The Political Economy of Multidimensional Child Poverty Measurement: A Comparative Analysis of Mexico and Uganda

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Abstract: As part of the 2030 Agenda, much effort has been exerted in comparing multidimensional child poverty measures both technically and conceptually. Yet, few countries have adopted and used any of these measures in policymaking. This paper explores the reasons for this absence from a political economy perspective. It develops an innovative political economy framework for poverty measurement and a hypothesis whereby *a country will only produce and use reliable and sustainable multidimensional child poverty (MDCP) measures if and only if three conditions coalesce: consensus, capacity and polity*. We explore this framework with two relevant case studies, Mexico and Uganda. Both countries satisfy the capacity condition required to measure MDCP but only Mexico satisfies the other two conditions. Uganda does not yet satisfy the consensus and political cost-benefit conditions. Processes related to child poverty measurement have been radically different in each country. Mexico first forged a political consensus and then decided on measurement. Uganda is experimenting first with measurement as part of building a technical and political consensus. Our proposed political economy framework is normatively relevant because it identifies the conditions that need to change across multiple contexts before the effective adoption and use of an MDCP measure becomes more likely.

Key words: Political economy, Multidimensional poverty, Children, Mexico, Uganda

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1. Introduction

The complete eradication of child poverty is more than an upbeat slogan. Goal 1 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) places multidimensional poverty at the center of the international 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Recent years have simultaneously seen substantive progress in measuring child poverty. The World Bank (2016a) uses the methodology of the international poverty line of US\$1.90 per person per day (the 2011 purchasing power parity [PPP] of US dollars). The multidimensional child-specific Bristol Approach developed by Gordon et al. (2003) defines absolute child poverty as deprivation in food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) subsequently developed its own multidimensional child poverty (MDCP) measure, the multiple overlapping deprivation analysis (MODA), which stresses the number and nature of deprivations experienced simultaneously by each child (de Neubourg et al. 2012; de Milliano and Playgo 2018). Alkire and Foster's (2009) multidimensional poverty index measures child poverty as the number of children living in households categorized as poor in multiple dimensions. Finally, Mexico's National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social, CONEVAL) measures multidimensional and income poverty among disaggregated population groups such as children or women (CONEVAL 2010).

This paper explores an apparent paradox. Despite abundant metrics, and unprecedented global consensus on the need to eradicate child poverty, there is a lack of consensus on MDCP measurements themselves. Few governments have established official measures of MDCP to inform policy in the same way as monetary poverty measures (Roelen 2017). In assessing this inconsistency, we develop a new analytical framework from a political economy perspective around the notion of the political costs and benefits of adopting MDCP measures. The central question focuses on why a country may succeed or not in adopting a MDCP measure for policymaking.

We focus on an upper-middle-income country, Mexico, and a low-income country, Uganda. Our analysis holds relevance for any low-, middle-, and high-income country currently investing in improving its data- and evidence-gathering on child well-being. However, both Mexico and Uganda have been chosen because of their pioneering role and different experiences in establishing MDCP measures for policy purposes. This sets them apart from the very few other comparable countries such as Armenia or Panama that have implemented existing MDCP measures. Methodologically, we address the MDCP measurement paradox using desk research and country data. This paper contains five sections, including the introduction. The second section briefly introduces a framework that integrates consensus, capacity and polity (or political settlement) considerations in child poverty measurement. It also builds a testable hypothesis to analyze the conditions in which a given country will (or will not) adopt an MDCP measurement. The third section reports on the progress of Mexico and Uganda in measuring child poverty. The fourth section tests our framework and discusses the results. The fifth section consists of our conclusions.

2. A political economy framework for measuring MDCP and its implementation

The notion of a political economy of measurement relies on the existence of political costs and benefits accruing from the measurement of complex or politically sensitive indicators, and on the existence of relationships between politics, polity and policy. This interplay of political costs and benefits—distinct from economic, social, or judicial perspectives—is discussed extensively in the political economy literature (Bueno de Mesquita 1995; Vining and Weimer 2001; Ostrom et al. 2005; Collier 2011; Burgess et al. 2015).

The effects of this political bottom-line on the practice of measurement are different from technical, logistical, administrative, or human resource-related phenomena. To the best of our knowledge, the literature on political economy has not previously analyzed the development or adoption of multidimensional, monetary, or MDCP measures, even as it has examined the design of subsidy and tax reforms and welfare measures, or the targeting and scaling up of antipoverty programs (Cox, North, and Weingast, 2013; Drèze and Sen 1991; Ito and Krueger 1992; Schmidt 2002; Schüring and Gassmann 2016; Inchauste and Victor 2017).

