

# Africa's growth dividend? Lived poverty declines in many countries

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## Introduction

Though Africa has recorded high levels of economic growth over the past decade, previous Afrobarometer surveys of citizens found little evidence that this growth had reduced levels of poverty in any consistent way (Dulani, Mattes, & Logan, 2013). However, new data from Afrobarometer Round 6, collected across 35 African countries, suggest a very different picture. While “lived poverty” remains pervasive across much of the continent, especially in Central and West Africa, we now see evidence that the decade of economic growth seems to have finally delivered broad-based reductions in poverty.

“Lived poverty” (an index that measures the frequency with which people experience shortages of basic necessities) retreated across a broad range of countries. In the roughly three-year period between Round 5 (2011/2013) and Round 6 (2014/2015) surveys, our data suggest that “lived poverty” fell in 22 of 33 countries surveyed in both rounds.

However, these changes show no systematic relation to recent rates of economic growth. While growing economies are undoubtedly important, what appears to be more important in improving the lives of ordinary people is the extent to which national governments and their donor partners put in place the type of development infrastructure that enables people to build better lives.

## Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. Five rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2013, and results from Round 6 surveys (2014/2015) are currently being released. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples, which yield country-level results with a margin of sampling error of +/-2% (for a sample of 2,400) or +/-3% (for a sample of 1,200) at a 95% confidence level. Round 6 interviews with more than

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### **Afrobarometer Round 6**

**New data from  
across Africa**

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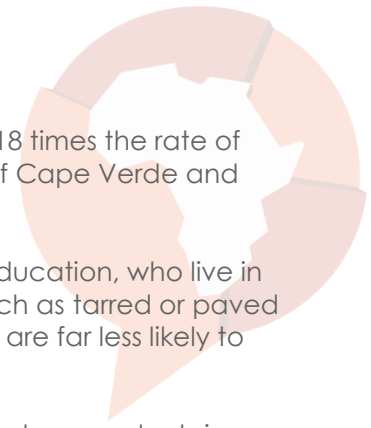
52,700 citizens represent the views of more than three-fourths of the continent's population.

This policy paper draws mainly on Round 6 data from more than 52,700 interviews in 35 countries, with over-time comparisons for 33 countries that were surveyed in both Round 5 and Round 6, as well as longer comparisons for 20 countries that have been tracked in at least three surveys (see the appendix for a list of countries and survey dates).

## Key findings

- While there are important differences by region and country, lived poverty remains extensive in Africa. In 2014/2015, 74% of survey respondents say they went without a cash income at least once or twice in the previous 12 months, and substantial proportions say the same thing about necessary medical care (49%), clean water (46%), food (46%), and cooking fuel (38%).
- Four in 10 (40%) encountered *frequent* shortages of cash income (going without “many times” or “always” in the past year), and between one in five and one in 20 faced frequent scarcity of clean water (20%), medical care (16%), food (14%), and cooking fuel (10%).
- Yet Africa can no longer be characterized as uniformly poor, as levels of lived poverty vary widely across the continent. Lived poverty is highest in Gabon, Togo, and Liberia and lowest in Mauritius, Cape Verde, and Algeria. Indeed, people in

Gabon and Togo experienced shortages at approximately 18 times the rate of those in Mauritius, and four times as frequently as residents of Cape Verde and Algeria.



- Respondents in full-time employment, with higher levels of education, who live in urban areas, and whose communities have infrastructure such as tarred or paved roads, piped water, sewerage, electricity, and health clinics are far less likely to report experiencing shortages of basic necessities.
- Comparing regional experiences of lived poverty, we find that respondents in Central and West Africa encounter the most frequent shortages, while North Africans experience the lowest levels of deprivation.
- Between the Round 5 and Round 6 Afrobarometer surveys, levels of lived poverty *declined* in 22 of the 33 countries included in both surveys, with very substantial reductions in Cape Verde and Egypt.
- However, lived poverty *increased* in five countries, most steeply in Mozambique, Benin, and Liberia, and remained stagnant in five others.
- In the 20 countries for which we have at least three rounds of surveys, we find the longest and most consistent declines in lived poverty in Zambia, Ghana, and Cape Verde. There have been more recent sustained decreases, since 2008, in Senegal, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and South Africa.
- However, we find sustained *increases* in poverty in Madagascar and Liberia.
- While many people across Africa are experiencing shortages less frequently, the connections with economic growth are tenuous. Rather, lived poverty tended to decrease in those countries that had made the most progress in building various forms of development infrastructure in local communities, such as tarred/paved roads and sewage systems.

### Measuring lived poverty in Africa using survey data

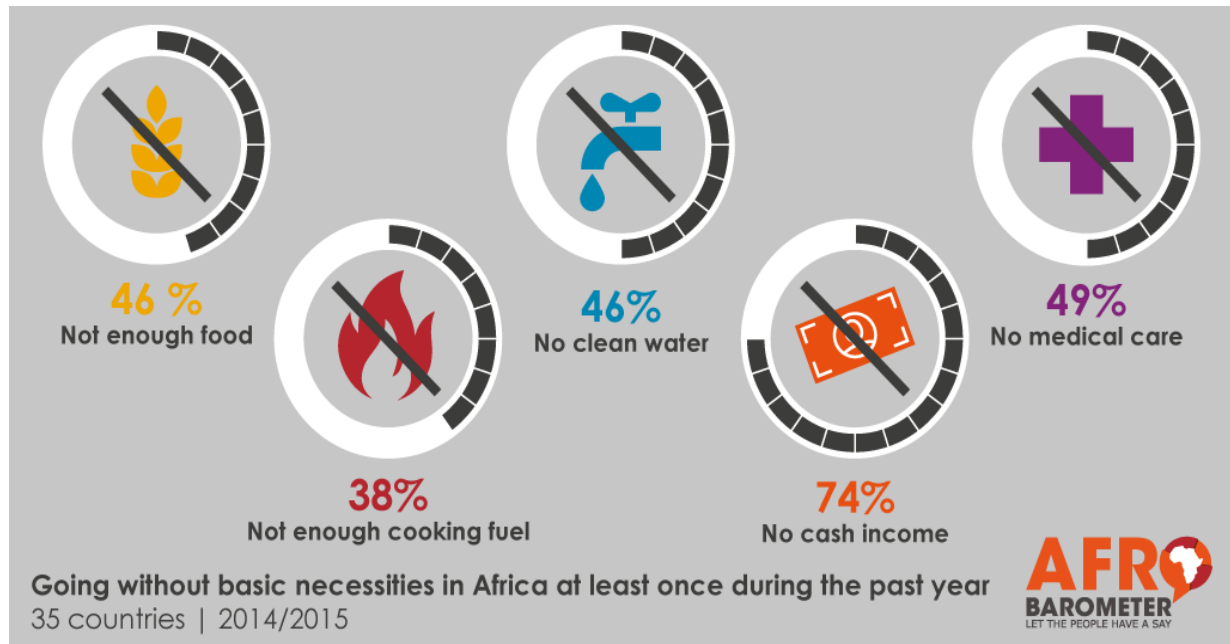
Poverty can be measured in a number of different ways. At the national level, all countries produce national accounts data to calculate their gross national income (GNI), which is used to summarize national wealth and the total state of the economy. However, the capacity of many African countries' national statistics systems to generate these numbers has recently been criticized (Jerven, 2013).

At the personal or household level, national statistics offices conduct large household surveys to measure income, expenditure, assets, and access to services, which are then used to calculate national poverty lines and place individuals above or below that line. The Millennium Development Goal that focused on reducing the number of people living on less than \$1.25 a day is a good example. However, such surveys are expensive and are conducted infrequently in many African countries. Other development organisations collect data on the consequences of poverty, such as the proportion of people who don't use improved drinking water sources or sanitation services, or the proportion of underweight children under age 5, in a given country.

As a contribution to the tracking of poverty in Africa, Afrobarometer offers the Lived Poverty Index (LPI), an experiential measure that is based on a series of survey questions about how frequently people actually go without basic necessities during the course of a year. The LPI measures a portion of the concept of poverty that is not well captured by other measures, and thus offers an important complement to official statistics on poverty and development. Because people are the best judges of their own interests, survey respondents are best placed to tell us about their quality of life, though they might not be able to do it with a

great deal of precision. If Amartya Sen (1999) is right and the value of one's standard of living lies in the living itself, an experiential measure of shortages of the basic necessities of life takes us directly to the central core of the concept of poverty.

Afrobarometer asks 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?* A range of response options are offered, starting with "never" for those who experienced no shortages, to "just once or twice," "several times," "many times," and "always." Because these questions are asked in all Afrobarometer countries, we are able not only to monitor shifts in the levels and nature of poverty over time, but also to compare experiences across countries and regions.



