

By Romaric Samson and Richard Houessou

Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, launched in 2015, outlines global aspirations and priorities through the end of this decade. Prominently, the first two Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) call for ending poverty "in all its forms everywhere" and for "zero hunger" (United Nations, 2021a).

The proportion of the world's population living in extreme poverty decreased from 36% in 1990 to 16% in 2010 and to 10% in 2015, but the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to have reversed this trend (Sumner, Hoy, & Ortiz-Juarez, 2020).

Benin has had one of the fastest-growing economies in sub-Saharan Africa in recent years (Adegoke, 2019), with per-capita gross domestic product (GDP) growth averaging 3.6% between 2017 and 2019 (World Bank, 2020). But the most recent household survey led by the Institut National de la Statistique et de l'Analyse Economique (2018) estimated that 38.5% of citizens still live in poverty. Are GDP gains translating into better lives for ordinary Beninese?

According to Afrobarometer survey findings, "lived poverty" – the experience of going without basic life necessities – has worsened significantly over the past decade in Benin. More than three out of four Beninese face moderate or high levels of lived poverty.

Many of these citizens continue to have limited access to the electricity grid, water and sanitation services, and other essential development infrastructure. Most importantly, our analysis shows they often lack the education and employment needed to break the poverty cycle.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network that produces reliable data on African experiences and assessments of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Eight rounds of surveys have been conducted in up to 39 countries since 1999. Round 8 surveys in 2019/2021 cover 34 countries. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the respondent's language with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Benin, led by at Innovante Recherche en Economie et Gouvernance (IREG), interviewed 1,200 adults between 22 November and 7 December 2020. A sample of this size produces national results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a confidence level of 95%. Surveys were previously conducted in Benin in 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, and 2017.

Key findings

- Almost all Beninese (97%) reported that they or someone in their family went without a cash income at least once during the year preceding the 2020 survey. Large majorities also experienced shortages of medical care (78%), clean water (66%), and food (64%).
 - o The proportions of the population experiencing shortages of these basic necessities have increased significantly over the past decade.
- More than three-quarters (78%) of citizens experienced moderate or high levels of lived poverty during the previous year, up from 51% in 2011.
- Moderate/high poverty was far more common in rural areas (86%) than in cities (68%). Women (81%) and citizens without formal education (82%) were somewhat more likely to experience moderate/high poverty than men (75%) and more educated citizens (66% of those with post-secondary qualifications).
- The regions of Atacora (91%), Couffo (88%), and Collines (86%) had the highest rates of moderate/high poverty.

- Citizens experiencing moderate or high poverty were less likely than their better-off counterparts to live in formal or non-traditional houses (55% vs. 75%). They were twice as likely as the non-poor to live in traditional houses or huts (36% vs. 18%).
- While many non-poor Beninese also lacked access to key infrastructure and public services, this was an even greater problem among citizens experiencing moderate or high lived poverty. Poor respondents were far less likely than wealthier respondents to live in areas served by a piped-water system (45% vs. 75%), by a sewage system (23% vs. 47%), by the electric grid (57% vs. 84%), and by banking or microfinance services (56% vs. 77%).
- A regression analysis shows that education and employment are important determinants of lower levels of lived poverty.

Poverty in Benin

Measuring poverty

Poverty is a multidimensional concept. It can be defined as a lack of monetary resources, lack of access to education and health care, lack of participation in a community, and so on. Objectively, poverty can be measured by monetising belongings and consumption and defining a threshold or poverty line under which households or individuals are considered poor.

There is a growing recognition that more reliable information on poverty can be obtained by asking individuals directly about their situation (Deaton, 2010). This "subjective" measurement captures poverty in different areas of life (education, health, food, security, employment) and provides more detailed information on deprivation (Ravallion, 2012)).

