

Poverty Reduction, Economic Growth and Democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the first decade of the 21st century, sub-Saharan Africa experienced its strongest period of sustained growth in decades. Economic indicators were up, and with them, many indicators of poverty witnessed marked improvements. But to what extent has Sub-Saharan Africa's record of economic growth made a material difference in the everyday lives of ordinary Africans? And to what extent have these region-wide trends been broadly shared across all countries? To examine these and other questions, we turn to an experiential measure of "lived poverty" that captures a portion of the central core of the concept of poverty that is not well captured by existing measures, and thus offers an important complement to official statistics on poverty and development.

The most recent data on lived poverty comes from public attitude surveys conducted by the Afrobarometer in 19 countries during 2008. We also report some results from a 2005 survey in Zimbabwe (since a new survey was not possible during 2008). The key findings are summarized below, and described in full in the text that follows.

Lived Poverty, 2008

The Lived Poverty Index (LPI) is based on a series of five questions that assess how frequently people go without basic necessities (enough food to eat, clean water, medicines or medical treatment, cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the course of a year. We find that:

- In every country, the most commonly reported shortage was a *cash income*, followed by shortages of *medical care*, *food*, *clean water*, and *cooking fuel*, in that order.
- The LPI score is created by combining the responses to create an average (mean) LPI score for each individual or for each country. Scores range along a five-point scale that runs from 0 (which can be thought of as no lived poverty) to 4 (which would reflect a constant absence of all basic necessities).
- The mean level of Lived Poverty across all nineteen 2008 surveys is 1.25 (on the scale of 0 to 4). However, there is significant cross-national variation around that mean, ranging from a high of 1.90 in Senegal (and 1.96 in Zimbabwe 2005) to 0.78 in Cape Verde.
- While the wealthiest countries tend to have substantially lower levels of lived poverty, the relation is relatively weak.

Trends in Lived Poverty, 2000-2008

To compare countries over time, we re-calculate a three-item scale (using only water, food and medical treatment) and track trends across 10 countries from 2000 to 2008. We find that:

- Lived poverty has indeed decreased within this group of 10 countries, from 0.71 circa 2000 to 0.67 in 2008 (on a scale of 0 to 2).

- But this 10-country trend masks wide variations. There have been overall *decreases* in lived poverty between 2000 and 2008 in six countries: Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, and Zambia.
- Lived poverty, however, remained essentially *unchanged* in Mali and Tanzania, and we observe sharp *increases* in three countries: Botswana, Nigeria and Zimbabwe (to 2005).
- Using the same scale to examine trends in countries that joined the Afrobarometer in 2002 or 2005, we find that poverty reduction has occurred in an additional three countries: Cape Verde, Kenya and Mozambique. It has increased in Benin, Madagascar, and Senegal.

Explaining Country Trajectories

The question then arises as to why we see such uneven country level trends in the reduction of lived poverty? Is it because growth has been equally uneven?

- A poverty-line based indicator does not seem to correspond particularly well to our lived poverty findings.
- National economic growth does seem to be at least modestly associated with changes in lived poverty. Examining trends across 17 countries between 2005 and 2008, lived poverty fell only in those countries that achieved growth rates of 5.5% or higher.

But the disparate paths of lived poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa appear to have at least one other important source: freedom and democracy.

- In each round of surveys, lived poverty has had a substantial correlation with indicators of political freedom: higher levels of political freedoms are associated with lower levels of lived poverty. But this might be due to higher levels of wealth among the region's more democratic countries.
- But we also find that *changes* in freedom (democratization) are strongly linked to *changes* in lived poverty (poverty reduction).
- Five countries exhibit the linkage of political freedom and poverty reduction quite clearly. As political freedom has increased in Zambia and Ghana between 1999 and 2008, levels of poverty have come down steadily. On the other hand, as political freedom decreased in Zimbabwe, Senegal and Madagascar, lived poverty has steadily increased

In sum, lived poverty remains extensive. While most Afrobarometer countries have managed to reduce lived poverty, others have allowed it to increase. Cross-national differences in national wealth and economic growth help explain differing country trajectories in lived poverty. However, a more complete picture must also take into consideration the state of political freedom. Lived poverty is strongly related to country level measures of political freedom, and changes in poverty are related to changes in freedom. This finding simultaneously supports Sen's (1999) arguments about the crucial importance of freedom for development. Yet using different measures of both development and democracy, it also corroborates the findings of Morton Halperin, Joseph Siegle and Michael Weinstein (2004) about a "democracy advantage" for well being and prosperity.

Poverty Reduction, Economic Growth and Democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa

Introduction

Until the 2008 global economic crisis, the first decade of the 21st century saw the world's developing economies produce their strongest period of sustained growth in decades (World Bank, 2009: 2). Sub-Saharan Africa was no exception to this trend. Gross Domestic Product growth across the region's economies increased from an average of 3.5 percent in 2000 to 5.7 percent by 2005. Even non-oil producing, agricultural countries such as Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mali, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Uganda were able to post growth rates of over 5 percent (UNDESA, 2008: 1, 3).

The regional growth trajectory was matched by a series of recorded improvements in other "outcome-based" indicators of poverty. For example, the estimated proportion of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa living on less than \$1 a day (a key Millennium Development Goal) decreased from 56 percent in 1997 to 51 percent in 2008 (United Nations, 2008: 9). As a whole, the region also experienced drops in undernourishment¹ improvements in access to clean water² and sanitation,³ and gains across several different health indicators.⁴

But to what extent has Sub-Saharan Africa's record of economic growth made a material difference in the everyday lives of ordinary Africans? And to what extent have these region-wide trends been broadly shared across all countries? To examine these and other questions, we turn to an experiential measure of "lived poverty" developed by the Afrobarometer Network – an international consortium of researchers⁵ – which has accumulated interviews with over 105,000 Africans in four rounds of surveys between 1999 and 2008.⁶

¹ The proportion of underweight children (under 5) dropped from 32 to 28 percent (United Nations, 2008: 10).

² The proportion of the population using improved drinking water source increased from 55 to 58 percent between 2000 and 2006 (United Nations, 2008: 42).

³ The proportion of the population using improved sanitation facilities moved upward slightly from 29 to 31 percent (United Nations, 2008: 40).

⁴ Child (under 5) mortality rates dropped from 167 per 1,000 live births in 2000 to 157 in 2006, and the proportions of babies (12 to 23 months) who received at least one dose of measles vaccine went from 55 percent in 2000 to 72 percent in 2006 (United Nations, 2008: 20-21). The presence of deliveries attended by skilled health workers went from 42 (2000) to 47 (2006); proportion of women (15-49) receiving at least some antenatal care went from 68 percent (1990) to 75 percent (2005). Maternal deaths per 100,000 live births also decreased, though very marginally, from 920 in 1990 to 900 in 2005 (UN, 2008: 25-26). And the proportions of people living with HIV receiving antiretroviral therapy increased from 21 to 30 percent (UN, 2008: 29).