These analyses focus on case studies that analyze political conditions and interactions among politicians, program administrators, local and national elites, and their constituencies, including the poor. The resulting balance of power between different categories is defined as political settlement, or alternatively, polity (Di John and Putzel, 2009). Conditions and interagency engagements are shaped by pressures from other countries, donors, the fear of unrest or violence, or perverse electoral institutions (Armijo, Biersteker, and Lowenthal 1994; Therkildsen 2000; Toonen 2001; Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2004; Keefer 2011). Transparency, incentives, voice and power also affect these interactions (Cole 2012; Di John and Putzel, 2009; Ostrom et al. 2005; Schmidt 2002). Whether benefits flow to special interest groups, citizens, or both also contributes

to shaping the political system along clientelistic or competitive lines (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006).

While this framing is useful, organizational and absorptive capacity constraints like human, informational, organizational and financial resources need also to be considered (e.g., Pritchett and de Weijer 2010). Here, we integrate all sets of factors in a single framework that brings together polity, capacity and political consensus as drivers, with the dynamics of processes, inputs and outputs and with stakeholder interactions. The main elements, processes and outcomes, can be depicted in nine main parts (Figure 1). These are represented by the core domains of the political economy (vision, politics, polity and policy), theoretical and technical consensus, and capacity. The framework elements are cyclical and dynamic, shaping the political economy and influencing each other.

Figure 1. Analytical Framework: The Political Economy of Multidimensional Child Poverty

Source: Authors.

This generic framework can be applied to any public policy decision that entails varying costs and benefits across different stakeholders—especially when measuring and mitigating poverty, particularly among children, who are typically disproportionately affected by poverty, lack a strong collective voice, and are exposed to specific vulnerabilities such as child labor, teenage pregnancy, and female genital mutilation. Given the distinct nature of child poverty, our political economy model is applied to understand how technical, polity and capacity dimensions interact to determine the extent to which measurement, monitoring and analysis of child poverty is adopted as part of efforts to combat it.

The political debate is characterised by the presence of different stakeholders (a) that together with international visions of development (b) influence national politics, thus framing political consensus (c). Political consensus, also known as dominant ideology in a political economy analysis (Lavers and Hickey 2015), affects the way MDCP is conceptualized. These dynamics challenge the polity structure (d). In particular, there are political costs and benefits to MDCP measurement. Political will to measure MDCP should be expected only if the benefits exceed the costs. In theory, more precise evidence, perceptions of enhanced transparency and accountability, and pressures from donors may turn the balance in favor of the political benefits. Political costs might include potential damage to a government's credibility caused by negative poverty data that may be worse than the standard monetary poverty statistics, greater demand for reliable data collection and dissemination, and for wider accountability to explain (negative) trends. The costs-benefits discourse will either lead to financing (e) the inputs required for MDCP or it will fail to do so. It must also be supported by some level of technical consensus (f), technical capacity (g) and effective measurement practice (h). The political costs-benefits analysis will

determine also the final strategy in terms of policy (i): i.e. the extent of the actual use of MDCP measurement in policymaking.

Technical capacities are a necessary but not sufficient condition in collecting and analyzing MDCP data and, ultimately, using them in policymaking. If the technical stakeholders lack the necessary technical capacity, technology, and human and financial resources, the measurement of MDCP will not be reliable or sustainable. Indeed, Beegle et al. (2016) demonstrate that good governance rather than income goes hand-in-hand with the capacity of national statistical offices in sub-Saharan Africa. High-quality statistics are indeed costly and require adequate and predictable funding and political willingness, but clientelistic governments rarely demand reliable and comparable data, as argued by Carletto, Jolliffe and Banerjee (2015).

The process of debate over whether or not to adopt MDCP measurements can vary. On one level, the adoption of MDCP metrics should be a technical issue reserved to a highly specialized department of a well-regarded ministry. For example, child poverty measurement (combining indicators on the risk of poverty or social exclusion) in the European Union is conducted by member states using a comparable source, the EU-SILC surveys, and agreed methods. These are all coordinated by Eurostat, a trusted technical source that publicizes its methodological decisions in a transparent manner. In other contexts, this discussion may be a highly visible, sensitive and controversial exercise that attracts the attention of a broad segment of society, mobilizing local and national government, academia, civil society and even children and young people themselves.

2.1 Hypothesis and methodology

From these arguments, we develop a testable hypothesis: a country will produce reliable and sustainable MDCP measures and use them for policymaking *only if all three* conditions coalesce:

political consensus, capacity and polity. *Political consensus* refers to the adoption of MDCP eradication or mitigation as a political priority. This condition is affected by internal politics that may (or may not) be favorable to creating a general consensus (points a, b, c in Figure 1). *Polity* refers to where the political benefits of implementing MDCP measurement exceeds the costs (point d in Figure 1). *Technical capacity* refers to the financing, collection and analysis of data to measure MDCP in the country (points e, f, g, h in Figure 1). It also includes technical consensus, whether or not there is a wide agreement on how to measure MDCP (Point f).