Afrobarometer collects data on personal experiences of poverty, or "lived poverty." Its surveys ask respondents: "Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: Gone without enough food to eat? Gone without enough clean water for home use? Gone without medicines or medical treatment? Gone without enough fuel to cook your food? Gone without a cash income?" Response options range from "never" and "just once or twice" to "several times," "many times," and "always."

Lived poverty in Benin

Deprivation is a reality for many citizens in Benin. The share of respondents who went without basic life necessities at least once during the previous year increased significantly compared to previous survey rounds (Figure 1). In 2020, almost all respondents (97%) said they or someone in their family went without a cash income at least once, a 6-percentage-point increase compared to 2011, while more than three-fourths (78%) went without needed medicine or medical treatment, a 20-point rise. Majorities also reported going without enough clean water (66%, up 19 percentage points compared to 2011), enough food (64%, up 15 points), and enough cooking fuel (52%, up 16 points).

Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) combines responses to these five questions about basic necessities to calculate an average "lived poverty" score for each respondent and for each country (Mattes, 2020). Scores range along a five-point scale from 0 (which can be thought of as no lived poverty) to 4 (reflecting a constant absence of all basic necessities). For Benin, this score has increased from 1.29 in 2011 to 1.81 in 2020 (Figure 2), suggesting that a typical respondent increasingly went without these basic necessities.

We can categorise the lived poverty scores of individual respondents into two groups: low or no lived poverty, with LPI scores of less than 2, and moderate or high lived poverty, with scores of 2 or above. In 2020, more than three-fourths (78%) of the population fell into the moderate/high lived poverty group, a 27-percentage-point increase over the past decade (Figure 3).

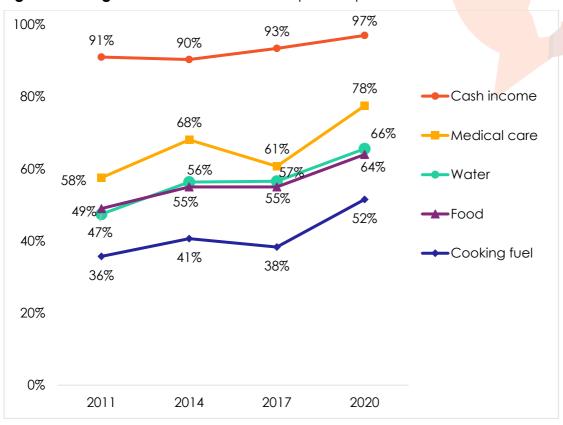


Figure 1: Going without basic necessities | Benin | 2011-2020

Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: Gone without enough food to eat? Gone without enough clean water for home use? Gone without medicines or medical treatment? Gone without enough fuel to cook your food? Gone without a cash income? (% who said "just once or twice," "several times," "many times," or "always")

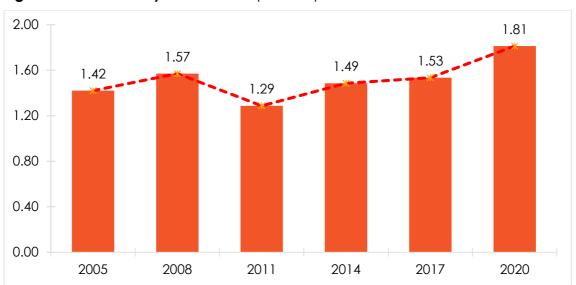


Figure 2: Lived Poverty Index score | Benin | 2005-2020

Lived Poverty Index (LPI) scores reflect average deprivation of five basic necessities on a scale of 0 (no deprivation) to 4 (constant absence of all basic necessities).

