

# It's not all about a dollar a day

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There seems to be some confusion regarding poverty lines. For the sake of simplicity, media around the world have seized upon the \$1 per day model as the defacto standard, yet the World Bank argues that there are in fact better lines that can be used.

One of the more popular 'alternative' measures are the World Bank's social indicators that reflect changes in living standards around the world. For example take this year's World Development Report's focus on "Agriculture for development."<sup>1</sup>

Moving away from money for a second, there are an estimated one billion people with no access to an all-season road worldwide.<sup>2</sup> In 34 of the world's poorest countries, 60 percent have no access to transport at all. What effect would that have on income?<sup>2</sup>

Every year the World Development Report tackles a new global issue, crucial to eliminating poverty. In the 2008 issue, 339 of the report's 386 pages talk about the returns that improved agricultural technology can bring the world's poor. Only two pages are devoted to income related poverty.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps it's a reflection of our own society, that a 2 minute news spot on a weekday night, will only announce a poverty measure we can all understand: money!

Could you ever imagine the TV reporter talking about the percentage of the world's population who had arable cropland or perhaps access to fertilizer?

There is much more to understanding poverty beyond mere dollar signs, and the world needs to realise that. Whilst we nobly talk about halving world hunger and poverty, it's important not to forget the other seven Millennium goals, which are the prime causes of poverty in the first place (especially education and health).<sup>3</sup>

Some of the more sobering indicators that the World Bank turned up recently include: life expectancy in Africa has *decreased* from 49 to 47 years;<sup>4</sup> almost *half* of all women are illiterate in South Asia;<sup>4</sup> more than a *billion* people have no access to clean water.<sup>5</sup>

A few more alternative indexes to check out include:

- UNDP Poverty Index 1 and 2 (alternative poverty index)  
<http://www.undp-povertycentre.org/newsletters/Tableglobapovertycounts.pdf>  
[http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/primer\\_ch2.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/primer_ch2.pdf)
- UN Technology Achievement Index (2001)  
<http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2001/en/pdf/techindex.pdf>
- World Bank Rural Access Index  
<http://www.worldbank.org/transport/transportresults/headline/rural-access.html>
- Human Development Indices  
<http://hdr.undp.org/en/humandev/hdi/>
- Education For All Development Index

[http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=43352&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=43352&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

**Sources:**

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<http://go.worldbank.org/ZJIAOSUFU0>
2. Rural Access Index – World Bank  
<http://www.worldbank.org/transport/transportresults/headline/rural-access.html>
3. United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Goals  
[www.un.org/millenniumgoals/](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/) and <http://go.worldbank.org/YG28BS8BG0>
4. World Development Indicators Summary 2007 (before the 2008 PPP revision)  
[http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DATASTATISTICS/Resources/reg\\_wdi.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DATASTATISTICS/Resources/reg_wdi.pdf)
5. World Bank – Water Supply and Sanitation Figures (2007)  
<http://go.worldbank.org/IVFIVRAGJ0>