Our hypothesis goes beyond the notion that political consensus alone is a sufficient condition for adopting a MDCP measure in a given country. Political consensus plays a key role in different phases: in the conceptualization of poverty; in the selection of deprivation dimensions; in the decision of what measure to use, what for and whether this measure is eventually incorporated into the legal framework. However, we posit that political consensus without sufficient capacity and technical agreement will not inevitably lead to the adoption of a measure and its use in policymaking. Two hypothetical cases can serve as examples. Suppose that a child poverty measure is agreed upon and adopted for policymaking, but its dimensions and indicators are “picked” by the government based on its interests or under pressure from donors. We argue that this is not a desirable outcome and is likely to be reversed once a new administration takes office or donors change their preferences, as there was not a technical consensus that brought together differing stakeholder views on how to measure poverty. In another hypothetical case, a government changes the constitution to include an ad-hoc definition and measure of child poverty that is then used in specific contexts. In that case, we hypothesize that the adoption of this measure will not be successful if the country lacks the capacity to measure and monitor it, or if there is no

consensus across stakeholders that the ad-hoc measure is technically feasible. This may lead to delays in developing the legislation needed to operationalize the measurement.¹

In order to test the above-mentioned hypotheses, we need to implement the MDCP political economy framework. This requires several steps. The first is a context analysis using official reports and legal documents. A historical perspective of policies, politics, and polity facilitates understanding of the dynamics of child poverty. The second step is the standard analysis of stakeholders' role and power. For this we use primary data (i.e. the interviews of key informants and stakeholders) to fully capture and disentangle potential entry points and the barriers and constraints which are behind the political cost benefit analysis. For this purpose, we prepared for a semi-structured interview covering all nine parts in Figure 1 via ten questions (see Appendix 1). We thus generated evidence to assess whether a country satisfies each of the consensus, capacity and polity conditions of MDCP measurement. We inquired about the status of (monetary and MDCP) poverty measurement; the need for a dedicated MDCP measure to address child poverty eradication; and the role that evidence generally and on MDCP in particular plays in policymaking, both in design and implementation.

We applied the same instrument in two countries, Mexico and Uganda, tested the same hypotheses and anchored the analysis on the same framework to maximize the comparability of both fieldwork experiences. However, the collection of primary data in both countries differed. In Uganda, we interviewed 15 key informants in Uganda representing the government, civil society and donors. We conducted field research with the help of UNICEF—historically very involved in MDCP data collection efforts in the country—and extended the scope of the research to the various

¹ Burchi, De Muro and Kollar (2018) propose a sustainable solution that circumvents the political preferences of the day by selecting dimensions in multidimensional poverty (MDP) measurement based on the country's Constitution.

Ugandan institutions that house all the political, technical and capacity dimensions of poverty measurement. In Mexico, we relied directly on three key contributors from CONEVAL, the independent institution mandated to develop all methodological, technical and operational aspects of measuring multidimensional poverty for over a decade. This part of the work was conducted in the period between January to April 2018 in Mexico and Uganda. Some participants requested anonymity: as such, we do not report the list of participants in either country.

3. The political economy of MDCP measurement in Mexico and Uganda

We develop two country case studies, Mexico and Uganda, to test the MDCP measurement hypothesis. The two countries are very different in multiple socioeconomic dimensions as shown in Table 1 (see appendix 2 for a detailed comparison of both countries).

Table 1: Key socioeconomic indicators in Mexico and Uganda, 2018

	Mexico	Uganda
Population size	126,190,000	42,720,000
Per capita income (GNI per capita, current international PPP)	19,360	1,970
Poverty rate (at USD 1.90 PPP 2011)	2.2%*	41.7%*
Gini index	48.3	42.8
Urban rate	80.2%	23.8%
Population 0-14 as share of total population	27%	47%
Child mortality (under 5, per 1,000 live births)	13	46
Maternal mortality (per 100,000 lives, modelled estimate)	33*	375*
Prevalence of stunting, height for age, % of children under 5	12.4%*	28.9%
Primary completion rate, total (% of relevant age group)	104%	53%*
Spending on social assistance, % GDP (2015)	1.7%	0/8
Human Capital Index (2017)	0.6	0.4

Source: World Bank's World Development Indicators and ASPIRE databases. All data refer to 2018 unless otherwise indicated with * for the closest available data for that year in the period 2015-2017.