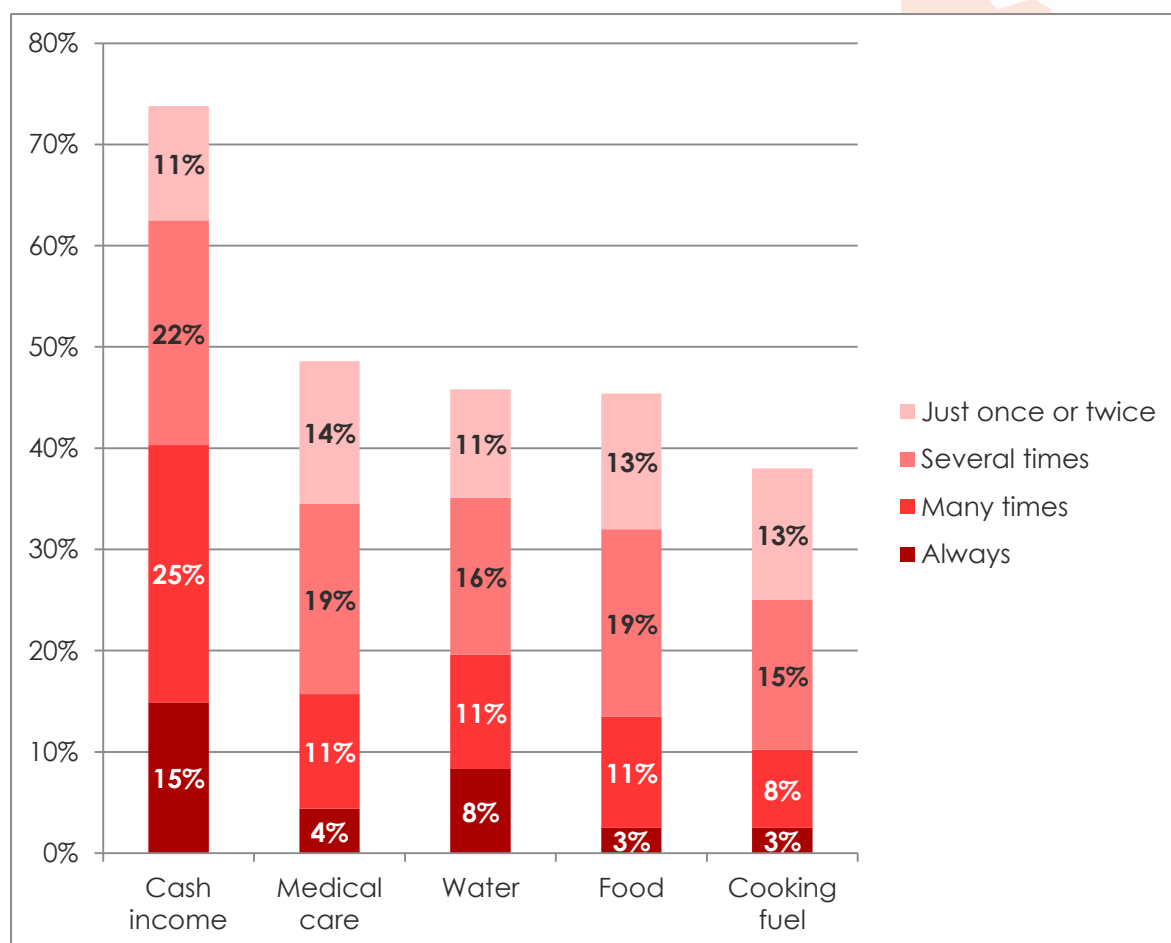
## The extent of poverty in Africa as of 2015

Based on responses to these questions in surveys conducted across 35 countries in 2014/2015, we find that significant numbers of Africans still fail to meet their most basic needs, and many fall short on a regular basis. Across the 35 countries surveyed, half of all respondents report facing shortages of medicine and medical services (49% at least once in the past year), and about four in 10 experienced shortages of clean water (46%), food (46%), and cooking fuel (38%) (Figure 1).

More troubling is the intensity of the problem: Between one in five and one in 20 people encountered *frequent* shortages (going without "many times" or "always" in the past year) with respect to water (20%), medicines (16%), food (14%), and cooking fuel (10%).

Reflecting the continent's ongoing employment crisis, the most commonly cited form of deprivation remains access to cash income, with three-quarters (74%) reporting that they went without cash at least once in the previous year. While cash income is not in itself a basic need, access to it can enable citizens to meet their basic and non-basic needs. Income shortages therefore have many spillover effects on people's lives. The fact that three-quarters of Africans report having gone without cash income at least once in the previous year – and that 40% did so frequently – poses a major development challenge, as many adults on the continent cannot afford to buy resources for immediate use or to invest in assets.

Figure 1: Going without basic necessities in Africa | 35 countries | 2014/2015



**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?

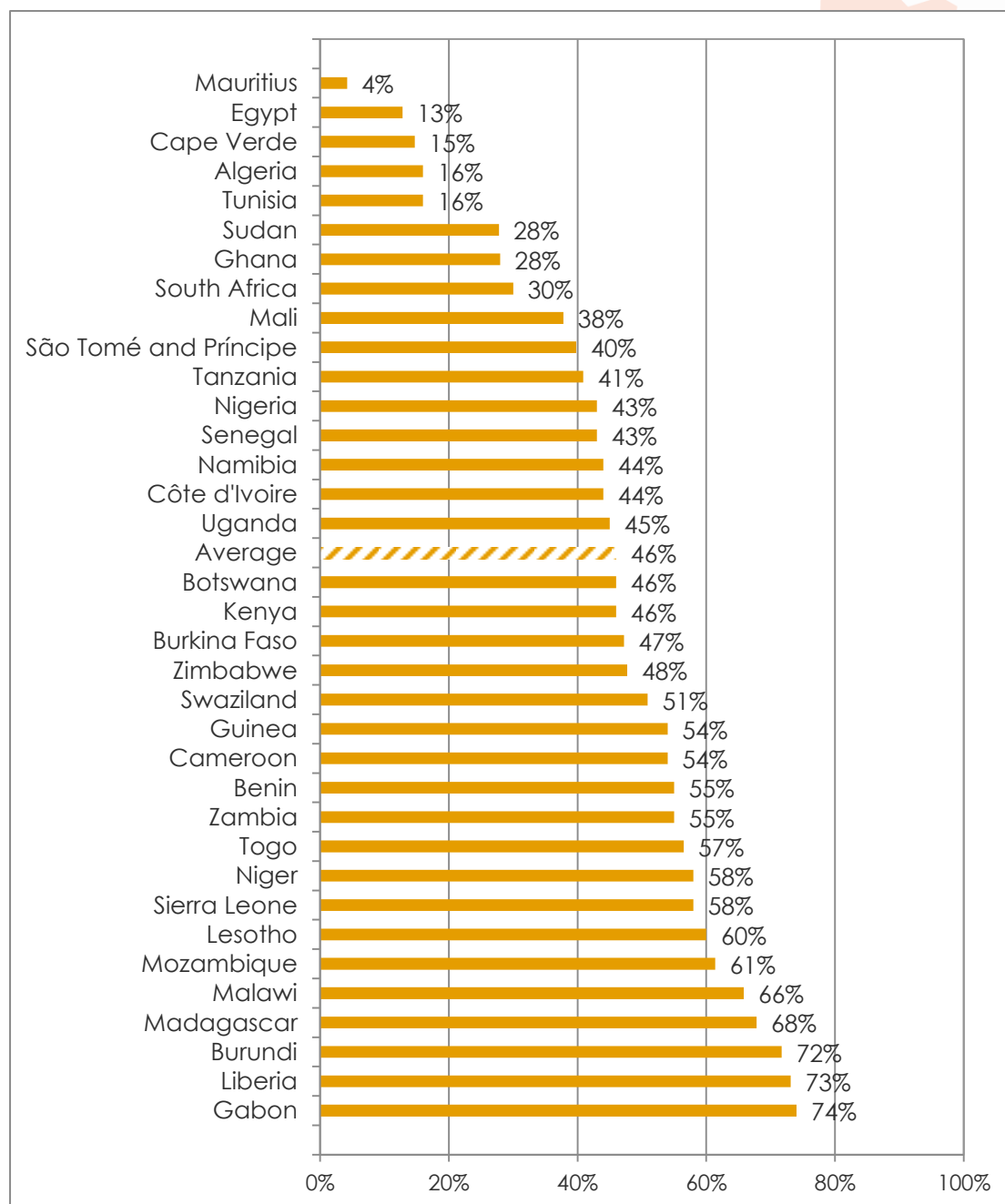
(Note: Due to rounding, summed response categories reported in the text may differ slightly from the sum of categories shown in graphics.)

### National and regional differences in lived poverty

Yet Africa can no longer be characterized as uniformly poor. Overall averages hide substantial country and regional differences across the continent.

Take those who experience shortages of food (Figure 2). Two-thirds or more of all citizens experienced at least one or two food shortages in the previous year in Gabon (74%), Liberia (73%), Burundi (72%), Madagascar (68%), and Malawi (66%). In contrast, fewer than one in six faced the same problem in Tunisia (16%), Algeria (16%), Cape Verde (15%), and Egypt (13%). And in Mauritius, a mere 4% reported ever going without food.