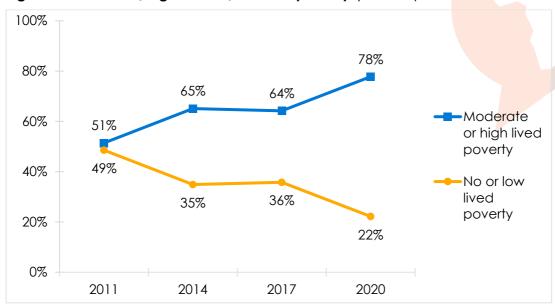


Figure 3: Moderate/high vs. low/no lived poverty | Benin | 2011-2020

Lived Poverty Index (LPI) scores reflect average deprivation of five basic necessities on a scale of 0 (no deprivation) to 4 (constant absence of all basic necessities).

Poverty profile: Who are the poor?

Poverty by key socio-demographic characteristics

Women were somewhat more likely than men to be in the moderate/high lived poverty category, 81% vs. 75% (Figure 4). Unsurprisingly, individuals with post-secondary education were less likely to be poor than those with less schooling, though the proportion was still enormous (66%). Lived poverty rates did not vary by religious affiliation.

Moderate/high lived poverty showed little variation by age group until after age 45, when it gradually declined, from a high of 82% in the 36-45 age group to 68% among those above age 55 (Figure 5).

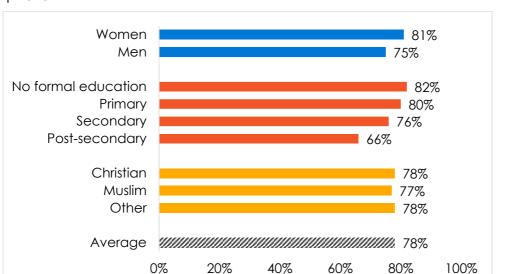


Figure 4: Moderate/high lived poverty | by gender, education, and religion | Benin | 2020

Figure shows % of the population that experienced moderate or high lived poverty, disaggregated by gender, education level, and religion.

100% 82% 79% 78% 78% 77% 80% 68% 60% 40% 20% 0% 36-45 18-25 26-35 46-55 Over 55 Total years years years years years

Figure 5: Moderate/high lived poverty | by age group | Benin | 2020

Figure shows % of the population that experienced moderate or high lived poverty, disaggregated by age group.

Poverty by residence and region¹

Moderate/high lived poverty was considerably more common in rural areas (86%) than in cities (68%) (Figure 6).

In line with this, regions that are home to big cities had lower rates of moderate/high lived poverty: Ouémé (74%), Borgou (67%), and Littoral (65%). In contrast, more than eight in 10 respondents reported moderate/high lived poverty in Atacora (91%), Couffo (88%), Collines (86%), Plateau (84%), Zou (83%), and Alibori (83%).

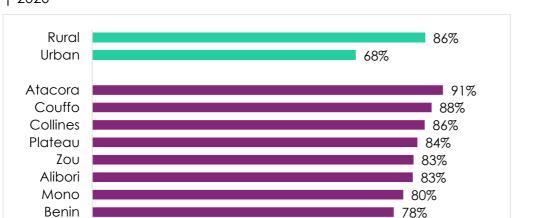


Figure 6: Moderate/high lived poverty | by urban-rural residence and region | Benin | 2020

60%

40%

77%

74%

74%

80%

100%

67%

65%

Donga

Ouémé

Borgou

Littoral

0%

20%

Atlantique

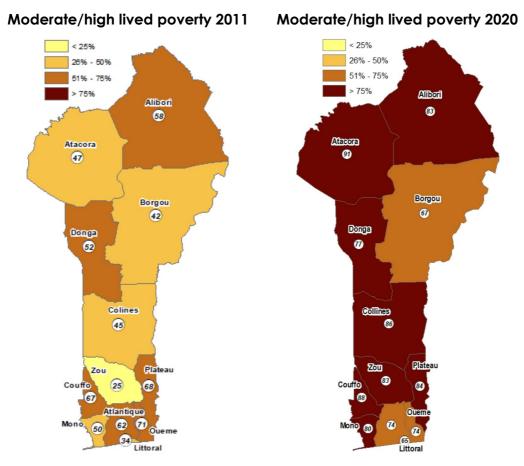
Figure shows % of the population that experienced moderate or high lived poverty, disaggregated by urban-rural location and region.

