 - The HLPF process could support a track allowing countries to report on LNOB implementation through a dedicated VNR section and corresponding HLPF session that requires identifying left-behind groups, outlining policy responses and acknowledging populations missing from data and programming. Reporting would be not only to the HLPF, but also to their own citizens.

Further research

- Additional analysis to identify groups most at risk of being left behind and where progress is been achieved; and dissemination of the research to stimulate public deliberation and inform policy-making.
- Generate a richer understanding of the challenges and trade-offs inherent in the LNOB agenda, and how these might be addressed. As the earlier discussion in this chapter attests, these are plentiful and diverse – some are illusory, while others have a stronger empirical foundation. In the former case, work is needed on messaging around LNOB, and in the latter, on negotiating delicate trade-offs.
- Interrogate how countries can make LNOB fundamental in 'building back better' from Covid-19. As noted at the start of this report, the global pandemic is having a disproportionate impact on disadvantaged populations, putting them at risk of falling into poverty traps that magnify the impacts of shocks and the long-term consequences of ill-health and disability, loss of schooling and

education, and the inability to save or borrow (Hallegatte et al., 2018: 2). A rapid and inclusive recovery that prioritises support to the most affected populations would benefit these groups and their societies.

- LNOB in left-behind countries should be a new focus and priority for future work. This report has deliberately focused on the

analytical elements, metrics and policies that could comprise an LNOB agenda in MICs, while noting that LICs/LDCs would require a different focus (Box 15). New research would seek to identify the key elements of a ‘leave no country behind’ agenda, and the metrics and policy imperatives that follow from this.

Box 15 Leave no country behind

A ‘leave no country behind’ agenda would focus on countries where a majority of people experience absolute deprivations and are increasingly being left behind those living elsewhere (frequently LICs, LDCs and conflict-affected and fragile states). In 1980, inter-country inequality accounted for around 80% of total inequality (Milanovic, 2016). Despite subsequent declines (especially when population weighted, owing to dramatic progress in China and India), between-country differences remain acute: the average person born in the United States earned 93 times more than the average person born in the world’s poorest country (ibid.). Moreover, ‘the absolute and relative gap between the poorest countries and the world’s richest countries has continued to widen’ (Klasen and Fleurbaey, 2018). Indeed, some 30 high-poverty countries have seen ‘little to no poverty reduction in recent years’ owing to low government effectiveness, a weak private sector, conflict and violence and natural hazards and environmental risks (Gertz and Kharas, 2018). As extreme poverty continues to fall globally, poverty in 2030 is projected to be concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa (nearly 80%) and in OECD-designated Fragile and Conflict-affected States (85%). With Covid-19, the call to ‘leave no country behind’ resonates even more strongly: assessments suggest that the pandemic will ‘exacerbate the geographical concentration of poverty’, notably in LDCs (Valensisi, 2020).

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