⁵ The Afrobarometer is a joint enterprise of the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (Idasa) and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP, Benin). Fieldwork, data entry, preliminary analysis, and the dissemination of survey results are conducted by National Partner organizations in each African country. Michigan State University and the University of Cape Town provide technical and advisory support services.

⁶ Round 1 covered 12 countries between 1999 and 2001 (Botswana, Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe). Round 2 surveys, conducted in 2002-3, also included Cape Verde, Kenya, Mozambique and Senegal. Round 3 in 2005-6 covered 18 countries with the inclusion of Benin and Madagascar. Burkina Faso and Liberia were added in Round 4. Fieldwork for Round 4 Afrobarometer surveys was conducted in 19 African countries between March and December 2008. Due to state-sponsored violence, a Round 4 survey could not be conducted in Zimbabwe during 2008; instead this bulletin refers to results from the Round 3 survey in Zimbabwe of October 2005. Also note that all findings from Zambia should still be considered provisional; final results will be released in mid-2009.

The Lived Poverty Index (LPI) consists of a series of question items that assess how frequently people go without basic necessities during the course of a year.⁷ It measures a portion of the central core of the concept of poverty that is not well captured by existing measures, and thus offers an important complement to official statistics on poverty and development. Because people are the best judges of their own interests, respondents are best placed to tell us about their quality of life, though they might not be able to do it with a great deal of precision. If Amartya Sen (1999) is right and the value of one's standard of living lies in the living itself, an experiential measure of shortages of the basic necessities of life takes us directly to the central core of what the concept of poverty is all about.

Lived Poverty in Africa, 2008

The root of the LPI battery of questions reads: "Over the past year, how often, if ever have you or your family gone without _____?" The interviewer then repeats the question for each of the following basic necessities: "Enough food to eat?" "Enough clean water for home use?" "Medicines or medical treatment?" "Enough fuel to cook your food?" and "A cash income?" But rather than forcing respondents to report their recalled experiences at an inappropriately fine level of precision (e.g., the number of days out of 365, or the number of weeks out of 52), we simply provide an ordinal level response scale with the options: "Never," "Just Once or Twice," "Several Times," "Many Times," or "Always".

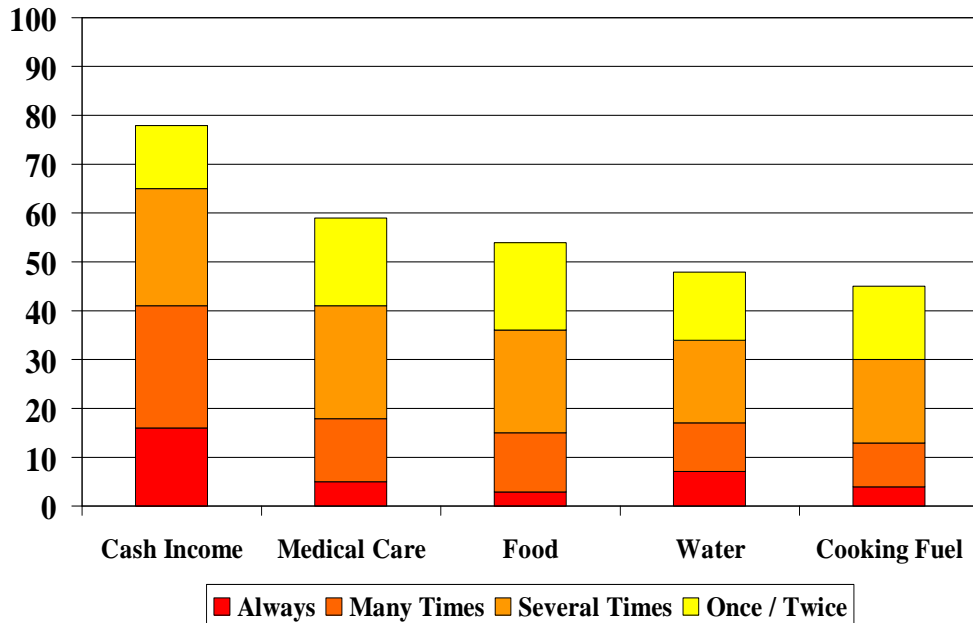
The responses to these items in the most recent, Round 4 series of Afrobarometer surveys, conducted in 19 countries in 2008, demonstrate that "lived poverty" in Sub-Saharan Africa is still extensive.⁸ In every country, the most commonly reported shortage (as measured by those who had gone without at least once) was a *cash income*. This aspect of poverty was followed by shortages of *medical care*, *food*, *clean water*, and *cooking fuel*, in that order (Figure 1). While the typical, or median African went without a cash income "several times" in the previous year, the typical experience with food and medical care was to have experienced "just one or two" shortages.⁹ On a more positive note, the average (median) African said she "never" went without clean water, or home cooking fuel (though just barely).

⁷ We adopted and developed this scale from a set of question items first asked in the New Russia Barometer (Rose, 1998).

⁸ All Afrobarometer interviews – totalling 26,414 in Round 4 – are conducted face-to-face by trained fieldworkers in the language of the respondent's choice. Respondents are selected using a random, stratified, multistage, national probability sample representing adult citizens aged 18 years. Each country sample yields a margin of error of +/- 3 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence level. The pooled, cross-country sample is equally weighted to standardize national samples at n = 1200.

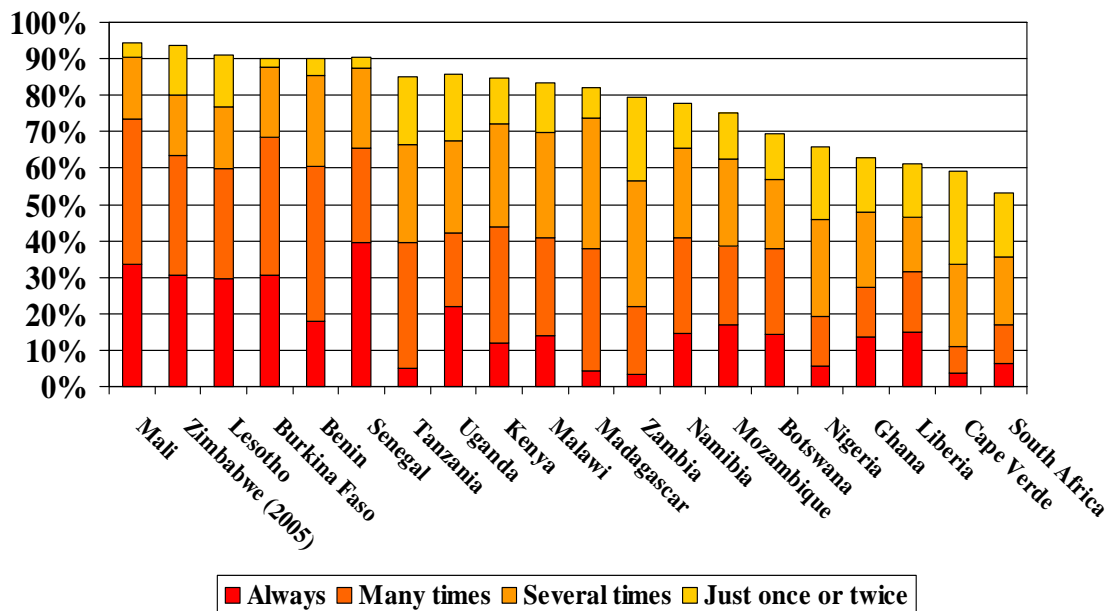
⁹ In general, Afrobarometer surveys can only be conducted in the continent's most open societies. Hence the results do not represent the continent – or all Africans – as a whole.