¹ In accordance with their share of the total population, small sample sizes in less populated regions produce results with large margins of error. These results should be interpreted with caution.

Heat maps (Figure 7) allow us to visualise regional changes in moderate/high lived poverty rates between surveys in 2011 (map on the left) and 2020 (right). While nationally the proportion experiencing moderate/high lived poverty increased by 27 percentage points during the period, the region of Zou recorded a 58-point increase, from 25% to 83%.

At the other extreme, Ouémé recorded the smallest change (+3 percentage points), though its 74% total remains concerning.

Figure 7: Change in proportion experiencing moderate/high lived poverty | by region | Benin | 2011-2020



Maps show % of the population that experienced moderate or high lived poverty in 2011 and 2020.

Lived poverty, housing, and access to infrastructure

Housing conditions are one of the strongest indicators of well-being (Parmentier, 1997; Gibson, Thomson, Kearns, & Petticrew, 2011). Better-off families are more likely to live in houses with improved materials for roofs, walls, and floors. Afrobarometer collects data on the housing characteristics of respondents. In most survey rounds, enumerators record what type of shelter the respondent lives in and what material the roof of the respondent's home or shelter is made of.

Survey findings show significant differences between the non-poor (those experiencing no or low lived poverty) and the poor (moderate or high lived poverty) in terms of having improved walls and floors. While 75% of the non-poor live in formal houses, the same is true for only 55% of the poor (Figure 8). The poor are twice as likely as the non-poor to live in traditional houses or huts (36% vs. 18%).

Differences are less clear with regarding to roofing materials. Metal (including aluminum, tin, and zinc) is by far the most common roofing material for both poor (80%) and non-poor (86%)

citizens. The poor are more likely than their better-off counterparts to live in homes with thatch or grass roofing (8% vs. 2%).

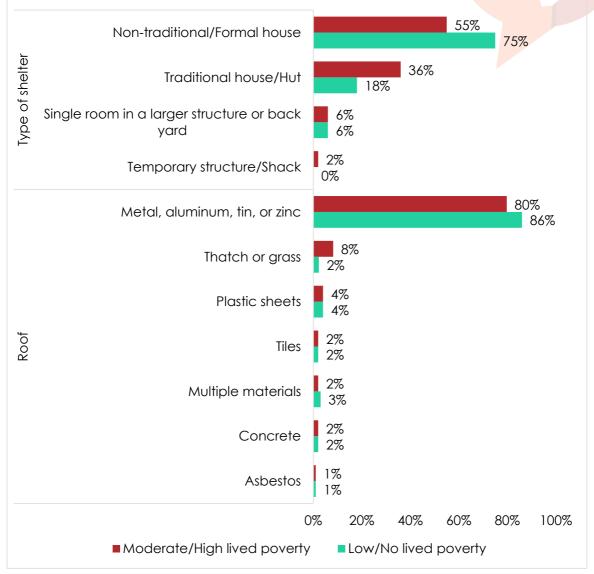


Figure 8: Housing materials | by level of lived poverty | Benin | 2020

Survey enumerators were asked to record: In what type of shelter does the respondent live? What was the roof of the respondent's home or shelter made of?

Infrastructure is a key element of poverty alleviation. It often acts as a catalyst for development and enhances the impact of interventions to improve poor people's access to other human, social, financial, and natural assets. Thus, investments in infrastructure such as energy, water, transportation, and communication technologies promote economic growth and improve living conditions in developing countries (OECD, 2007).

Afrobarometer survey enumerators also record the presence or absence of a wide range of infrastructure in the communities they visit, including facilities such as an electricity grid, piped water, and a health center and services such as cell-phone and banking services.