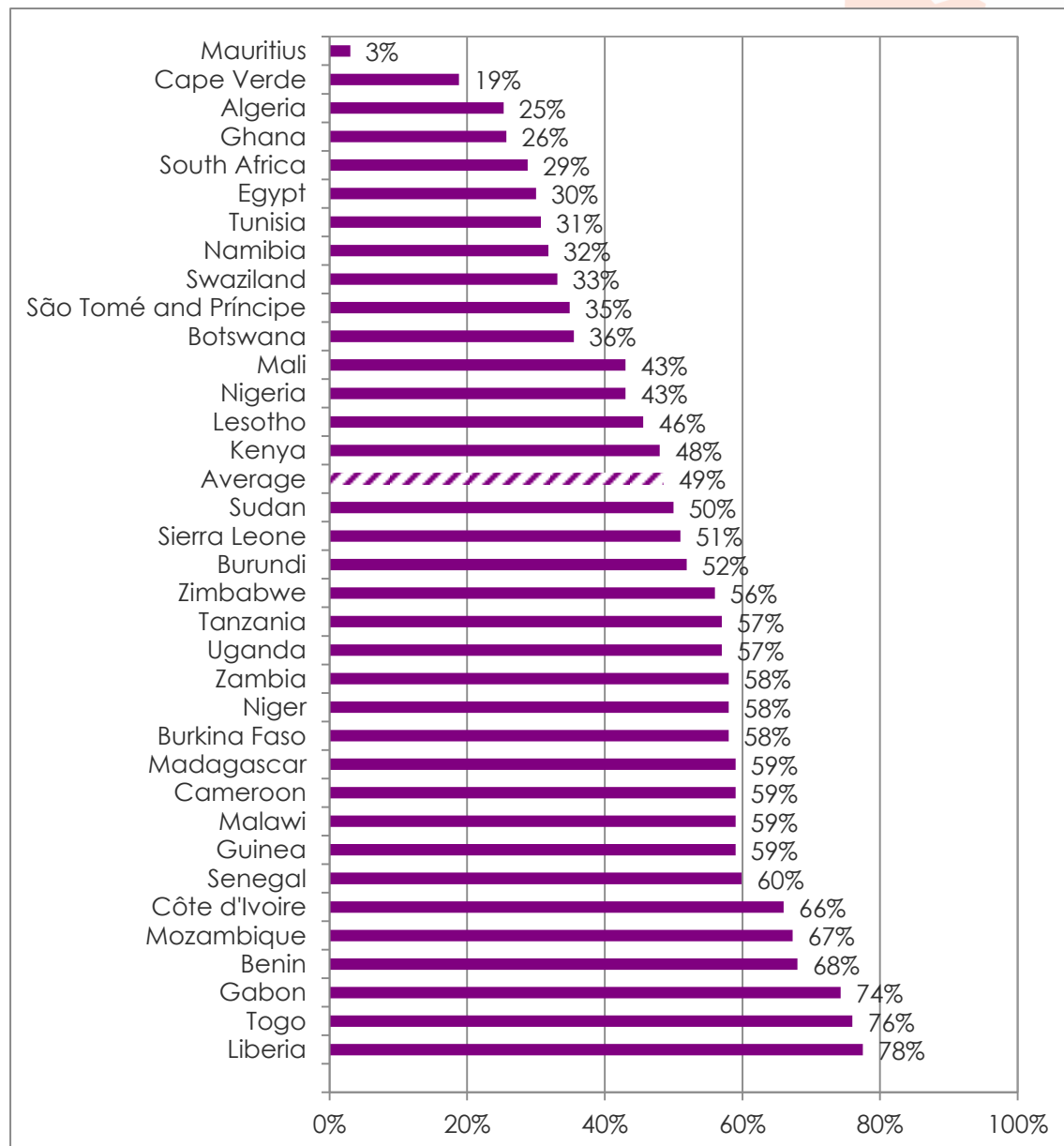
Figure 2: Going without food (at least once in past year) | 35 countries | 2014/2015



**Respondents were asked:** Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: Gone without enough food to eat? (% who say "just once or twice," "several times," "many times," or "always")

Similarly, while between two-thirds and three-quarters of all citizens say they went without necessary medicine or medical treatment once or twice in the past year in Liberia, Togo, Gabon, Benin, Mozambique, and Côte d'Ivoire, one in four or fewer faced these scarcities in Ghana, Algeria, and Cape Verde (Figure 3). In Mauritius, a mere 3% went without needed medical care, reflecting the country's position as one of a very small group of African countries that have invested heavily in health service provision and provide free health-care access to their populations.

Figure 3: Going without medical care (at least once in past year) | 35 countries | 2014/2015



**Respondents were asked:** Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: Gone without medicines or medical treatment? (% who say “just once or twice,” “several times,” “many times,” or “always”)

### The Lived Poverty Index (LPI)

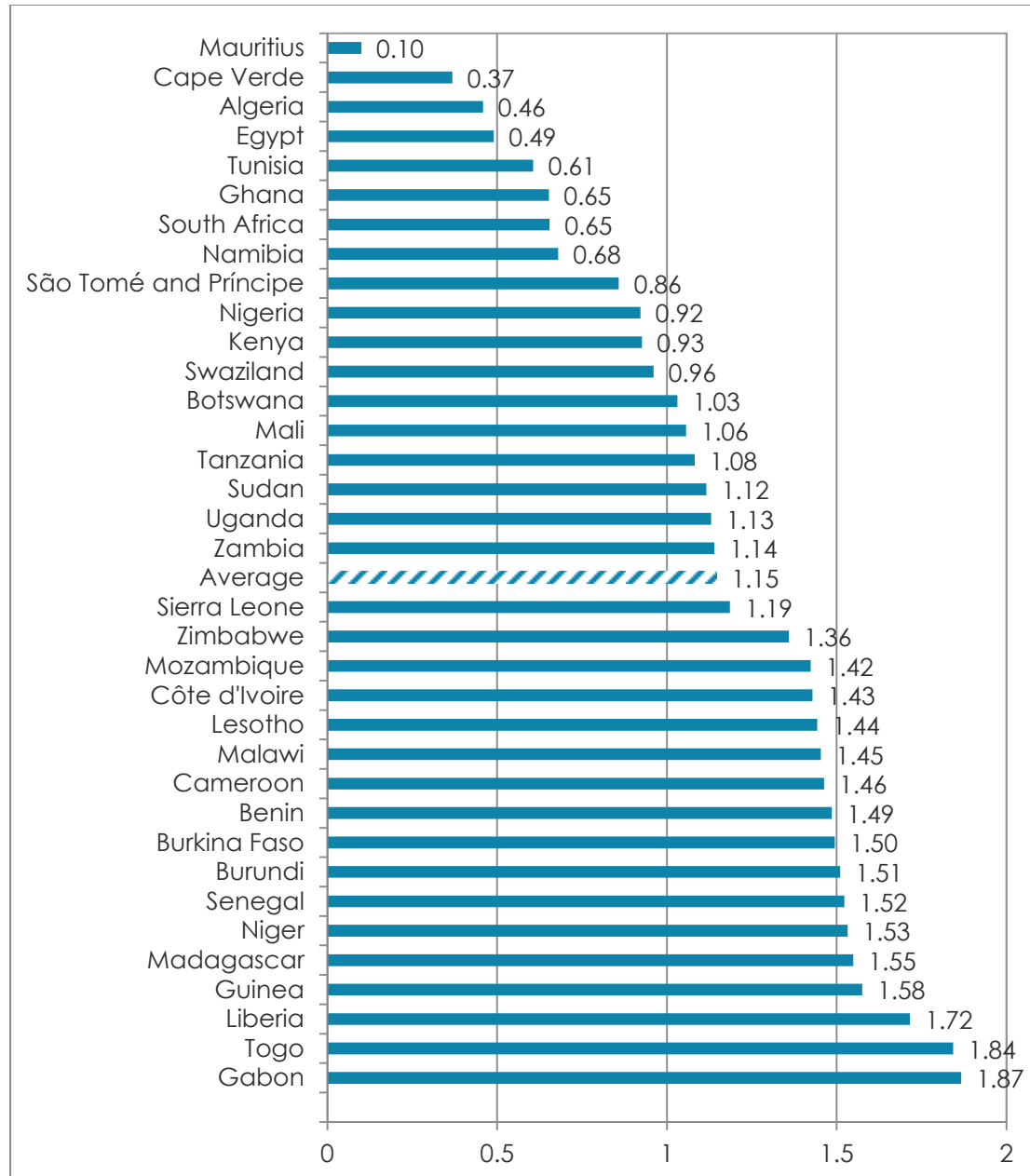
The responses to this set of five Afrobarometer questions can be combined to calculate average scores for each respondent and each country that capture overall levels of “lived poverty.” The Lived Poverty Index (LPI) score ranges along a five-point scale from 0 (which can be thought of as no lived poverty) to 4 (which would reflect a constant absence of all basic necessities).<sup>1</sup>

The mean lived poverty score across all 35 countries in 2014/2015 is 1.15 (on the scale of 0-4), suggesting that the typical African respondent went without each of these basic necessities “once or twice” over the past year.