The two countries also differ in their historical attempts to officially measure poverty. In Mexico, those initial efforts started in the early 1990s, closely linked to the need to target social programs and anchored around notions of multidimensional deprivation. For example, the Marginalization Index was used to aggregate social deprivation at the State and Municipal levels. Calculated by the National Population Council of Mexico, it was widely used to target the emerging flagship social program Oportunidades (Ortega-Diaz 2014). The index comprises nine indicators related to education, living conditions, employment and population density. During the following decade, CONEVAL developed the Index of Social Lag, with a specific mandate of measuring some dimensions of poverty, which uses 13 indicators capturing education, access to health services, living conditions and household assets. By contrast, in Uganda, efforts to measure poverty have centered around monetary poverty, reflected in the adoption of the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) in 1997 (MoFPED 1997). Uganda's Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) has measured monetary poverty around a national poverty line since 1992. With the assistance of UNICEF and the World Bank, UBOS constructed a poverty map in 2018 (using the 2014 Census) to estimate poverty at the parish level for the entire population and among children (see Section 3.2).

These two countries were chosen because they are relatively unique globally in having spearheaded methodological or empirical advances in the measurement of child poverty. In addition, the different experiences of Mexico and Uganda in consensus-building, the development of MDCP measures, and their use for policy purposes provide illuminating contrasts. These differences are partly explained by the mature political consensus around eradicating child poverty in Mexico compared with the developing debate in Uganda. Of course, two case studies alone cannot necessarily provide definite conclusions valid for other countries. Mexico and Uganda both have the technical capacity necessary to design and collect MDCP, so we cannot establish how

lack of technical capacity affects the development of a MDCP measure from these two case studies. To do so, we would need to evaluate countries with very low technical capacity but with political interest and technical consensus in establishing a MDCP measure: for example, a fragile country with strong support among external stakeholders (say, a donor or an academic institution).²

However, our two case studies allow us to make a critical point about comparability globally. In effect, a hypothesis that goes beyond political economy considerations to include consensus and capacity should be relevant across multiple political regimes, development stages and institutional settings.

3.1. Mexico

By around the turn of the millennium, a vibrant community of Latin American and Mexican scholars had already defined poverty in multidimensional terms (see Altimir 1979, Beccaria and Minujin 1987, Boltvinik 1990). Mexico, however, lacked an official poverty measurement or rate. The 2000s brought substantive changes, starting with a simple poverty measurement based on income created by the Secretariat of Social Development's Technical Committee for the Measurement of Poverty (CTMP 2002). The first officially reported poverty rate in Mexico was 24.2 percent in 2000, which declined to 20.3 percent by 2002 (Székely and Rascón 2005). Members of the government and opposition questioned this improvement amid a low-growth context, and it became widely accepted that the measurement of poverty should be entrusted to an independent institution. The 2004 General Law for Social Development (DOF 2004, 2008, 2018) created such an institution, and CONEVAL was launched in 2006, tasked with establishing guidelines and criteria for the definition, identification and measurement of poverty, and regulating

² Examples of such countries are Afghanistan, Chad or Mozambique that experience fragile situations and for which an MPI measure has been developed by the Oxford Policy and Human Development Initiative, OPHI.

and coordinating the evaluation of social development policies and programs (DOF 2010, CONEVAL 2015). Critical in the passing of this law was explicit support from Congress, especially from Chamber of Deputies member (2003-2006) Professor Julio Boltvinik, an expert on multidimensional poverty. The push from opposition parties and the support from the Federal Ministry of Social Development (SEDESOL) made possible the approval of this legislation.

The 2004 General Law established that CONEVAL would develop a multidimensional poverty measure from data generated by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography and that the measure would be updated every two years for Mexico's states and every five years for municipalities (DOF 2004, 2018). CONEVAL established that the measurement methodology could not be changed for 10 years (CONEVAL 2010). The law also required CONEVAL to take the political consensus on fundamental human rights enshrined in the Mexican Constitution of 1917 (DOF 1917) as a starting point. Hence, multidimensional poverty was defined as both monetary poverty and non-compliance with social rights (CONEVAL 2010, p. 28).

CONEVAL has been critical in developing Mexico's ability to measure child poverty, thus aiding compliance with the Constitution of Mexico, which establishes that children have the right to food, health care, education and healthy recreation for the sake of their integral development (DOF 1917). In a series of research documents beginning in 2009, CONEVAL and UNICEF partnered to analyze child poverty and make policy suggestions; their most recent document maps MDCP (CONEVAL and UNICEF 2009; UNICEF and CONEVAL 2015). The incidence of child poverty has been consistently defined alongside income and social rights, the two analytical spaces relating to poverty defined by CONEVAL in its methodology for multidimensional poverty measurement. Because this measurement is derived from a national indicator (income), quality of housing and access to basic services are computed as dimensions of the poverty of the entire

household and, are thus not restricted to children. However, the educational, health, social security and food dimensions are specific to children. These efforts have led to the production of estimates of child poverty in Mexico since 2009, using data (from 2008 onwards) from the Module of Socioeconomic Conditions of the National Household Income and Expenditure Survey.

