

# Poverty and regional inequality in ghana

[Sociology](#), [Poverty](#)



The flood of development rhetoric on poverty, the primacy accorded by lenders and donors to the Millennium Development Goals, of which the reduction of extreme poverty is the first and usually considered the most important, and the frequency with which reducing, alleviating or eliminating poverty is seen as a prime goal and measure of development – these factors make it matter more than ever to know what poverty is. What it is taken to mean depends on who asks the question, how it is understood, and who responds. From this perspective, it has at least five clusters of meanings.

The first is income-poverty or its common proxy (because less unreliable to measure) consumption-poverty. This needs no elaboration. When many, especially economists, use the word poverty they are referring to these measures. Poverty is what can be and has been measured, and measurement and comparisons provide endless scope for debate.

The second cluster of meanings is material lack or want. Besides income, this includes lack of or little wealth and lack or low quality of other assets such as shelter, clothing, furniture, personal means of transport, radios or television, and so on. This also tends to include no or poor access to services.

A third cluster of meanings derives from Amartya Sen, and is expressed as capability deprivation, referring to what we can or cannot do, can or cannot be. This includes but goes beyond material lack or want to include human capabilities, for example skills and physical abilities, and also self-respect in society.

A fourth cluster takes a yet more broadly multi-dimensional view of deprivation, with material lack or want as only one of several mutually reinforcing dimensions.

These four clusters of the meanings of poverty have all been constructed by “ us”, by development professionals. They are expressions of “ our” education, training, mindsets, experiences and reflections. They reflect our power, as non-poor people, to make definitions according to our perceptions. And the primacy we accord to poverty alleviation, reduction or elimination implies that these meanings that we give are fundamental to what development should be about. One expression of this has twelve dimensions, each one potentially having an impact on all of the others, and vice versa, thus emphasising the interdependence of the dimensions of poverty as we see them. Another expression of this has five dimensions to illustrate development as What poverty is taken to mean depends on who asks the question, how it is understood, and who responds. Our common meanings have all been constructed by us, non-poor people. They reflect our power to make definitions according to our perceptions.