<sup>1</sup> Previous research has demonstrated that this scale has impressive internal validity and reliability that is strong and consistent across all country samples and across all survey rounds. See Mattes (2008).

However, as suggested above by the responses to specific questions, there are significant cross-national variations around that mean. At their worst, the index scores for Gabon (1.87), Togo (1.84), and Liberia (1.72) suggest that the average person in these countries experiences shortages across all or most basic necessities “several times” a year. Indeed, people in Gabon and Togo experienced shortages at approximately 18 times the rate of those in Mauritius (0.10) and four times as frequently as residents of Cape Verde (0.37) and Algeria (0.46) (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Average lived poverty | 35 countries | 2014/2015**

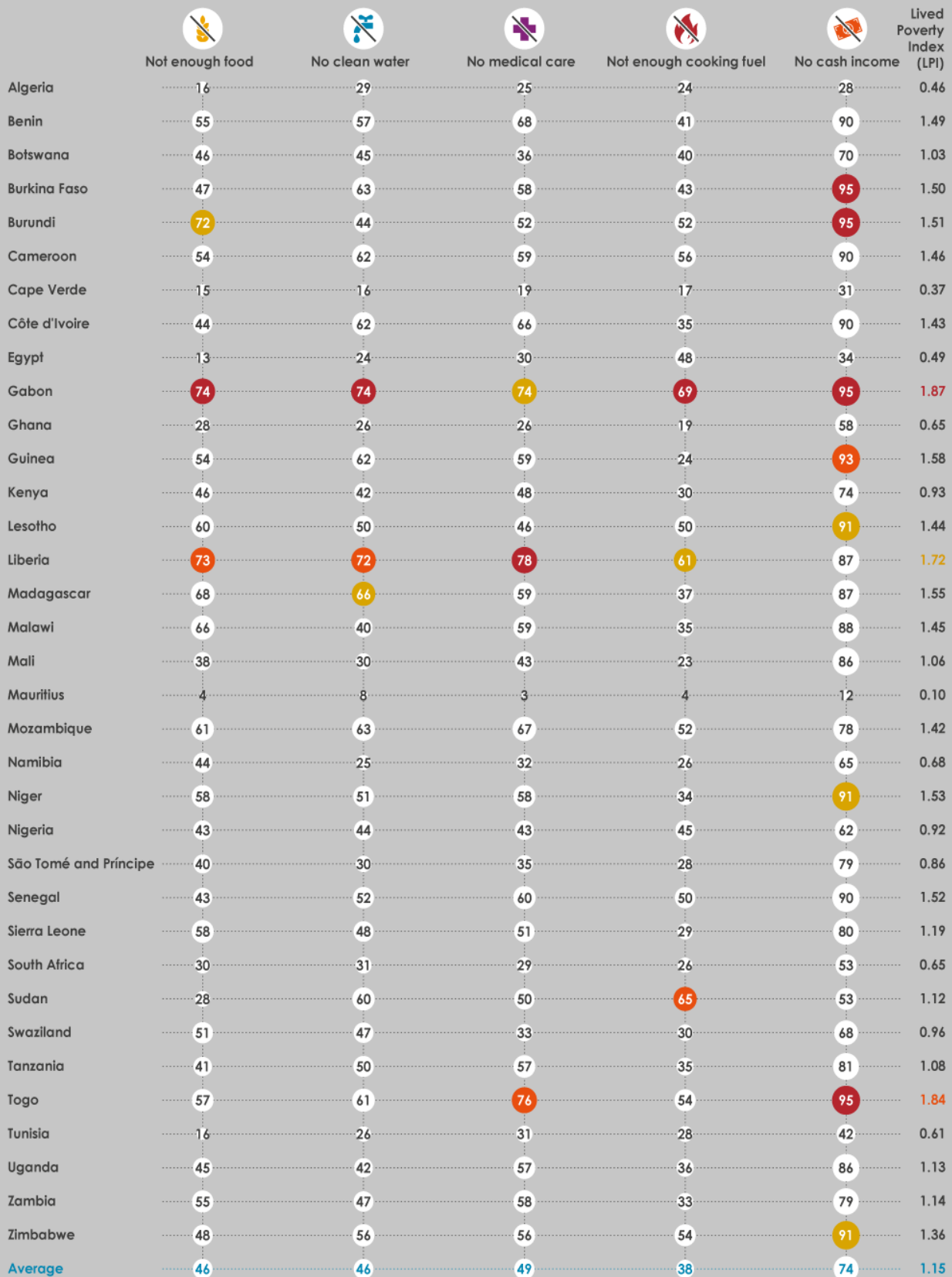


In general, it is evident that Central and West African countries are clustered at the bottom of the scale with the worst lived poverty, while North African countries dominate at the top with the least. A comparison of average LPI scores by region confirms that these apparent regional differences are real. Respondents who live in Central Africa (with an LPI score of 1.40) and West Africa (1.29) experience shortages most frequently, followed by those in East (1.16) and Southern (1.07) Africa, while those who live in North Africa (0.67) are least likely to suffer shortages.



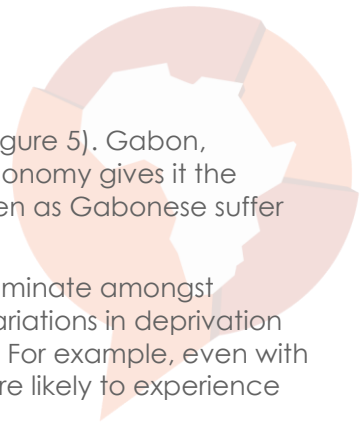
## Going without at least once in the past year

35 countries | 2014/2015



Key  % of all respondents  1st  2nd  3rd ranking among 35 countries

**AFRO**  
**BAROMETER**  
LET THE PEOPLE HAVE A SAY

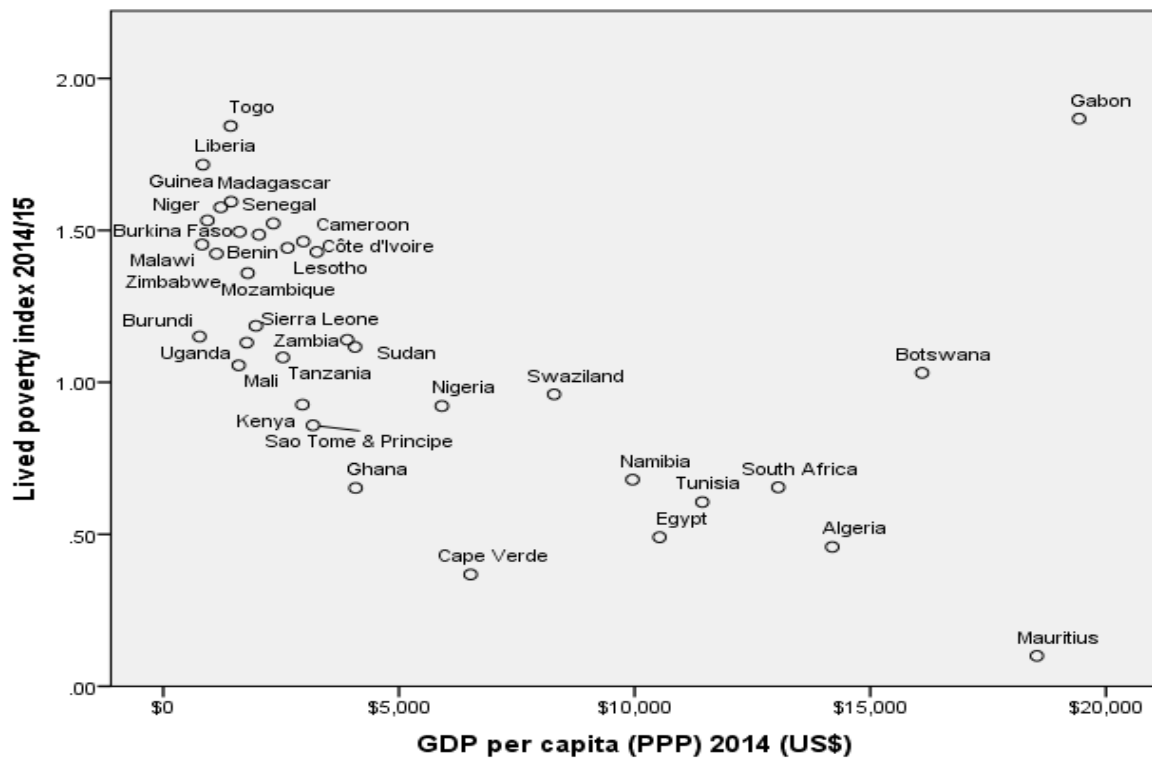


In general, levels of lived poverty fall as national wealth increases (Figure 5). Gabon, however, stands out as a significant outlier, as its oil-export-driven economy gives it the highest gross domestic product (GDP) among these 35 countries even as Gabonese suffer the highest levels of deprivation.<sup>2</sup>

The value of the Lived Poverty Index is illustrated by its ability to discriminate amongst countries with similar levels of national wealth. It reveals important variations in deprivation amongst a range of countries that fall under \$2,500 GDP per capita. For example, even with similar levels of national wealth, Togolese and Malawians are far more likely to experience shortages than people living in Sierra Leone, Mali, or Uganda.