In 2020 in Benin, only about half (52%) of respondents were found to be living in areas with piped-water systems, and only 29% had a sewage system in the area. About six in 10 lived in zones served by an electric grid (64%) and banking/microfinance services (60%) (Figure 9).

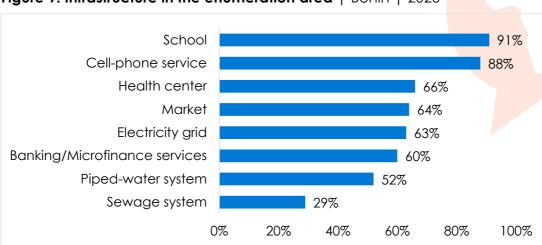


Figure 9: Infrastructure in the enumeration area | Benin | 2020

Survey enumerators were asked to record: Are the following facilities/services present in the primary sampling unit/enumeration area? (% "yes)

While proximity to schools and markets was similar for poor and non-poor citizens, access to other infrastructure and services varied considerably by economic status (Figure 10). For example, fewer than half (45%) of the poor lived in areas served by a piped-water system, compared to 75% of the non-poor. And only 23% of poor citizens lived in areas served by a sewage system, compared to twice as many (47%) of the non-poor. In other words, more than three-fourths (77%) of the poor were deprived of waste-water disposal services, a significant health hazard.

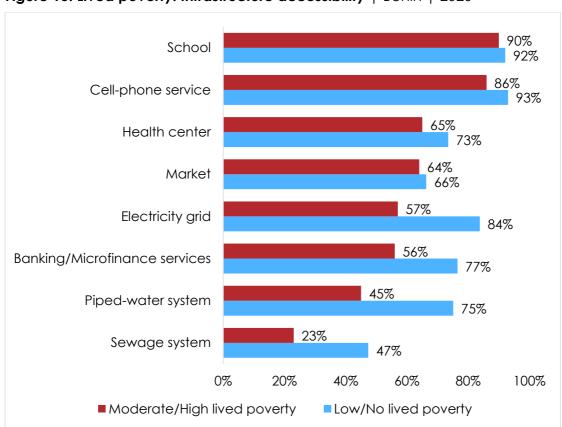


Figure 10: Lived poverty: Infrastructure accessibility | Benin | 2020

Survey enumerators were asked to record: Are the following facilities/services present in the primary sampling unit/enumeration area? (% "yes)

While 84% of the non-poor resided in areas served by the electric grid, the same was true for just 57% of the poor, placing them at a disadvantage in many sectors requiring energy, from health care and education to economic activities.

Access to banking or microfinance services was also more challenging for residents experiencing moderate or high lived poverty, as only 56% lived within easy reach of a bank, money-transfer point, mobile banking services, or ATM, compared to 77% of the non-poor. For subsistence farmers or informal traders looking to bounce back from unexpected emergencies, this may make it harder to obtain financial help.

Poverty and economic insecurity

Bossert and D'Ambrosio (2013, p. 1018) describe economic insecurity as "the anxiety produced by the possible exposure to adverse economic events and by the anticipation of the difficulty to recover from them." Examples might include a fear of unemployment or the expectation of a worsening financial situation due to natural or other shocks (flooding, drought, sickness, inflation, job loss, crop failure, armed conflict, etc.). As might be expected, economic insecurity is common among low-income households and is fuelled by economic inequality (Western, Bloome, Sosnaud, & Tach, 2012; Bossert & D'Ambrosio, 2013).

Economic insecurity has serious consequence that can span generations. For instance, economic insecurity can limit people's ability to invest in their children's education and health and their willingness to take potentially profitable risks (United Nations, 2021b).

Afrobarometer findings reflect ways in which lived poverty may be associated with aspects of economic insecurity. For example, citizens who experienced moderate/high lived poverty were less likely than their better-off counterparts to hold positive views of their own living conditions (25% vs. 42%) or their country's economy (34% vs. 48%) (Figure 11).

