

Will the poverty-related SDGs be met? Global projections for 2030

Arief Anshory Yusuf, Zuzy Anna, Ahmad Komarulzaman and Andy Sumner

The 1980s are sometimes referred to as the ‘lost decade’ for development. Many countries in the Global South experienced weak or no improvement in poverty indicators. Our projections are equally dire for the current decade and prospects for the SDGs unless action is taken.

Recent projections on the pace of progress towards the poverty-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) since the COVID-19 pandemic paint a bleak picture. The World Bank projects extreme poverty (at the new poverty line) at 574 million in 2030 and the FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO, project that there will be 590 million undernourished people in 2030.

Our new projections across a set of poverty-related SDGs—including extreme poverty, undernutrition, stunting, child mortality, maternal mortality, and access to clean water and basic sanitation—predict even worse conditions. These indicators have a strong, historic correlation to GDP per capita and sufficient country coverage of data to make global projections possible.

Why now? The SDGs were agreed in 2015 with a 2030 deadline. Our projections are timely—coming halfway to 2030 from 2015 when the SDGs were agreed—and use economic growth forecasts that consider recent global shocks, such as the COVID-19 crisis and inflation shock.

What do we find in global estimates?

1. Extreme poverty reduction will be slow.
2. The number of undernourished people will be higher in 2030 than in 2015 when the SDGs were agreed.

FINDINGS

We project a decade of stagnation in the 2020s

Consequently, all poverty-related SDG targets will not be achieved

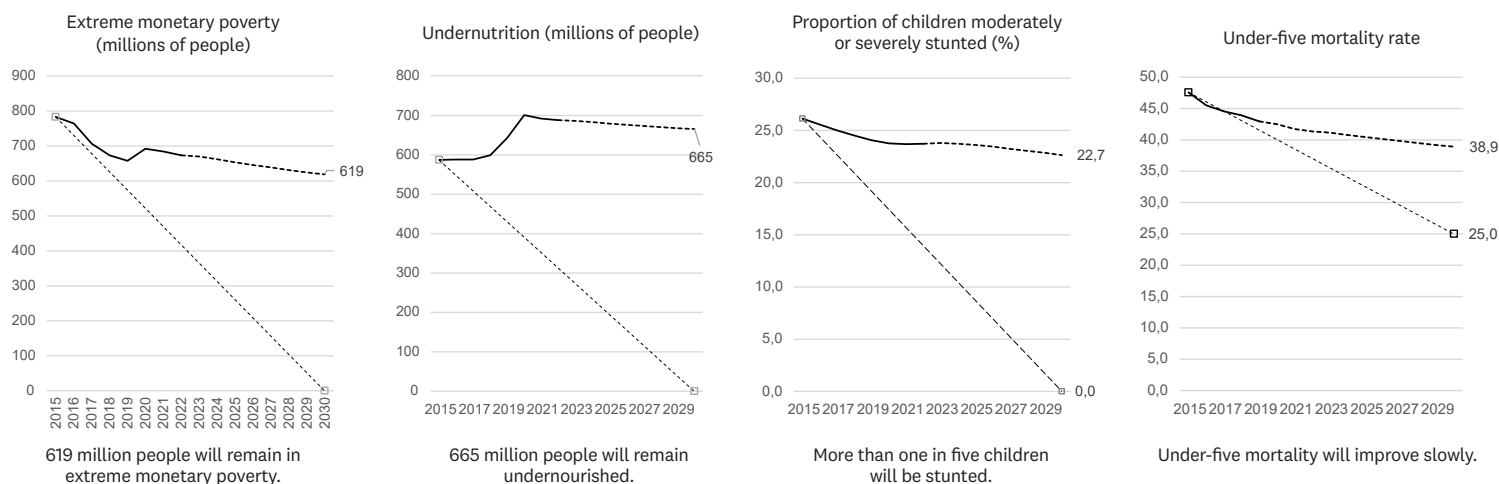
In 2030, 600 million people will remain in extreme monetary poverty, 665 million people will be undernourished, and more than 1 in 5 children will be stunted

The number of undernourished people will rise in absolute numbers between 2015–2030

We project that the under-5-year-old mortality and the maternal mortality SDGs will not be met, and progress will be slow in the 2020s

Water and sanitation will remain huge problems: 1 in 10 people will still lack access to clean water and 1 in 5 will still lack access to basic sanitation

FIGURE 1 | Projections of poverty-related SDGs, 2015–2030



- Although under-5-year-old and maternal mortality will fall, progress will slow in the 2020s.
- The number of people lacking access to safe water will still be 1 in 10 in 2030 (800 million people) and the number of people lacking basic sanitation will more than 1 in 5 of the population (1.7 billion people) in Global South countries in 2030

The findings are sobering.

Based on current trends, the world in 2030 will not achieve the poverty-related SDGs. In fact, our projections show that over 600 million people will remain in extreme poverty and 665 million people will be undernourished. Additionally, more than 1 in 5 children will be stunted. Under-5-year-old and maternal mortality will improve, but slowly. Access to safe water and basic sanitation will remain major problems.

With our projections in mind, urgent policy action is undoubtedly required.

What to do, quickly?

We argue that there is an urgent need for redistributive measures, given the weak outlook for economic growth due to projected austerity and the many countries of the Global South facing high debt-servicing costs and even debt distress. National and global public policy should focus on two areas.

First, a stronger focus is needed on inclusive growth and productive capacities (SDG 8). Specifically, redistribution with growth at global and national levels through policies that build productive capacity, introduce or expand income transfers, and ensure sufficient public investment in health, water, and sanitation.

Second, new international financing needs to be made available through debt relief or other forms of finance with the goal of increasing the fiscal space of Global South countries. This supports the stronger focus on SDG 8.

In the 1970s, Chenery et al.’s call for ‘Redistribution with Growth’ laid out an ambitious agenda. It advocated for asset redistribution,

income transfers, and public investments with a focus on productive capacity and raising the incomes of the poor. Crucially, this requires the deliberate adoption of the twin objectives of both redistribution and growth.

This idea has potential to be applied at global and national levels. Indeed, it is becoming evident that, at a global level, debt relief and other forms of development finance will be needed in the coming years to ensure scope for social and productive spending to expand—not contract—at national levels in the Global South. Our findings point toward the need for a renaissance of such agendas as the clearest pathway to ending poverty.

IMPLICATIONS

A stronger focus is needed on inclusive growth and productive capacities (SDG 8), and specifically, redistribution with growth at global and national levels through policies that build productive capacity, expand transfers, and ensure public investments

New international financing needs to be made available, through debt relief, to expand the fiscal space of low- and middle-income countries

This financing will ensure scope for social and productive spending to expand rather than contract in the 2020s



This Research Brief is based on WIDER Working Paper 123/2023 **Will economic growth be sufficient to end global poverty?**, by Arief Anshory Yusuf, Zuzy Anna, Ahmad Komarulzaman, and Andy Sumner.