Figure 5 also suggests that while lived poverty appears to decline rapidly as GDP approaches \$5,000 per person, it does not necessarily decline thereafter. While increasing levels of wealth have translated into relatively low levels of lived poverty in Egypt, Cape Verde, Algeria, and Mauritius, poverty remains higher than national wealth would predict in Botswana, South Africa, and Namibia.

**Figure 5: Lived poverty and national wealth | 35 countries | 2014/2015**

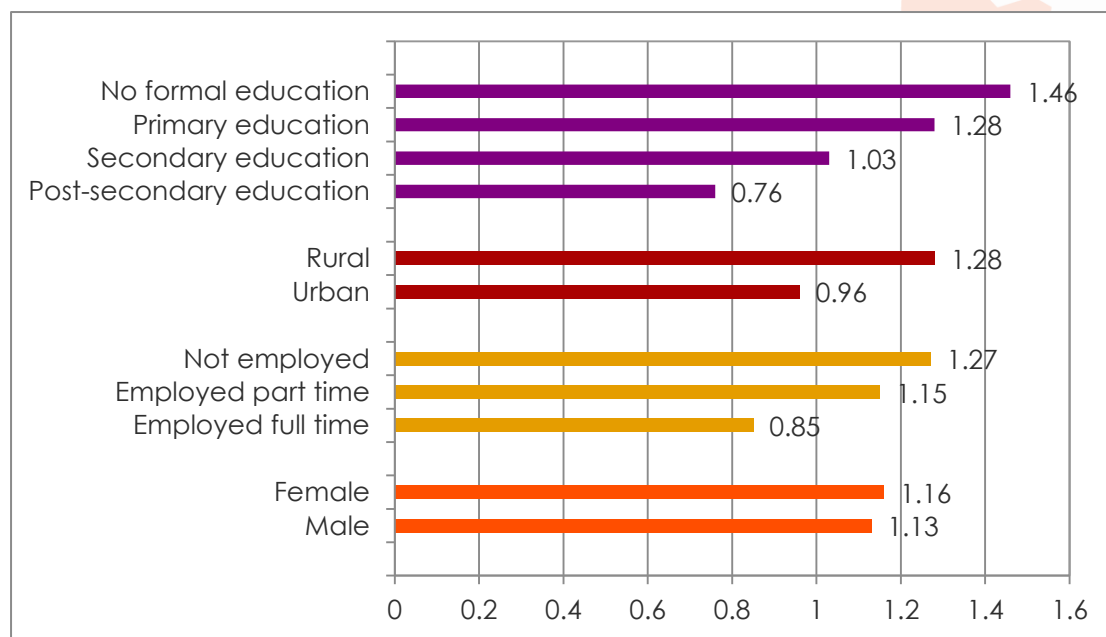


At the level of the individual, respondents with higher levels of education experience substantially lower levels of lived poverty, as do those who live in urban areas and those who have full-time jobs (Figure 6).<sup>3</sup> There are surprisingly small differences between men and women; this is probably because the survey questions asked not only about respondents but about anyone in the household who had experienced shortages.

<sup>2</sup> Whether using GDP per capita (PPP) or GNI per capita (Atlas method), the overall 35-country correlation of wealth and poverty is modest (Pearson's  $r = -.546$ ,  $p < .001$  (GDP) or Pearson's  $r = -.487$ ,  $p = .003$  (GNI)). If Gabon is excluded from the calculation, the correlation is much stronger (Pearson's  $r = -.769$ ,  $p = .000$  and Pearson's  $r = -.748$ ,  $p < .001$ , respectively).

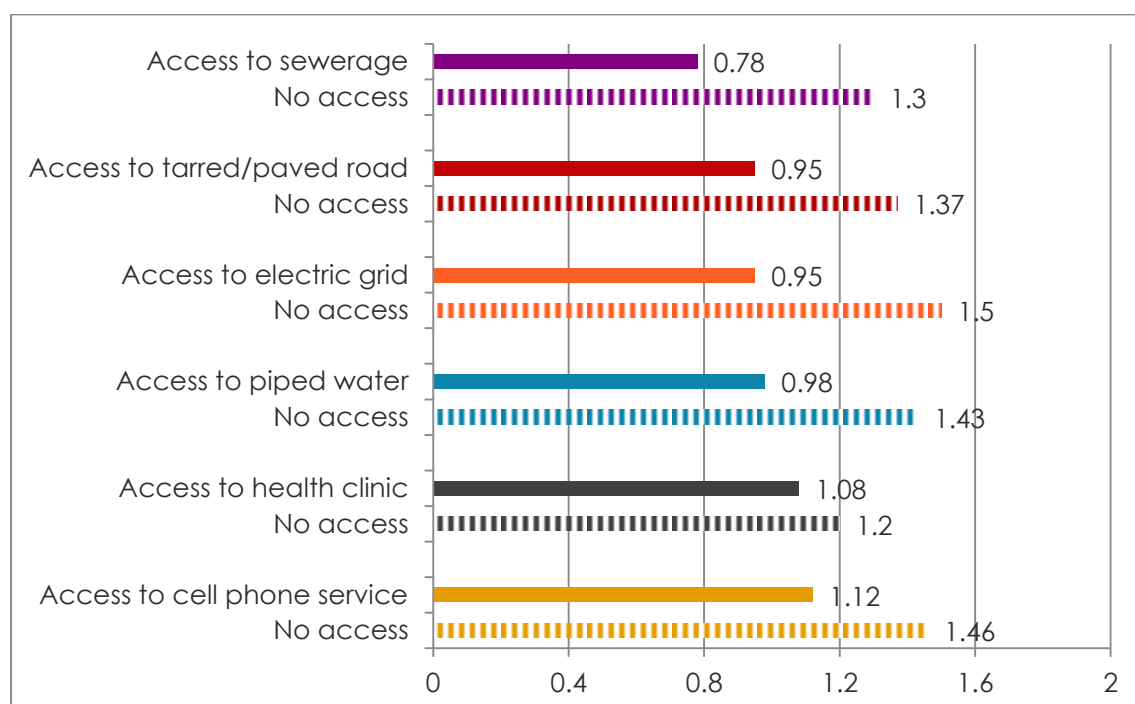
<sup>3</sup> For education, Pearson's  $r = -.257$ ,  $p < .001$ ; for urban-rural location, Pearson's  $r = -.163$ ,  $p < .001$ ; and for employment, Pearson's  $r = -.186$ ,  $p < .001$ .

**Figure 6: Lived Poverty Index by demographic indicators** | 35 countries | 2014/2015



Besides people's individual characteristics, their environment can be a factor in the experience of lived poverty: The data suggest that the state can help reduce poverty by providing development infrastructure. People who live in communities with infrastructure such as tarred/paved roads, an electricity grid, piped water, sewerage, cell phone receptivity, and health clinics<sup>4</sup> are far less likely to report experiencing shortages of basic necessities (Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Lived Poverty Index by development infrastructure** | 35 countries | 2014/2015