Over the past five years, MDCP data has helped inform policy decisions regarding national, state and municipal social programs. CONEVAL's methodology also inspired the General Law for the Rights of Girls, Boys and Adolescents passed in 2014, which made children the only population group to be recognized as a national priority (Articles 17 and 50; DOF 2014). In response, the National System for the Integral Protection of Children and Adolescents was created in 2015, tasked with designing a national policy across ministries and local governments. This establishes 25 objectives for the benefit of almost 40 million people aged 0 to 17 (SIPINNA 2016).

National policy relies on CONEVAL's methodology to monitor children's rights, and each of the 25 national objectives are quantified by indicators consistent with this and according to the terms of the Mexican Constitution. CONEVAL will issue resulting recommendations to the National System of Integral Protection (Articles 132 and 134, DOF 2014). Meanwhile, the Government has chosen the multidimensional poverty indicator as the main guide of social policy. For example, in 2014, federal and state governments established a National Strategy for Inclusion, which assigns goals and helps determine budgets for all federal social ministries in tackling poverty.

These achievements, however, have been recently tested. The new administration of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador imposed severe budgetary cuts to CONEVAL and replaced its long-standing Executive Secretary in 2019. The new Executive Secretary, however, has already signaled the continuity in the work to be done by CONEVAL (as the recently published

multidimensional poverty report 2008-2018 shows). In addition, the CONEVAL budget for evaluation for 2020 has also been recently reinstated.

3.2. Uganda

Uganda's mandate to design, implement and evaluate child poverty-related interventions has developed differently to that of Mexico. For example, the Office of the Prime Minister has played an instrumental role in coordinating initiatives—such as the Nutritional Action Plan in 2011. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development is formally tasked with identifying policy priorities and developing policy interventions, although the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development ultimately decides on budgetary allocations. The National Planning Authority also develops a four-year National Development Plan (currently 2015/16 to 2019/20) that reflects national political and policy priorities, drafted in consultation with ministries and local governments, and assesses how effectively the annual budget addresses national priorities.

While the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development has been praised for successfully promoting gender equity as a policy priority, its capacity to center child poverty in policy is widely questioned. This reflects a lack of consensus in Uganda on the nature of child poverty, despite the country's historically strong focus on overall poverty reduction. Indeed, following the adoption of the Poverty Eradication Action Plan in 1997 (MoFPED 1997), monetary poverty fell sharply, from 34.0 percent in 2000 to 19.7 percent in 2013 (World Bank 2016b). The current political agenda identifies infrastructure, productive investments, and energy as the priority areas of intervention to boost the agriculture sector and promote competition, leading to more

inclusive growth and, ultimately, reducing poverty (National Planning Authority 2010, 2015; World Bank 2016b).

Nevertheless, Uganda's fight against poverty currently lacks a focus on children, instead centering on the household. Some stakeholders see children as recipients of interventions rather than active participants in development (Africhild 2016), or identify vulnerable children with refugee children, street children, orphans and child workers (MoGLSD 2017; USAID 2015).

A substantive discussion around MDCP has only begun in recent years, promoted by UNICEF, Africhild and Save the Children (UNICEF 2017), and involving preliminary estimates of MDCP by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development and UNICEF (UNICEF and MoGLSD 2015). UBOS, the Economic Policy Research Centre, EPRC, and UNICEF have contributed to four new reports on MDCP in 2019 (Government of Uganda et al. 2019 a, b, c; Government of Uganda and UNICEF 2019) and a study on deprivation among child refugees and host communities (Government of Uganda et al 2018). These studies show the extent and nature of child poverty in Uganda, using the latest and most reliable data available along with new and traditional child poverty measurements (based on monetary and consensual approaches)—including areas affected by forced migration and emergencies. Notwithstanding these analyses and in contrast to Mexico, multidimensional poverty measurement has had no political champion, instead it has been backed by professionals with limited impact on public debate. Furthermore, the predominance of external stakeholders in measuring poverty means that Uganda lacks strong ownership of the decision of whether to measure MDCP, contrasted with the national debates and expertise involved in Mexico.

These efforts have not yet translated into the prioritization of children in policy. The Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development does not allocate budgetary resources according to a specific concept of child poverty or vulnerability, even though it includes poverty in its spending allocation formula (MoFPED 2017). Thus, public spending on education remains biased towards tertiary education. The proposed budget framework for 2018/19 includes some UGSh 74 billion (or USD 20 million) for pre-school and primary education versus UGSh 121 billion for tertiary education (or about USD 33 million, MoFPED 2017). Spending on early child development is currently negligible (Cuesta et al. 2018).