They were also less likely than those experiencing low or no lived poverty to think that economic conditions would improve over the next 12 months (52% vs. 65%) or to see the country as moving in the right direction (51% vs. 68%).

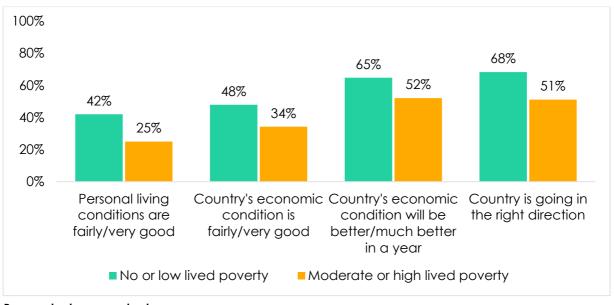


Figure 11: Country's direction and economic condition | by level of lived poverty | Benin | 2020

Respondents were asked:

Would you say that the country is going in the wrong direction or going in the right direction? In general, how would you describe: The present economic condition of this country? Your own present living conditions?

Looking ahead, do you expect economic conditions in this country to be better or worse in 12 months' time?

Determinants of lived poverty

To examine key determinants of lived poverty, this paper uses a multinomial logistic regression, a predictive analysis that estimates the probability of experiencing lived poverty based on a variety of independent variables (Green, 1992; Hurlin, 2003; Khalid, Shahnaz, & Bibi, 2005). Model 1 focuses on determinants of lived poverty at the national level, while models 2 and 3 analyse these determinants at the urban and rural levels.

Variables

The dependent variable, lived poverty, has four categories: no lived poverty, low lived poverty, moderate lived poverty, and high lived poverty. Each respondent (representing a household) is assigned to one of these four mutually exclusive categories.

Independent variables include:

- Employment of the head of household, categorised in five groups: Not employed; primary-sector occupation such as agriculture and fishing; secondary-sector occupation such as industries or manufacturing; tertiary-sector occupation such as services, construction, and restaurants; and other.
- Respondent's level of education (categorised as no formal education, primary (both uncompleted and completed), secondary, and post-secondary): Education contributes to one's quality of life in its own right as well as to one's ability to take advantage of income-earning opportunities (Majeed & Malik, 2015). Arguably, educational effects also influence other dimensions of poverty, such as decisionmaking abilities.
- Citizen engagement: To examine the potential contribution of social cohesion or inclusiveness to lived poverty, we include three indicators related to respondents' involvement in the life of the community: frequency of participating in community meetings, of getting together with others to raise an issue, and of participating in protest marches or demonstrations.²
- Household size, defined as the number of people living in the respondent household based on the latest national household survey (Institut National de la Statistique et de l'Analyse Economique, 2018).
- Respondent's age

Results

Table 1 shows the results (coefficients and standard errors) of the regression analysis using an ordered multinomial logistic model. They indicate that education and employment are important factors associated with a significant reduction in lived poverty levels. They are statistically significant at national, urban, and rural levels.

In particular, if the household head has a job in the secondary sector (industries or manufacturing), the probability of the household experiencing lived poverty is significantly lower (by 64%, 54%, and 81%, respectively, at the national, urban, and rural levels) compared to the reference category of having a household head who is not employed. We find similar results, but with lower incidence, when the head of household has a job in the tertiary sector.

Similarly, citizens with primary, secondary, or post-secondary education are significantly less likely to be poor than those with no formal education. In urban areas, post-secondary education has by far the greatest impact on the probability of experiencing lived poverty,

² Respondents were asked: Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year: Attended a community meeting? Got together with others to raise an issue? Participated in a demonstration or protest march?

whereas at the rural level, being educated at the secondary level has about the same effect on lived poverty as post-secondary qualifications.