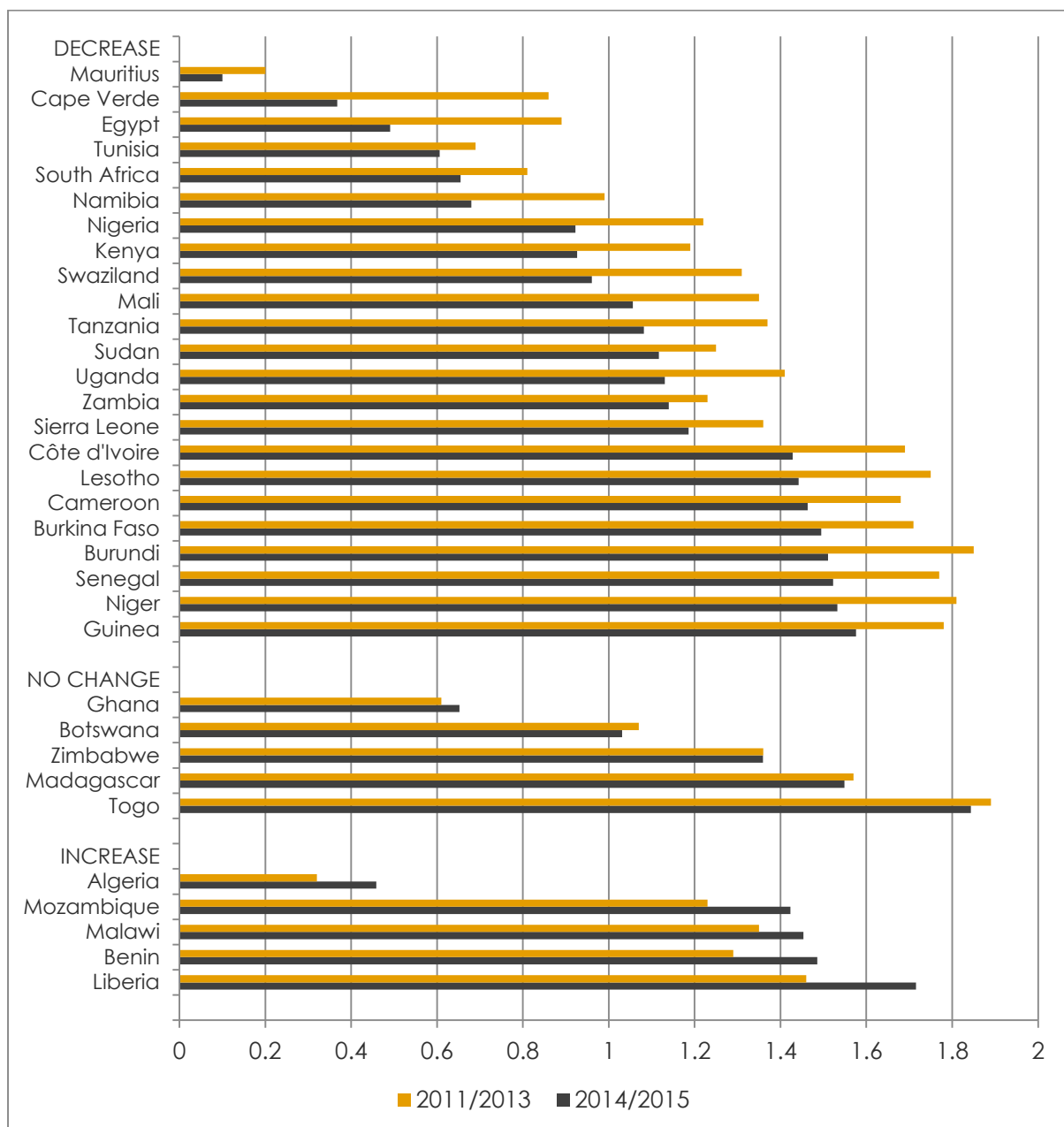


<sup>4</sup> For sewerage, Pearson's  $r = -.253$ ,  $p < .001$ ; tarred/paved roads, Pearson's  $r = -.222$ ,  $p < .001$ ; electricity grid, Pearson's  $r = -.279$ ,  $p < .001$ ; piped water, Pearson's  $r = -.227$ ,  $p < .001$ ; health clinics, Pearson's  $r = -.083$ ,  $p < .001$ ; and cell phone service, Pearson's  $r = -.093$ ,  $p < .001$ .

## Changes in lived poverty

While previous Afrobarometer surveys found little evidence of consistent change in lived poverty across the continent (Afrobarometer, 2004; Mattes, 2008; Mattes & Bratton, 2009; Dulani, Mattes, & Logan, 2013), Round 6 data suggest some important broad-based changes may be in the offing. Of the 33 countries included in both Round 5 and Round 6 surveys, 22 countries exhibit decreases in lived poverty between 2011/2013 and 2014/2015 that are larger than sampling error (Figure 8).<sup>5</sup> In five countries, lived poverty increased by statistically significant margins, while the changes in five other countries were not statistically significant (meaning that any apparent differences might be accounted for by natural sampling error).

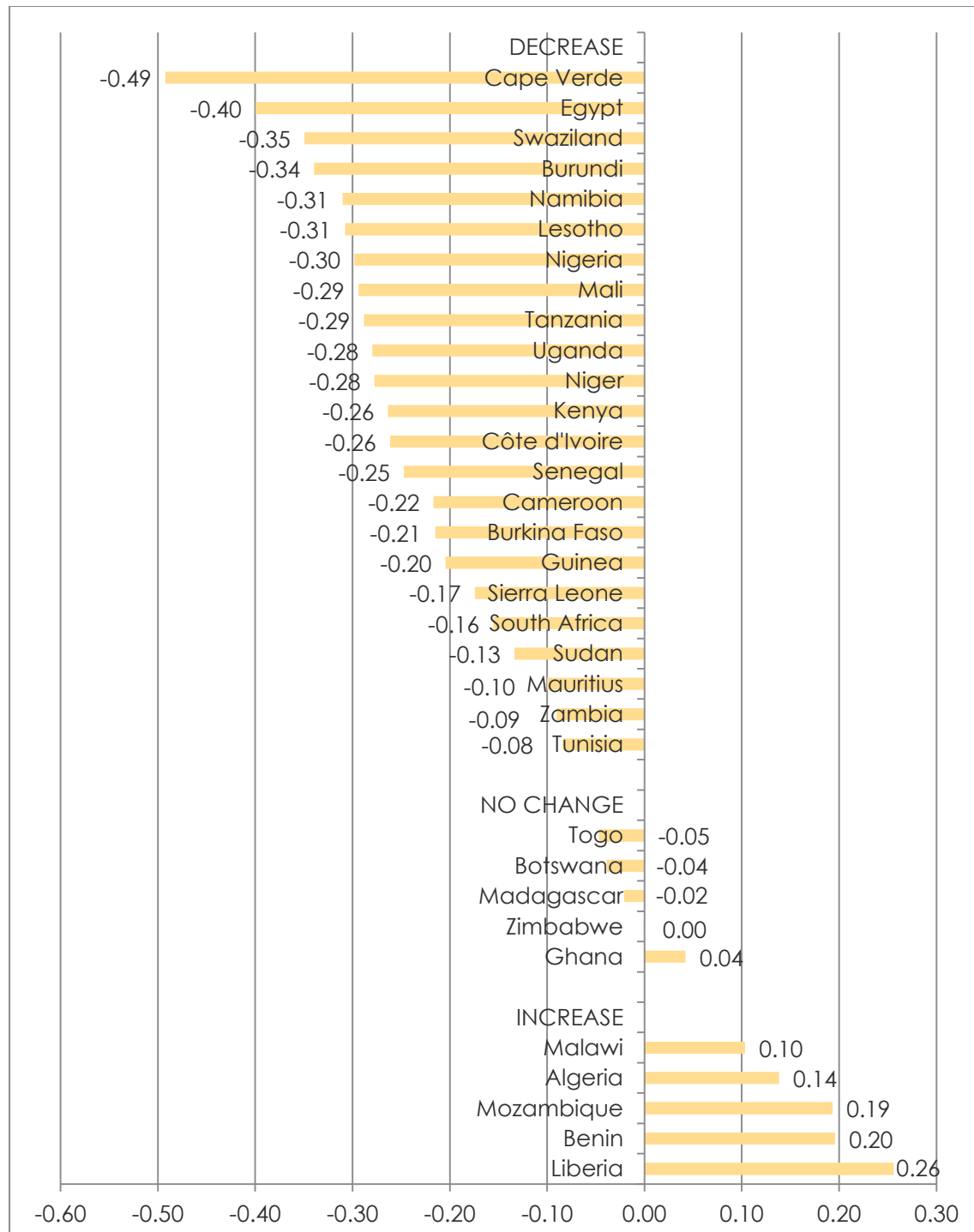
**Figure 8: Changes in lived poverty | 33 countries | 2011-2015**



<sup>5</sup> Measured as a one-tailed test comparing the Round 6 index score for each country to its Round 5 score, plus or minus twice the standard error. Generally, this means that the differences in the LPI scores should be larger than +/- .05 points to be considered statistically significant.

Moreover, the size of the decline was in many cases quite substantial (Figure 9). In Cape Verde, for example, the LPI score dropped by almost one-half of a point on the five-point scale (from 0.86 to 0.37), meaning that the average person went from reporting one or two experiences of scarcity across most dimensions to recording no shortages. In Egypt, Swaziland, Burundi, Namibia, and Lesotho, the average person was about one-third of a point lower on the poverty scale in 2014/2015 compared to 2011/2013. The typical respondent in Mozambique, Benin, and Liberia, however, scored between one-fifth and one-fourth of a point higher than in the previous survey. Nevertheless, it is clear that people across a large number of countries appear to be leading somewhat better lives, at least as measured by the absence of everyday shortages.