Unlike in Mexico, where political consensus preceded measurement, the piloting of alternative child poverty measures is part of the nascent process of building consensus in Uganda. Existing measurement efforts are plentiful but fragmented, made possible by a large stock of data unrivalled among sub-Saharan African countries (Beegle et al. 2016), including one Integrated Household Survey (1992–93), seven Uganda National Household Surveys (1996, 1999, 2002, 2005–06, 2009–10, 2012–13 and 2016–17), and five Uganda Panel Data Surveys (2009–10, 2010–11, 2012–13, 2013–14, 2016–17). In addition, six Demographic and Health Surveys (1988–89, 1995, 2000–01, 2006, 2011 and 2016) and three recent census rounds (1991, 2002 and 2014) have been conducted.

Uganda is also one of the few countries in the region (alongside Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, and South Africa) to have developed a monetary poverty map. In parallel, the Government, the World Bank and UNICEF also developed a child poverty map in 2016, the first of its kind (Figure 2). The map illustrates estimates of child monetary poverty through a simulated consumption distribution that combines information on household incomes from the

2012–13 Household Survey and socioeconomic characteristics drawn from the 2002 census, following the small area estimation technique developed by Elbers, Lanjouw and Lanjouw (2003).

Figure 2. Child Monetary Poverty Map, Uganda 2012/13

Source: UBOS, World Bank, and UNICEF 2016.

In 2014, UNICEF and the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development provided the first measure of MDCP in Uganda (UNICEF and MoGLSD 2015). This measure was based on notions of deprivations and children’s rights, adding to the scant academic literature on (child) multidimensional poverty in Uganda (Guarcello et al. 2008; Levine, James, and Batana 2014; Rutaremwa 2013; Wasswa 2015). Furthermore, UBOS in collaboration with UNICEF included a module on a consensual definition of poverty in the 2016 Household Survey, something which was also unprecedented regionally. Those few studies producing a consensual poverty measurement in sub-Saharan Africa have not focused on children or drawn from specific modules

in nationally representative surveys. Some use census data, as in South Africa (Nobel et al. 2008), localized fieldwork data, as in Zimbabwe (Mtapuri 2011) or an existing Demographic and Health Survey, as in Benin (Nandy and Pomati 2015), or household surveys (on social attitudes), as in South Africa (Barnes 2009). University of Bristol experts (Gordon et al. forthcoming 2020) have adapted the consensual poverty methodology and the related analysis developed in Uganda to produce nationally and subnationally representative estimates of MDCP, as well as specific estimates for refugee children. But the application of consensual poverty definitions depends on first conducting extensive focus groups to determine which material deprivations parents and caregivers find most relevant. Ongoing initiatives to measure MDCP include efforts by the Economic Policy Research Centre, the National Planning Authority, the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, UBOS, and the United Nations Development Programme.

4. Discussion

We expect that a country will only produce and use reliable and sustainable MDCP measures only if three conditions are satisfied: (i) *political consensus*: MDCP eradication or mitigation is agreed to be a political priority and this political consensus is sustained within the national political process (a, b, c in Figure 1); (ii) *political costs and benefits*: the political benefits exceed the political costs of implementing MDCP measurement (d in Figure 1); and (iii) *technical capacity*: there is wide agreement on how to conceptualize and measure MDCP, and on how to finance, collect and analyze data to measure MDCP (e, f, g, h in Figure 1).

Appendix 3 summarizes our assessment of how these three conditions fare in Mexico and Uganda. Mexico has achieved a strong and sustainable *political consensus* around the concept of multidimensional poverty, enshrined in a legal framework that leaves little room for interpretation.

In fact, the mechanics for revising current practices are also built into legislation, spelled out in the General Law for Social Development, thus ensuring that technical consensus and political consensus go hand in hand. In contrast, Uganda fails to satisfy the condition of political (and technical) consensus necessary to adopt an official MDCP measure. Relevant agencies and civil society actors have made significant progress in the technical measurement of MDCP but advances towards a political consensus remain limited.

Mexico and Uganda also exhibit differences in terms of the *political costs and benefits* involved in defining and using MDCP measures. In Mexico, failure to produce poverty estimates following the agreed methodology and timeframe would create a severe political cost, as would seeking to develop an alternative methodology. There is little need for alternative methodologies because Mexico's MDP measure can be applied meaningfully to capture child welfare, and complementary measurement is subject to little political cost provided it follows the "rules of the game."

In Uganda, the political cost-benefit balance is different. In terms of benefits, a consensus MDCP measure would produce additional evidence, increasing public awareness of child deprivation and support for intervention. A specific measure of child poverty would be consistent with growing concerns over young people and regional disparities, making more precise diagnostical analysis available and visible. It would also strengthen public perceptions that policies and budgets are based on evidence and target social well-being rather than infrastructure-based growth.