Figure 1: Lived Poverty Across 19 African Countries, 2008



However, responses to these items also demonstrate substantial cross-national variation across each basic necessity.¹⁰ For example, while just over one-half of all South Africans experienced at least one shortage of cash in the previous 12 months, the figure ranges as high as nine of every ten Malians, Zimbabweans (2005), Basotho, Burkinabe, Beninois and Senegalese.

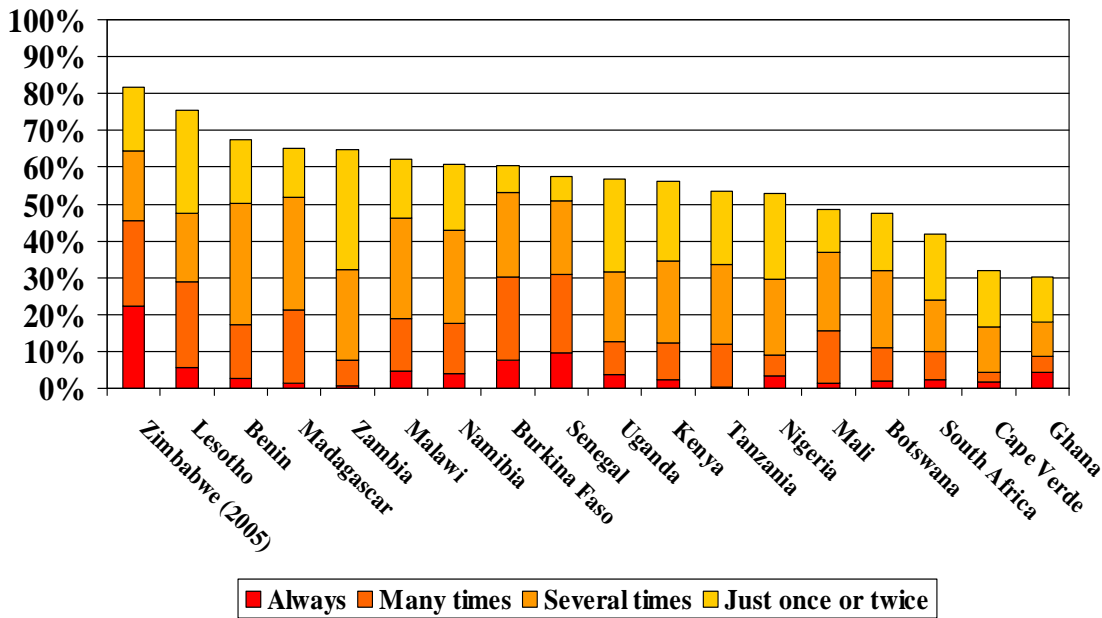
Figure 2: Lived Poverty: Going Without Cash Income, by Country, 2008



¹⁰ All average scores for 2008 exclude Zimbabwe. But 2005 scores for Zimbabwe are included as a point of reference for all cross-national comparisons.

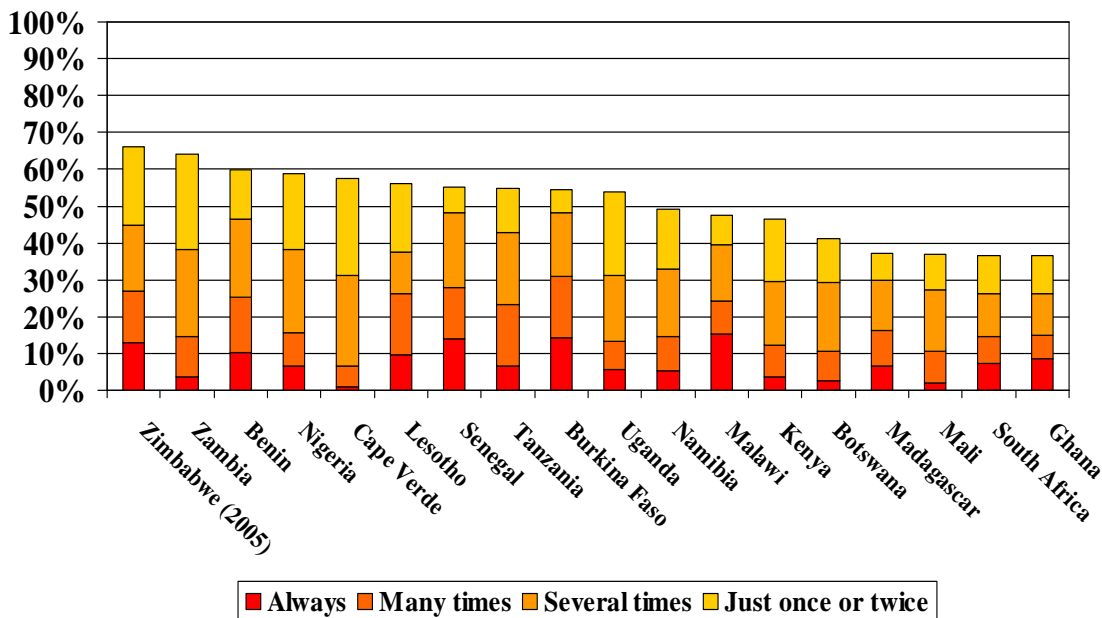
Turning to food, the LPI question finds that just three in ten Ghanaians, and Cape Verdians experienced any kind of food insecurity in the previous year, compared to seven of every ten Basotho (and eight of 10 Zimbabweans in 2005).

Figure 3: Lived Poverty: Going Without Food, by Country, 2008



Finally, we report responses to the question on clean water for cooking purposes and home use. Shortages afflicted approximately 35 percent of respondents in Ghana, South Africa, Mali and Madagascar, compared to 60 percent or more of Zambians and Zimbabweans (2005).