With regard to age, the negative and significant value shows that as citizens grow older, the likelihood of their being poor decreases. This makes sense, as gaining life and work experience may lead to better earnings

Table 1: Determinants of lived poverty | Benin | 2020

	National	Urban	Rural
Age	-0.00791* (0.00407)	-0.00399 (0.00584)	-0.00905 (0.00581)
Household size	-0.204***	-0.154	-0.418***
	(0.0705)	(0.108)	(0.102)
Education			
No formal education	Reference		
Primary	-0.0764 (0.148)	-0.162 (0.225)	0.131 (0.204)
Secondary	-0.355** (0.147)	-0.264 (0.224)	-0.372* (0.201)
Post-secondary	-0.801*** (0.228)	-0.782*** (0.291)	-0.397 (0.422)
Employment of head of household	(0:==0)	(0.202)	(31122)
Not employed		Reference	
Primary sector	-0.182 (0.233)	-0.155 (0.339)	-0.511 (0.340)
Secondary sector	-0.644*** (0.234)	-0.538* (0.315)	-0.809** (0.358)
Tertiary sector	-1.095*** (0.279)	-0.715** (0.361)	-1.573*** (0.472)
Other	-1.136*** (0.378)	-0.812* (0.442)	-1.057 (0.929)
Citizen engagement		,	
Participate in community meeting	0.00857 (0.0485)	0.0616 (0.0677)	-0.0872 (0.0720)
Get together with others to raise an issue	0.0596 (0.0504)	-0.000575 (0.0703)	0.138* (0.0734)
Participate in demonstration or protest	0.120** (0.0528)	0.0872 (0.0859)	0.140** (0.0681)
Observations	1,193	564	629
R-squared by hand	0.0314	0.0215	0.0344
Log Lik	-1304	-652.5	-627.6
Standard errors in parenthesis; *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1			

Household size is also negatively correlated with the likelihood of being in poverty, especially in rural areas. An increase of one person in the household reduces the probability of experiencing moderate/high lived poverty by 42% in rural areas and 15% in urban areas. It seems plausible that this effect might depend on the ages of household members. A large number of children who do not contribute financially to the household might make lived poverty more likely, while working-age household members might help improve the family's

living conditions. Fusco and Islam (2020), for example, found that the number and ages of children significantly affect the probability of being poor.

With regard to social inclusion, the analysis shows that participation in protests and (in rural areas) getting together with others to raise an issue are positively correlated with lived poverty. These findings contradict our expected relationship and may require further research to shed light on whether they vary based on the content or frequency of these community activities.

Though the finding is not statistically significant, a negative sign suggests that in rural areas, participating in community meetings might contribute to decreasing poverty. This could be because such meetings develop social connections and enhance solidarity among community members, as in informal women's associations, tontines, and unofficial ado-gbè savings groups that are common in Benin (World Bank, 2021).

Conclusion

A descriptive analysis of Afrobarometer survey data reveals that the proportion of Beninese experiencing moderate or high lived poverty has risen significantly over the past decade. Shortages of basic necessities – including food, clean water, medical care, and a cash income – are widespread, especially in rural areas and in largely rural regions of the country.

The findings also suggest a persistent divide between the poor and the non-poor in access to basic infrastructure. Despite government efforts to broaden the coverage of essential services, many citizens still live in areas with limited access to the electricity grid, piped water, improved sanitation, and other infrastructure needed to expand economic activities and improve the quality of life.

A regression analysis confirms the central role of education and employment in reducing the likelihood that households will fall into poverty.

These findings point to potential ways forward for the government and development partners. Calls for additional investment in basic service infrastructure, relevant education, and job creation are not new, but with lived poverty intensifying, they are loud and clear.

Do your own analysis of Afrobarometer data – on any question, for any country and survey round. It's easy and free at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

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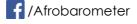
Afrobarometer, a nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, is a pan-African, non-partisan research network. Regional coordination of national partners in about 35 countries is provided by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, and the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

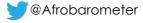
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