

# “Child Poverty in East Asia and the Pacific: Deprivations and Disparities: A Study of Seven Countries” UNICEF East Asia and Pacific

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## **Abstract:**

Poverty reduction begins with children. A child’s experience of poverty is very different from that of an adult. Income is but one dimension among many that should be assessed when analyzing child poverty and disparity. Non-monetary deprivation in dimensions is equally, if not more, revealing.

As part of UNICEF’s Global Study on Child Poverty and Disparities, several countries in East Asia and the Pacific undertook national child poverty and disparity studies. Results from seven of those countries, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Mongolia, the Philippines, Thailand, Vanuatu and Viet Nam, are reviewed to identify trends and lessons, generate strategies for UNICEF EAPRO, and to contribute toward a richer conceptualization of the situation of children in the region.

Data from these countries shows substantial reductions in the percentage of children who are severely deprived, with rates falling by one third from 56% in 2000 to 36% in 2006. However, the analysis also reveals that despite these gains, over 30 million children in the seven countries suffer from at least one severe deprivation. This is more acute in certain segments of the population. The most notable dimensions of inequity include disparities between rural and urban areas, between provinces or sub-national regions, between different ethnic groups, between small and large households, and between households headed by well-educated and poorly educated adults.

Patterns of child poverty in the region are suggestive of a natural clustering of countries. Cambodia, Lao PDR and Mongolia (Cluster A) consistently exhibit higher child poverty rates than the sub-regional average. The Philippines, Thailand, Viet Nam, and Vanuatu (Cluster B) have child poverty rates around or lower than the sub-regional average.

In Cluster A countries, a significant proportion of the child population is poor, often severely and multiply deprived. UNICEF strategies in these countries must remain focused on ensuring that basic social infrastructure is in place and that universal access to basic services is pursued. In Cluster B countries, a much lower proportion of the population is severely deprived and for the majority of the population the quality of basic services is a more pertinent issue than access. In these countries UNICEF strategies should focus on the extension of basic services to marginalized subgroups, as well as on improving the quality and scope of services provided.

Social protection is a key underdeveloped policy area that should be tailored differently in Cluster A and Cluster B. Universal child benefits or targeted cash transfers should be investigated at the country level to assess their feasibility and effectiveness.

Given the multidimensional nature of child poverty, policies and programs for child poverty reduction must go beyond sectoral approaches and promote an integrated strategic vision. Child-sensitive budgeting, monitoring, and analysis can be used to promote child equity. Strategic communication and advocacy, based on evidence from the country studies on child poverty, should be used to influence policy. Since child poverty is a challenge shared by countries across the region, South-South collaboration between the seven countries will be invaluable.