Figure 4: Lived Poverty: Going Without Clean Water, by Country, 2008



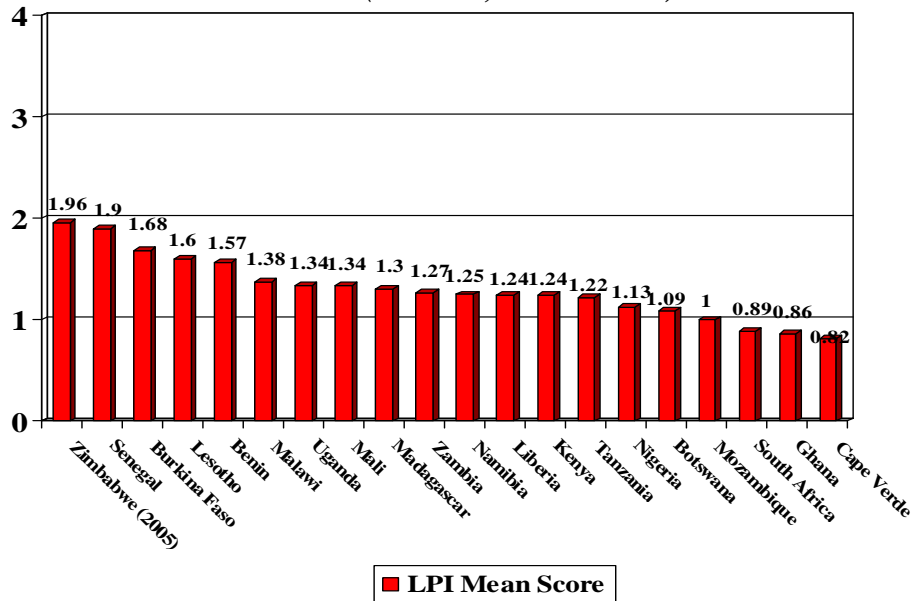
This battery of questions enables us not only to examine the various aspects of lived poverty individually, but also to combine the responses and create an average (mean) LPI score for each

individual or for each country (or any other sub-group for that matter). Scores range along a five-point scale that runs from 0 (which can be thought of as no lived poverty) to 4 (which would reflect a constant absence of all basic necessities). Previous research has demonstrated that the scale has impressive internal validity and reliability that is strong and consistent *across all country samples* and *across all rounds of surveys*.¹¹

The mean level of Lived Poverty across all nineteen 2008 surveys is 1.25 (on the scale of 0 to 4). However, there is significant cross-national variation around that mean, which ranges from a high of 1.90 in Senegal (and 1.96 in Zimbabwe 2005) to 0.78 in Cape Verde.

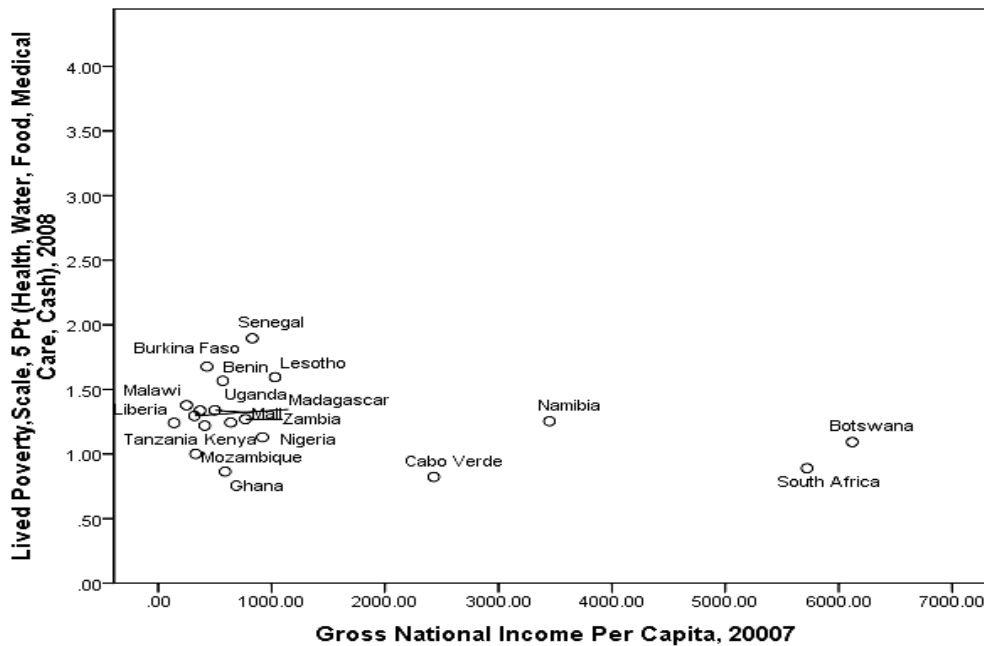
While the wealthiest countries tend to have substantially lower levels of lived poverty, Figure 6 reveals that the fit is relatively weak. Of the four countries with per capital Gross National Incomes Per Capita of \$1000 or more, Cape Verde (0.78) and South Africa (0.89) have significantly lower levels of lived poverty, but not Botswana (1.09) or Namibia (1.25). However, countries under \$1000 per capita include both those with very high levels of lived poverty such as Senegal (1.90), Burkina Faso (1.68) and Benin (1.57), as well as a country with one of the lowest levels of lived poverty (Ghana at 0.86).

**Figure 5: Average Lived Poverty, by Country, 2008
(0-4 Scale, 5 Dimensions)**



¹¹ See Robert Mattes, 2008, “The Material and Political Bases of Lived Poverty in Africa: Insights From the Afrobarometer.” In Valerie Møller, Dennis Huschka and Alex Michalos, eds., *Barometers of Quality of Life Around the Globe: How Are We Doing?* Springer Science Business Media B.V., pp. 161-186.

Figure 6: National Wealth and Lived Poverty, by Country, 2008
($r=-.395$, $N=19$)



Across all countries, rural people (1.40) experience higher levels of poverty than urban dwellers (1.03).¹² And in South Africa, blacks (1.04) experience poverty at over three times the rate of white (.29) and Indian (.30) respondents. But while women may personally confront far greater challenges in eking out a living than men, they are only slightly more likely to belong to households that experience shortages than men (1.28 to 1.25).¹³

Lived Poverty, 1999-2008

The LPI not only allows us to make efficient comparisons across countries or other subgroups, but also across time. However, because there were some differences in the content and wording of the questions and responses across countries in the first round of surveys (circa 2000), **we recalculate a three-item scale (using only water, food and medical treatment)** that can provide overtime trends for 10 countries between 2000 and 2008¹⁴ (of the original 12 Afrobarometer countries, the Uganda questionnaire did not carry this scale in 1999, and the most recent Zimbabwe Round 4 survey will only be carried out later this year). **This three-point scale runs from 0 to 2, and will be used for all subsequent analyses in this paper.**

What this recalculated scale shows is consistent with the picture of sub-Saharan Africa's sustained growth described at the start of this paper: lived poverty has indeed decreased within this group of 10 countries. It has gone downward from 0.71 to 0.67 on a scale of 0 to 2 between 2000 and 2008, and moved downward slightly, but consistently in each round of surveys.¹⁵