Regarding *technical capacity*, both countries satisfy the necessary conditions. Mexico has the financial, technical and human resource capacity to measure multidimensional poverty regularly (in 2012, this office had a budget of US\$12 million and 107 staff and consultants

[CONEVAL 2013]). Uganda's Bureau of Statistics boasts an impressive record of data collection, with an average annual budget of US\$18 million over 2014-19 (UBOS 2014). Stakeholders score the bureau highly for independence, data accessibility, and methodological soundness (UBOS 2014). The Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development also supports the bureau financially.

However, Uganda's capacity to measure MDCP is limited, reflecting the early stage of discussion and evidence/implementation gaps in other policy areas (e.g. child protection). UBOS is yet to align data collection cycles with the needs of the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development and the National Planning Authority (UBOS 2014). Another concern is that UBOS does not have mechanisms for screening routine data from local governments, agencies and ministries (UBOS 2014).

As such, the political costs of adopting an MDCP measure in Uganda currently seem to exceed the potential benefits. Uganda's presidential system might tempt it to follow the example of countries like Mexico, wherein a constitutional mandate came before adopting an MDCP measure, but this would not be straightforward. In Mexico's case, it took nearly a century to do so following the ratification of the Constitution in 1917. Several entry points could accelerate the adoption of an MDCP measure in Uganda by changing the balance between the political costs and benefits: for example, emphasizing the role of children as instrumental actors in development who could help turn Uganda into a middle-income country by 2040. This evidence-based case can be made in nonpolitical forums such as UNICEF or academic platforms, whose reach can be expanded further. Midway through the implementation of the national development plan, the National Planning Authority reviews progress and budgets, providing another entry point for the effective adoption of an MDCP measure. By contrast, emerging political developments (as

described above) might threaten the stability of Mexico's measurement of MDP—although its mandatory use for policy making has not been questioned—or Uganda's chances of successfully adopting a measure in the next few years.

5. Conclusions

We have argued that consensus, polity and capacity must align before a country can adopt an MDCP measure that can be used effectively in policymaking. We conclude that the three conditions are met in Mexico, but not yet in Uganda. Measuring MDCP in Mexico has been possible for three reasons. First, there has been an explicit political agreement to measure poverty in a multidimensional way. Second, Congress agreed to establish an independent institution to increase the indicator's credibility. Third, the chosen methodology for multidimensional poverty measurement allows for disaggregation by population group. Eliminating multidimensional poverty measures in Mexico would require legislative changes. In Uganda, no political or technical consensus has been reached, although the country appears to be testing the waters regarding adopting its own MDCP measure and has proven capacity to collect data effectively.

Mexico is at a more advanced stage in building political consensus around child poverty than Uganda. In Mexico, political consensus emerged before the MDCP measurement method was identified. In Uganda, the development and selection of one of several possible MDCP measurements are likely to precede any political decision. Uganda's progress in evaluating various indicators should eventually facilitate a technical consensus. The political economy costs identified in this paper, which center around efforts to enhance accountability and overcome distrust, are surmountable. Quick progress can be made by increasing dialogue and including MDCP measures more prominently in national development plans.

This comparative analysis is also relevant to other low- and middle-income countries, and even high-income countries that are currently investing in improving data- and evidence-gathering on child well-being. Armenia, Bhutan, Colombia and Kenya are among those boosting their child-specific data, evidence on multidimensional poverty, and institutional mechanisms to address the technical issues involved in ending child poverty. The extent to which consensus, polity and capacity are aligned will determine whether and how such countries adopt an MDCP measure in policymaking.

The comparability of our results, drawing on two separate evidence-gathering exercises, may be debated. While the exercises target different groups in each country, the analytical instruments—desktop review and the quality survey instruments—are the same in both. It is also true that two case studies alone cannot necessarily provide definite conclusions for other countries. However, a hypothesis that exceeds political economy considerations to include consensus and capacity should be relevant across multiple political regimes, development stages and institutional settings. Our hypothesis can be further explored in two different country contexts, such as Mexico and Uganda, and at different stages of consensus building.

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Appendix 1: Semi-structured questionnaire tool to clarify the political economy of MDCP measurement