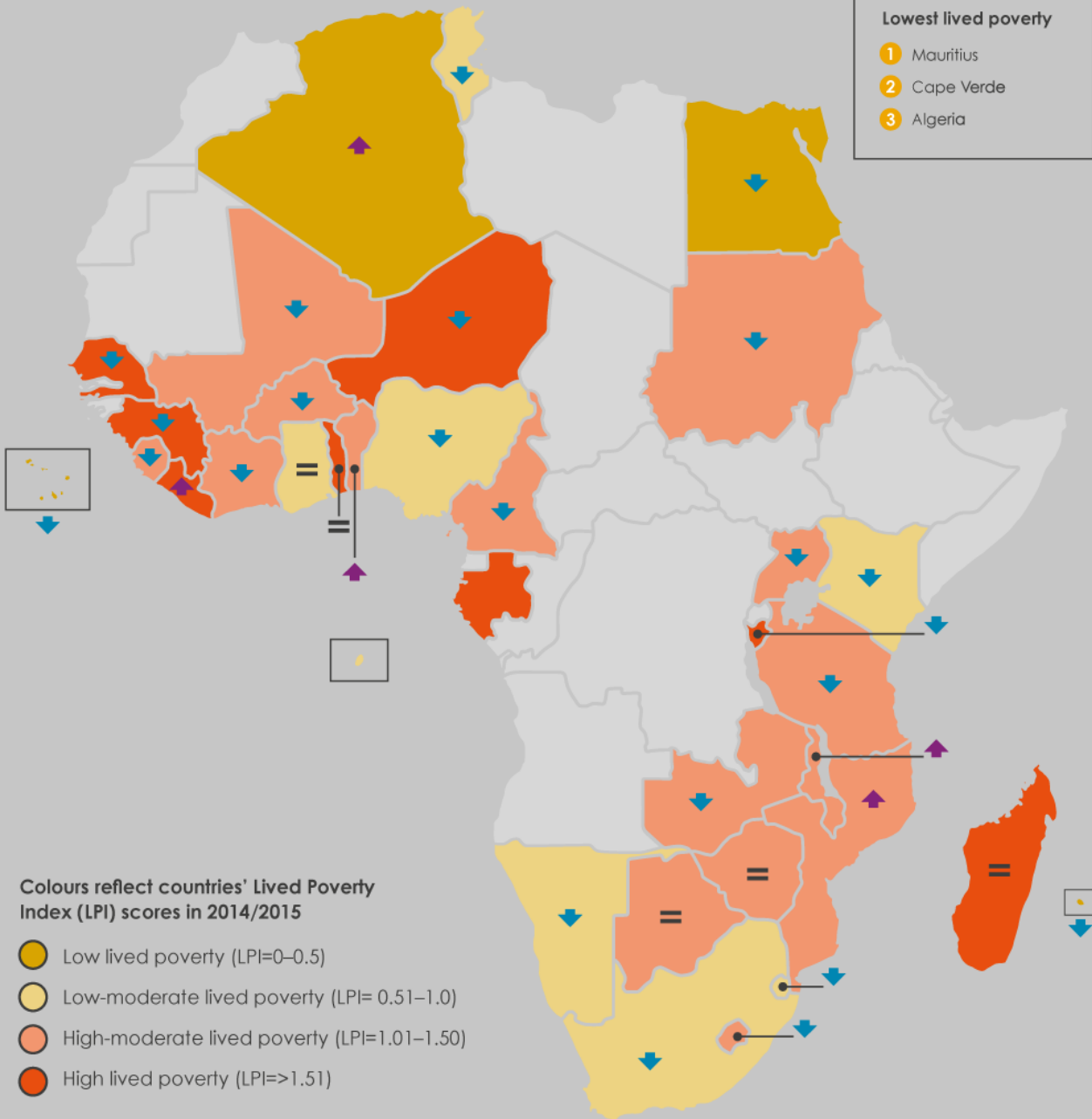
**Figure 9: Point changes in Lived Poverty Index | 33 countries | 2011-2015**



# Lived poverty in Africa

35 countries | 2011–2015

- Highest lived poverty**
- 1 Gabon
  - 2 Togo
  - 3 Liberia
- Lowest lived poverty**
- 1 Mauritius
  - 2 Cape Verde
  - 3 Algeria



\*Gabon and São Tomé and Príncipe were not surveyed in 2011/2013.

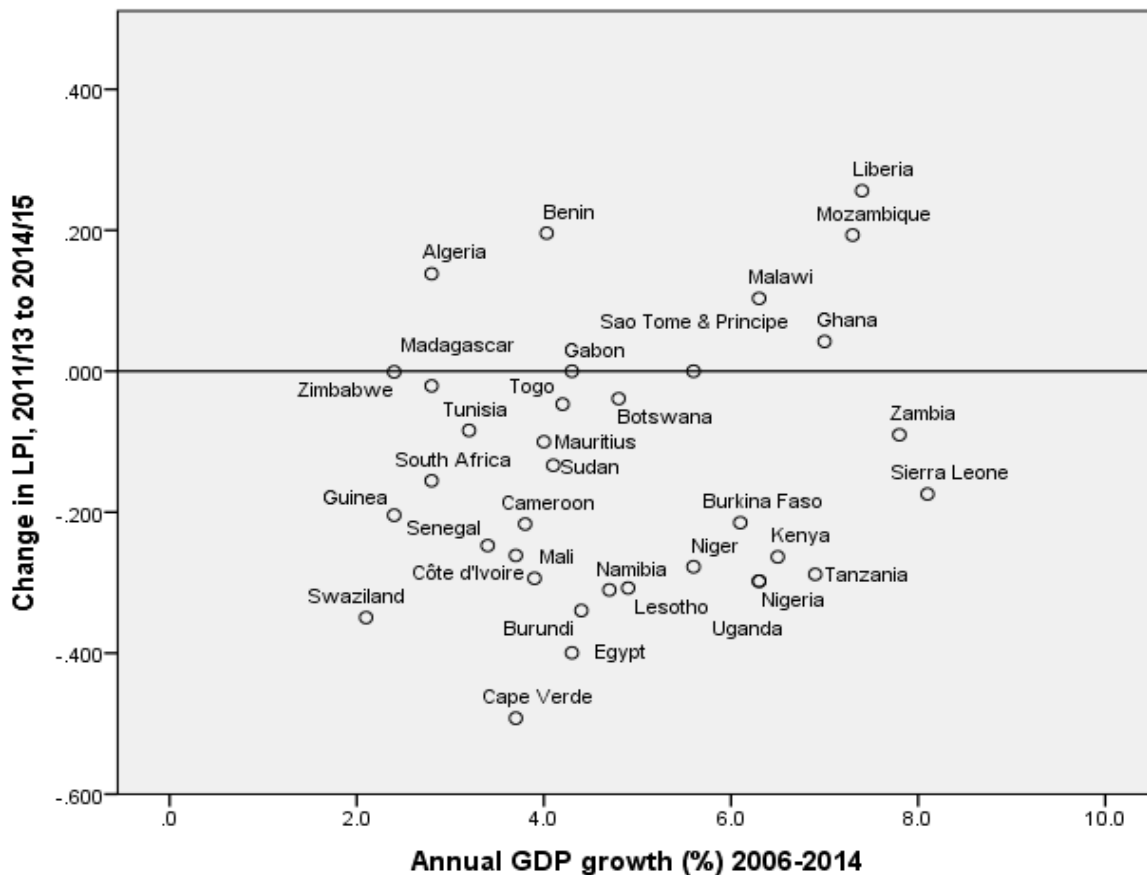




## Drivers of lived poverty reduction?

While we saw earlier that there is a relatively strong association between levels of lived poverty and levels of national wealth (GDP per capita), there is little evidence of any systematic link between poverty reduction (or increase) and economic growth. On the one hand, countries with both high (Sierra Leone) and low (Swaziland) levels of recent economic growth managed to reduce poverty. On the other hand, in some cases poverty has increased even in countries with very high levels of economic growth (Liberia, Mozambique, and Malawi) (Figure 10).

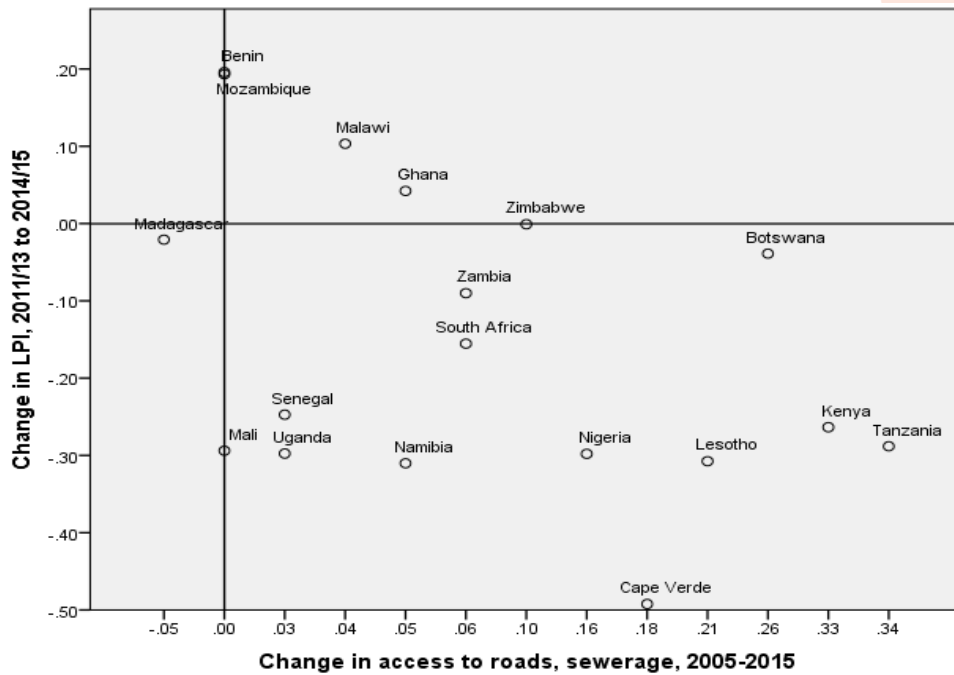
Figure 10: GDP growth and changes in lived poverty | 35 countries