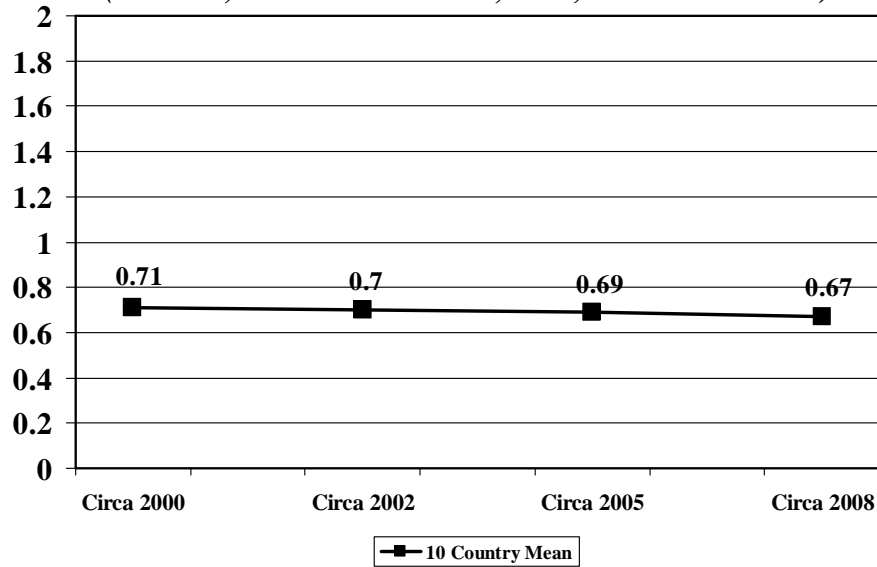
¹² Eta = .194, p = .000, n=26,412.

¹³ Eta = .016, p = .018, n=26,412.

¹⁴ The scale consists of only three items because the question on cash income was not asked in Ghana in Round 1, and the question on home fuel was adopted across the Afrobarometer only in Round 2.

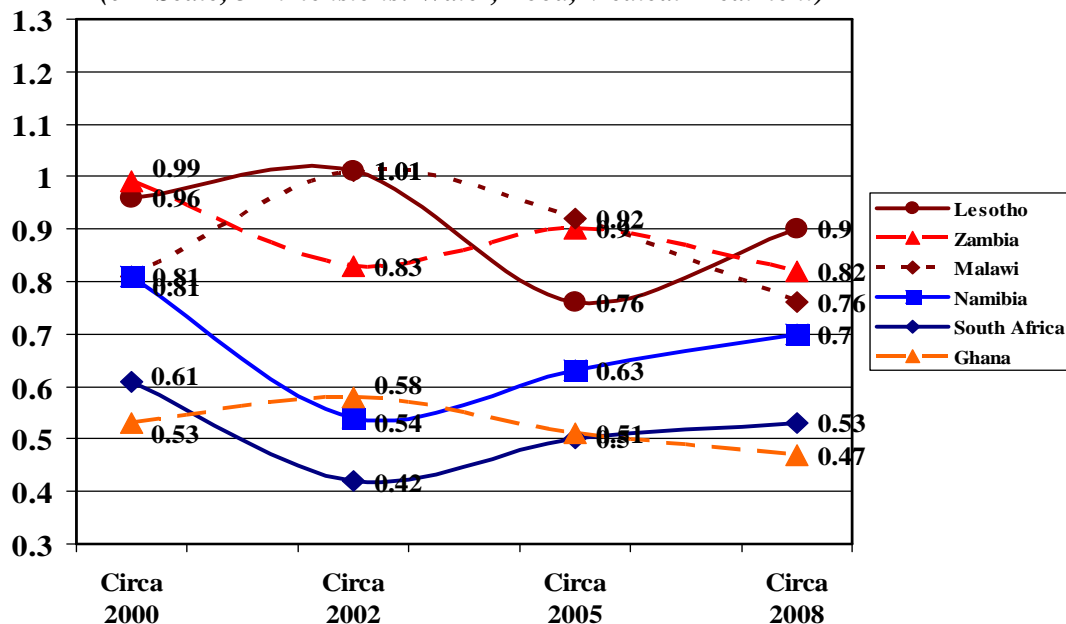
¹⁵ The differences between the first and last survey are statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level.

Figure 7: Changes in Lived Poverty, 10 Countries, 2000-2008
(0-2 Scale, 3 Dimensions: Water, Food, Medical Treatment)



However, this 10-country trend masks more than it reveals. While no single country has consistently reduced lived poverty at each survey, there have been overall *decreases* between Round 1 (circa 2000) and Round 4 (2008) in six countries. The largest reduction has occurred in Zambia (.99 to .82)¹⁶, followed by Namibia (.81 to .70), South Africa (.61 to .53), Ghana (.53 to .47), Lesotho (.96 to .90), and Malawi (.81 to .76).

Figure 8: Decreasing Lived Poverty, 2000-2008
(0-2 Scale, 3 Dimensions: Water, Food, Medical Treatment)

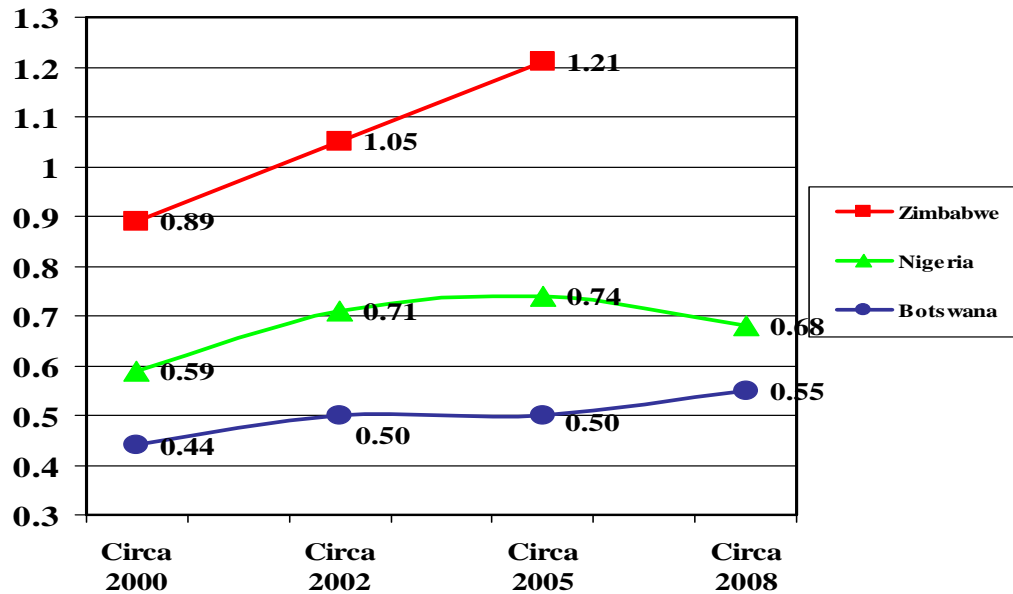


Lived poverty, however, remained essentially *unchanged* in Mali (.60 to .63) and Tanzania (.73 to .71) (not shown). Indeed, we observe sharp *increases* in three countries. The largest increase, by

¹⁶ 2008 results for Zambia are provisional.

far, occurred in Zimbabwe (.90 to 1.21 as of the 2005 survey), followed by Botswana (.44 to .55) and Nigeria (.59 to .68).