<i>Thematic area</i>	<i>Research question</i>	<i>Relevant component (to be traced in Figure 1)</i>
Presentation	The purpose of this interview and, more generally, of this research is to understand and document the status of child poverty measurement in [country]. We do not seek to advocate any particular measure. Rather, we want to understand the efforts made so far to measure child poverty specifically given the past and current initiatives in [country] to measure poverty in the last 20 years (which may include surveys, poverty maps, child poverty maps, atlases, other).	n.a.
The status of monetary poverty, child monetary poverty, multidimensional poverty, and MDCP in [country]	<i>Question 1</i> What is the current position of your institution with respect to poverty, child poverty, multidimensional poverty and MDCP? Has this been different from the past? Explain.	Political Consensus (a, b, c)
	<i>Question 2:</i> What has been the evolution of child poverty measurement over time in [country]? Please refer to initial measures, key changes, developments in terms of theory or application, methodological shifts, etc.	Technical Consensus (f)
	<i>Question 3:</i> Do you think there is a common understanding of child poverty in [country]? Explain why/not.	Political Consensus (a, b, c)
	<i>Question 4:</i> How useful/relevant is all the complexity around quantitative indices, thresholds, choices, participatory approaches, perceptions/subjective to define and use a child poverty measure?	Capacity (g) and Technical Consensus (f)
The need for a dedicated MDCP in [country]	<i>Question 5:</i> From all these considerations, is it necessary to have a dedicated MDCP measure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From the perspective of policymaking/strategies? • For advocacy reasons? • For technical reasons? • For political reasons? Please explain.	Consensus (political and technical a, b, c, f); capacity; polity (d)
	<i>Question 6:</i> How can potential improvements of the current child poverty measurement make it more relevant for advocacy or policymaking (both generally or specifically for education, health, social protection, child protection, etc.)?	Consensus (political, technical a, b, c, f); polity (d)
MDCP as part of evidence-based policymaking	<i>Question 7:</i> What role has evidence on poverty, in general, and child poverty, in particular, played in policy design and implementation? How relevant is it to include other evidence in, for example, national development plans, sectoral strategies, investments, the budget, other, in [country]?	Polity (d)
	<i>Question 8:</i> Has any new policy or policy change resulted from this evidence? Explain.	Polity (d)
	<i>Question 9:</i> Do the political system, institutions, stakeholders, context facilitate or hinder the adoption and use of a child poverty and MDCP measure? Explain.	Polity (d)
	<i>Question 10:</i> What would be the entry points or strategies to adopt and use an MDCP for true policymaking?	Polity (d)

Source: Authors

Appendix 2: The socioeconomic development of Mexico and Uganda

Mexico is a middle-income economy, the 11th largest globally, with a highly urban population. The poverty rate in 2018 measured by the USD 1.90 income per capita benchmark is only 2.2 percent of the 126 million-strong population, but some 48 percent as measured by Mexico's national income poverty line. Poverty rates are particularly high among indigenous populations and women and children in rural areas. These disparities are reflected by a high GINI income inequality index of 48.3. Child mortality is relatively low, as is maternal mortality, but stunting affects 12 percent of under-5s. Spending on social assistance is low, at 1.7 percent of GDP. A new World Bank indicator, the Human Capital Index, measures the amount of human capital that a child born today can expect to attain by age 18. Its level of 0.6 in Mexico indicates that there is still ample room for improvement.

By contrast, Uganda is a low-income economy of 41 million people. Although 80 percent of the population is rural, the annual urban growth rate of 5.2 percent is among the highest in the world (World Bank 2019). The economy relies on agriculture and is highly vulnerable to weather fluctuations and regional political instability. Although Uganda achieved the MDG goal of halving poverty by 2015, 41 percent of people still live on less than USD 1.90 per day. The northern part of the country, seriously affected by conflict, is significantly poorer than other regions. Nationally, both child and maternal mortality rates are high, and one-third of children under five are stunted, one of the 20 highest national rates worldwide (World Bank 2019). With a low score of 0.4 in the Human Capital Index, Uganda's young and extremely fast-growing population will have low levels of productivity in the future.

Appendix 3. Satisfying Conditions for the Adoption and Use of MDCP, Mexico and Uganda

<i>Hypothesis, conditions</i>	<i>Condition is satisfied</i>	<i>Mexico</i>		<i>Uganda</i>	
Consensus: political		Satisfied	SDG 1	Satisfied	SDG 1
	If MDCP eradication or mitigation is agreed to be a political priority	Satisfied	Ending MDCP satisfies social rights and the rights of children, a subpopulation group of higher interest	Not satisfied	Child poverty is not a national development priority (comparable, for example, with investment on infrastructure)
	If political consensus is sanctioned and sustained	Satisfied	1917 Constitution, and 2004 General Law for Social Development	Not satisfied	Current National Development Plan does not feature MDCP prominently, and the MGLSD has not put child poverty at the center of the policy debate
Consensus: technical	If there is a wide agreement of how to conceptualize and measure MDCP	Satisfied	CONEVAL, the methodology for multidimensional poverty measurement	Not satisfied	Ongoing debate and multiple measures are being estimated
Political costs and benefits	If the political benefits exceed the political costs of implementing MDCP	Satisfied	Costs < benefits	Not satisfied	Costs > benefits
Capacity	If agreed MDCP measures are financed, collected and analyzed sustainably in the country	Satisfied	CONEVAL develops the methodology and evaluates policies; the National Institute of Statistics and Geography collects the data	Not satisfied	Uganda Bureau of Statistics

Source: Author elaboration.