Figure 9: Increasing Lived Poverty, 2000-2008
(0-2 Scale, 3 Dimensions: Water, Food, Medical Treatment)



Using the same scale to examine trends in countries that joined the Afrobarometer in Round 2 (circa 2002) or Round 3 (circa 2005), we see that poverty reduction has occurred in an additional three countries: Mozambique (.80 to .52, though the big drop occurred only after Round 3); Cape Verde (.67 to .52) and very slightly in Kenya (.72 to .68). It has increased, very considerably in Senegal (.71 to .96), Benin (.76 to .90) and Madagascar (.66 to .75).

Figure 10: Decreasing Lived Poverty, 2002-2008
(0-2 Scale, 3 Dimensions: Water, Food, Medical Treatment)

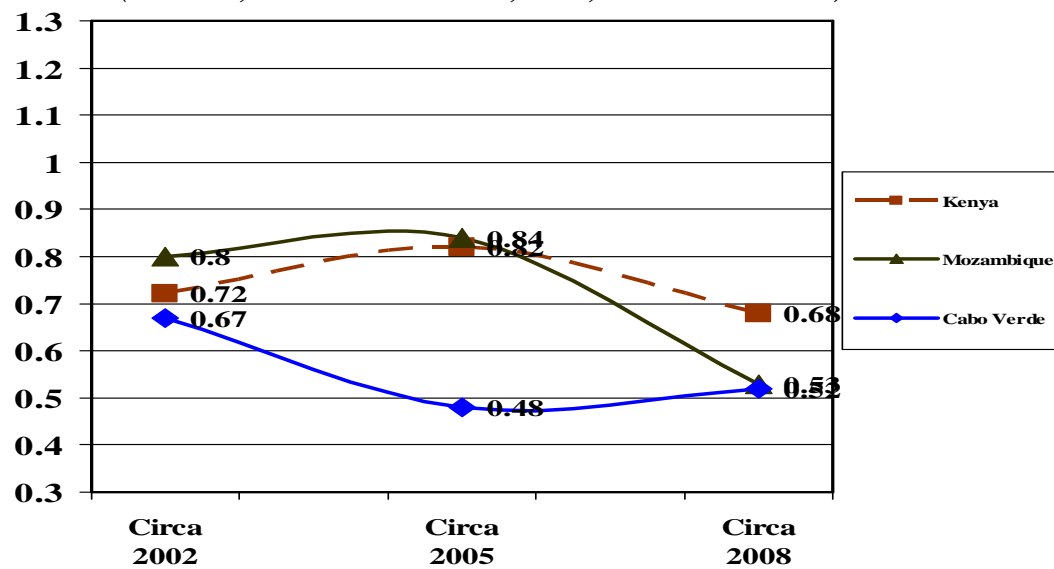
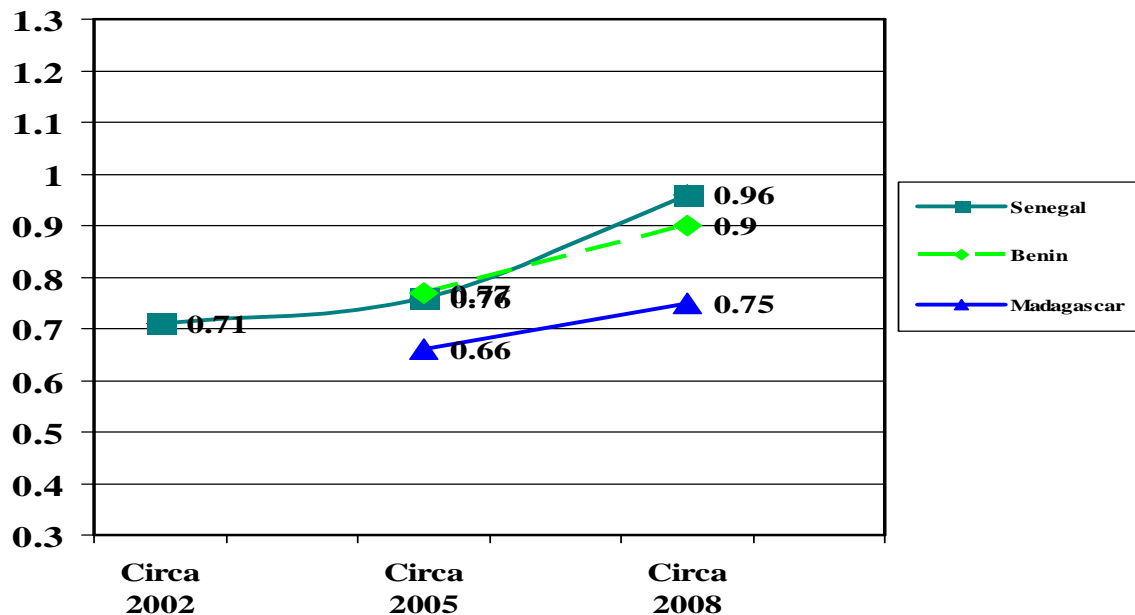


Figure 11: Increasing Lived Poverty, 2002-2008
 (0-2 Scale, 3 Dimensions: Water, Food, Medical Treatment)



Understanding Differing National Trajectories in Lived Poverty

Given the generally positive picture of growth painted by the region-wide statistics cited at the beginning of this paper, the question then arises as to why we see such uneven country level trends in the reduction of lived poverty? Is it because growth has been equally uneven? To unpack this, we first look at World Bank data on the proportion of the population living on less than \$1 per day, the international poverty line (which now serves as the official indicator of one of the Millennium Development Goals). As noted above, the Bank has estimated that this figure decreased from 56 percent in 1997 to 51 percent in 2008. However, this estimate is not an average for all countries, but rather appears to be an extrapolation from only those countries that have conducted at least two household poverty assessment surveys during this time period.

Table 1 lists those Afrobarometer countries that meet this criterion. Setting aside Burkina Faso, for which we have only one Afrobarometer survey, this leaves us 11 countries with which to make head-to-head comparisons. The proportions of people living below the income-based poverty line decreased in nine of the eleven countries. Of these nine countries, however, the Afrobarometer data show that “lived poverty” actually *increased* in three of them (Madagascar, Nigeria and Senegal) and showed no change in another (Mali). None of this is to suggest that the World Bank data are wrong. But strong criticisms have been made of the usefulness of a “poverty line” approach. William Easterly (2007: 4), for example, has noted that the approach (and the resulting MDG goal) “places great value on growth that moves an individual from below to above the absolute poverty line, while it places zero value on growth that increases income of those who still remain below the poverty line. There is no rational basis in welfare economics for such extreme weighting.”

Table 1: Changes in Poverty* (Measured as Percentage of Population Under Poverty Line)

	End of Previous Poverty Assessment Survey	Proportion of Country Living On Less Than \$1.25 (PPP) Per Day**	End of Most Recent Poverty Assessment Survey	Proportion of Country Living On Less Than \$1.25 (PPP) Per Day	Net Change
Burkina Faso	1998	70.0	2003	56.5	-13.5
Senegal	2001	44.2	2005	33.5	-10.7
Mali	2001	61.2	2006	51.4	- 9.8
Ghana	1999	39.1	2006	30.0	- 9.1
Malawi	1998	83.1	2005	73.9	- 9.2
Madagascar	2001	76.3	2005	67.8	- 8.5
Mozambique	1997	81.3	2003	74.7	- 6.6
Uganda	2002	57.4	2005	51.5	- 5.9
Lesotho	1995	47.6	2003	43.4	- 4.2
Nigeria	1997	68.5	2004	64.4	- 4.1
Zambia	2003	64.6	2005	64.3	- 0.3
Kenya	1997	19.6	2006	19.7	+0.01

* Benin, Cape Verde, Liberia, Namibia have had only one poverty assessment household survey.

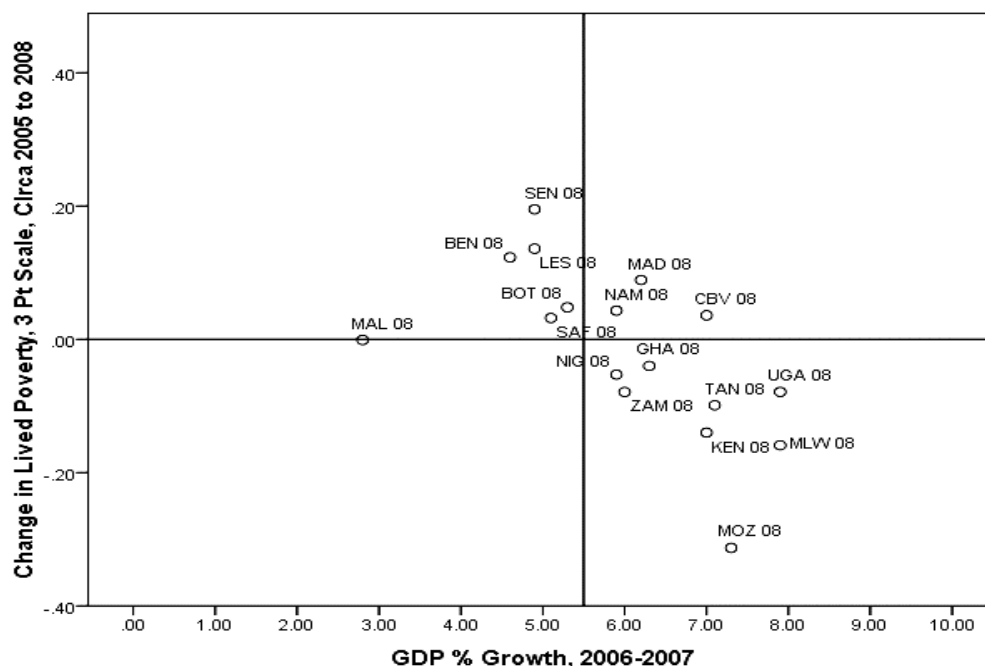
Botswana's last survey was in 1994, South Africa's was 2000, and Tanzania's 2001. Zimbabwe does not appear to have ever held a poverty assessment exercise.

** While \$1 Per Day is widely used, most recent World Bank data use \$1.25 adjusted for purchasing power parity.

Source: World Bank, 2009: 66-69.

Yet national economic growth does seem to be at least modestly associated with changes in lived poverty. Examining trends across 17 countries between 2005 and 2008, lived poverty fell only in those countries that achieved growth rates of 5.5% per year or higher over the same period.

Figure 12: Growth and Lived Poverty Reduction, by Country, 2005-2008
($r=-.623$, $N=17$)

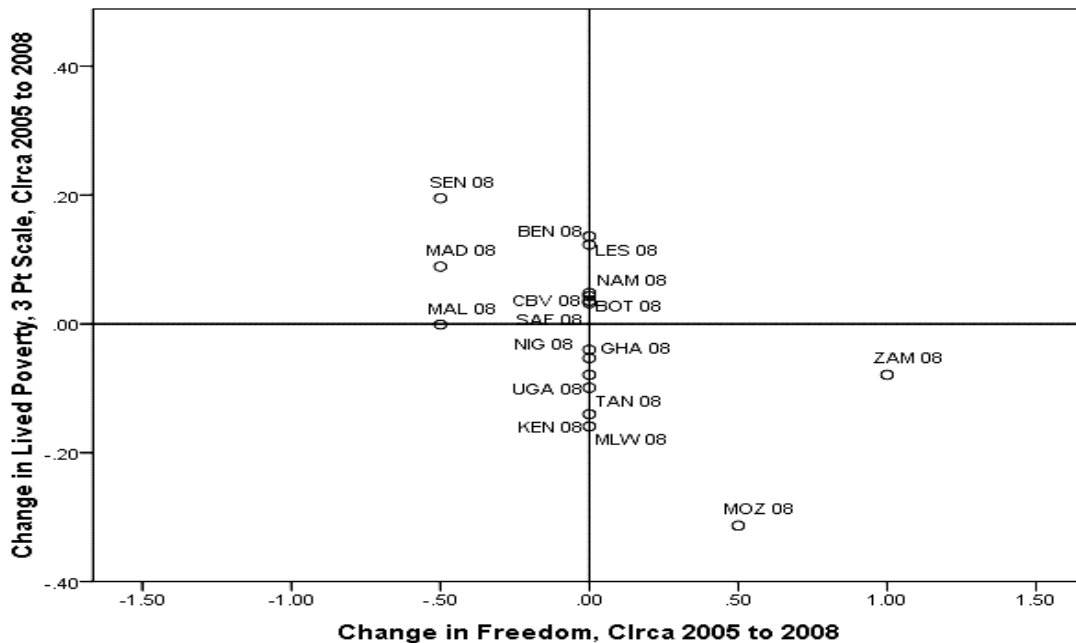


But the disparate paths of lived poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa appear to have at least one other important source. As Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen (1999: 152-154) has emphasized, freedom and democracy are also critically important to development, especially through the freedom of choice. “[F]reedoms are not only the primary ends of development, they are also among its primary means” (1999: 10) Given this logic, we ask whether lived poverty might be as much, or more a function of political freedom and democracy, as it is national material wealth.

The first piece of evidence that this might be true can be seen in the fact that in each round of surveys, lived poverty has had a substantial correlation with indicators of political freedom (as measured by the combined reversed Freedom House measures of political rights and political liberties). Higher levels of political freedoms are associated with lower levels of lived poverty.¹⁷ However, it is very likely that at least part of this association is due to the higher levels of wealth amongst the region’s more democratic countries, like Cape Verde, Botswana and South Africa.

A second, stronger piece of evidence can be found once we hold the level of democracy constant and only look at *changes* in freedom (democratization) and how they relate to *changes* in lived poverty (poverty reduction). We find strong linkages. That is, the more a country expanded political liberties and political rights in a given period, the more it reduced poverty during the same period. The link exists whether the period in question is 2000-2005 ($r=-.633$, $N=11$), 2000-2008 ($r=-.482$, $N=10$) or 2005-2008 ($r=-.531$, $N=17$).

Figure 13: Democratization and Lived Poverty Reduction, by Country, 2005-2008
($r = -.531$, $N=17$)



As we have already seen, not all countries have consistently reduced (or increased) lived poverty, nor have they consistently increased (or decreased) political freedom. However, five countries exhibit the linkage of political freedom and poverty reduction quite clearly. As political freedom has increased in Zambia and Ghana between 1999 and 2008, levels of poverty have come down

¹⁷ In Round 1, the correlation is $r = -.652$ ($N=11$). For Round 2: $r=-.614$ ($N=16$); Round 3: $r=-.897$ ($N=18$); and Round 4: $r=-.452$ ($N=19$).

steadily. On the other hand, as political freedom decreased in Zimbabwe, Senegal and Madagascar, lived poverty has steadily increased.

Figure 14: Democratizers Reducing Poverty

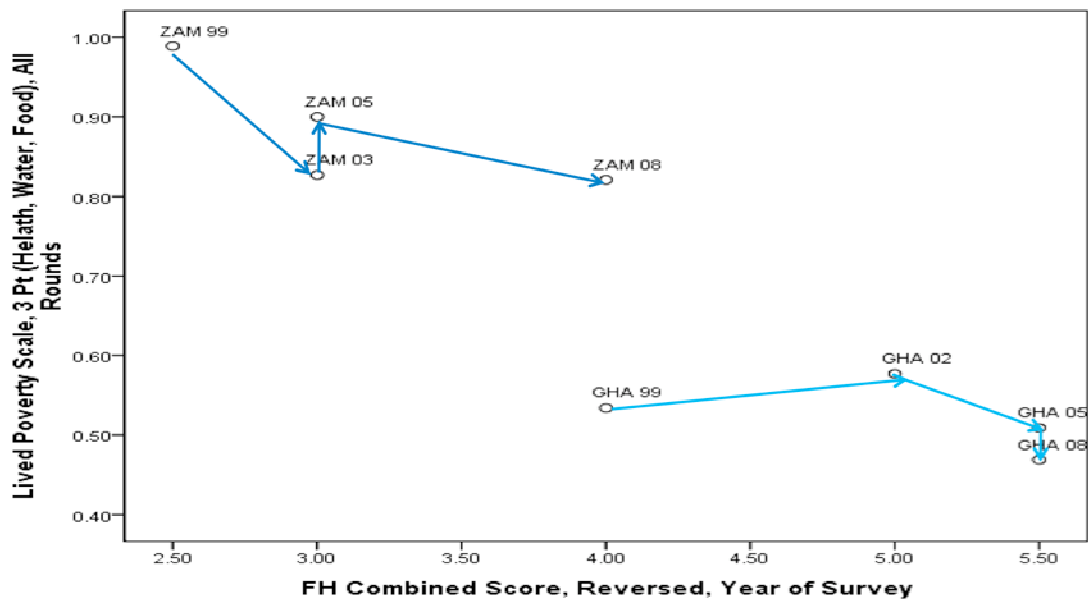
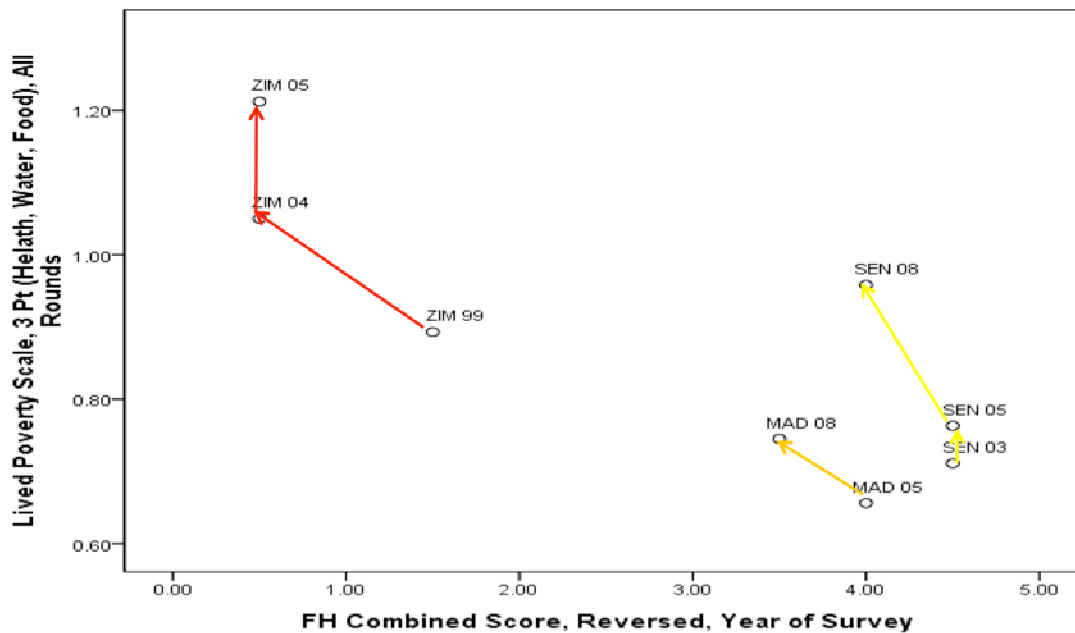


Figure 15: Backsliders Increasing Poverty



Conclusion

While Sub-Saharan Africa experienced significant growth in the first decade of the 21st century, and made notable progress as measured by a range of “outcome” based indicators of development, lived poverty remains extensive. While most Afrobarometer countries have managed to reduce lived poverty, others have allowed it to increase. Very little of this, however,

seems to be reflected by the Millennium Development Goal indicator of the proportion of people living below the money-metric poverty line of \$1 a day.

We do find that cross-national differences in national wealth and economic growth help explain differing country trajectories in lived poverty. However, a more complete picture must also take into consideration the state of political freedom. Lived poverty is strongly related to country level measures of political freedom, and changes in poverty are related to changes in freedom.¹⁸ This finding simultaneously supports Sen's (1999) arguments about the crucial importance of freedom for development. Yet using different measures of both development and democracy, it also corroborates the findings of Morton Halperin, Joseph Siegle and Michael Weinstein (2004) about a "democracy advantage" for well being and prosperity. As Siegle has argued more recently, "Democracies and democratizers in Africa consistently generate superior development outcomes, avoid economic and humanitarian catastrophes, and are less prone to civil conflict" (2006: 6). "It is for this reason that the keywords should be *democratic governance* and not solely the politically correct 'good governance'" (2006: 5).

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www.afrobarometer.org

¹⁸ A model containing both variables explains 43 percent of the variance in the net change in lived poverty between 2005 and 2008. The standardized regression coefficient (beta) for growth is -.496 while the coefficient for democratization is -.353 (N=16).

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