There is stronger (though far from perfect) evidence of a link between poverty reduction and indicators of infrastructural development (see Mitullah, Samson, Wambua, & Balongo, 2016). Poverty tended to decrease over the previous three years in those countries that had invested the most effort and resources in building development infrastructure in local communities (Figure 11). For example, countries that had increased the number of local communities with paved roads and sewage systems by 15% or more were far more likely to exhibit sharp reductions in lived poverty.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Pearson's  $r = -.44$ ,  $p < .10$

**Figure 11: Change in LPI by change in paved roads and access to sewerage | 18 countries**  
| 2005-2015

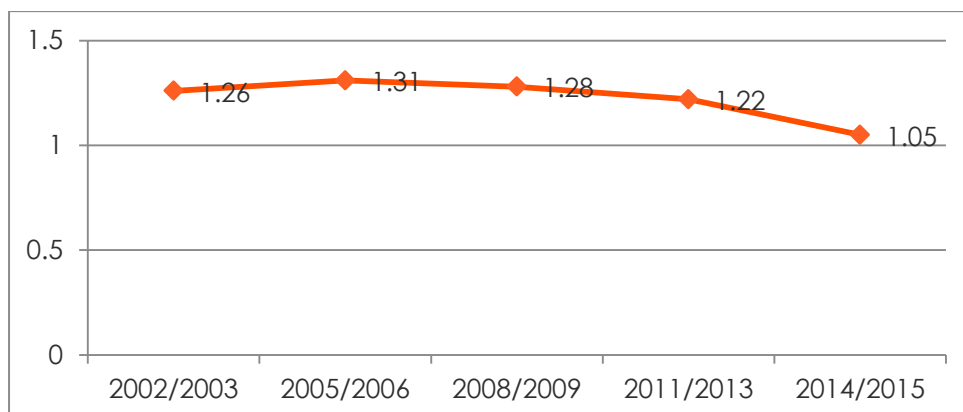


### Longer-term changes in lived poverty

While the implications of these recent developments are encouraging, one needs to keep in mind that they are just that: recent. And to the extent that they have been based on commodities-led growth, they could be easily reversed, especially as some analysts have warned of the end of Africa's commodities boom (Rowden, 2015).

Thus we turn to an examination of long-term trends. We start by looking in aggregate at trends in the average LPI across 16 countries tracked since Round 2 (2002/2003).<sup>7</sup> When we examined this trend in 2013, there was little progress to report over the preceding decade (Dulani, Mattes, & Logan, 2013). Starting at 1.26 in 2002/2003, the average LPI had increased slightly to 1.31 in 2005/2006 before declining very gradually to 1.22 in 2011/2013. However, over the past three years, there has been a marked drop, down to 1.05 (Figure 12), reflecting substantial improvement in the average experience of citizens in these 16 countries.

**Figure 12: Changes in average lived-poverty score | 16 countries | 2002-2015**

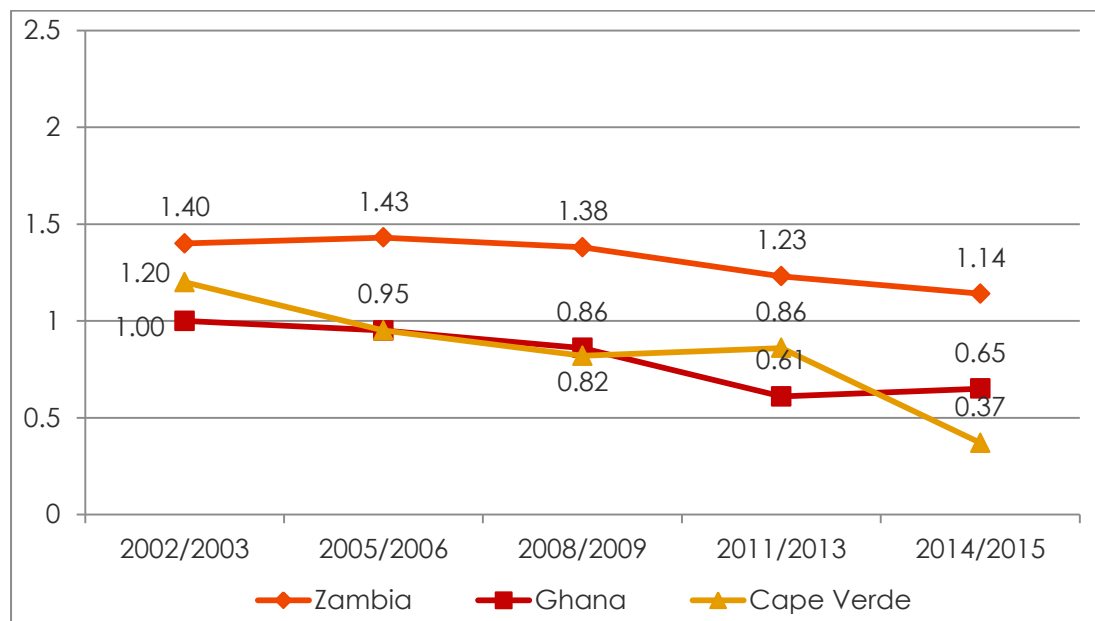


<sup>7</sup> Countries tracked since Round 2 are Botswana, Cape Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.



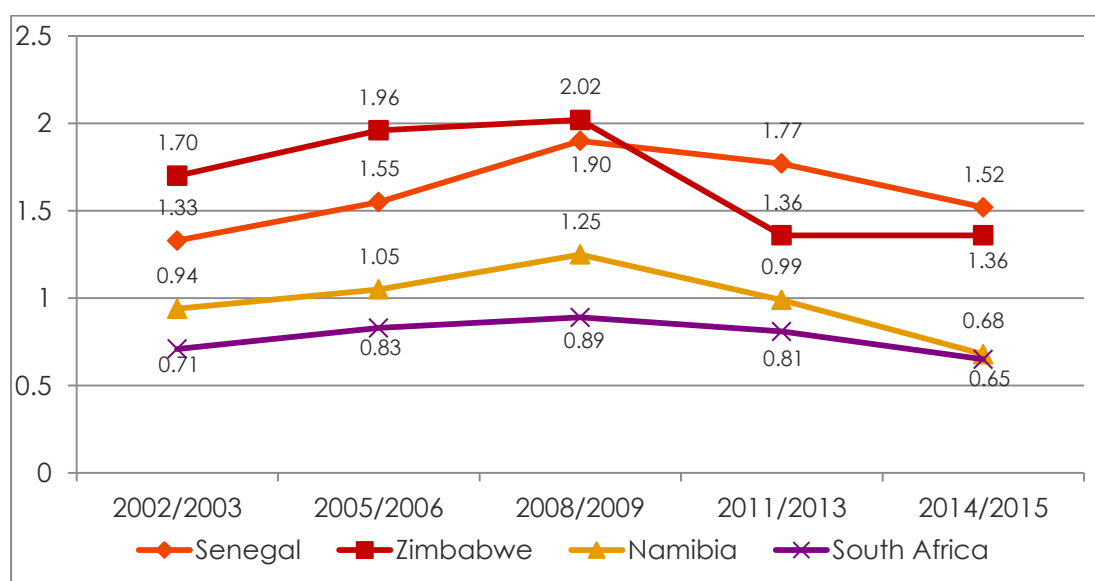
We also examine LPI trends for the 20 countries for which we have at least three rounds of surveys<sup>8</sup> to identify those that have exhibited longer-term poverty alleviation (or poverty proliferation). We find sustained reductions over the past decade in just three places: Cape Verde, Ghana, and Zambia (Figure 13). Poverty reduction in Cape Verde has been substantial: The country's LPI score has fallen from 1.2 in 2002 to 0.4 in 2015. Not coincidentally, Afrobarometer has found that Cape Verde consistently recorded the largest gains in infrastructural development across a number of different dimensions over the past decade (Mittulah, Samson, Wambua, & Balongo, 2016).

**Figure 13: Countries with long-term decreases in lived poverty | 20 countries | 2002-2015**



In another set of countries – Senegal, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and South Africa – poverty also declined over the past six to seven years. However, each of these countries had witnessed increases in lived poverty up until around 2008 (Figure 14).

**Figure 14: Countries with recent decreases in lived poverty | 20 countries | 2002-2015**

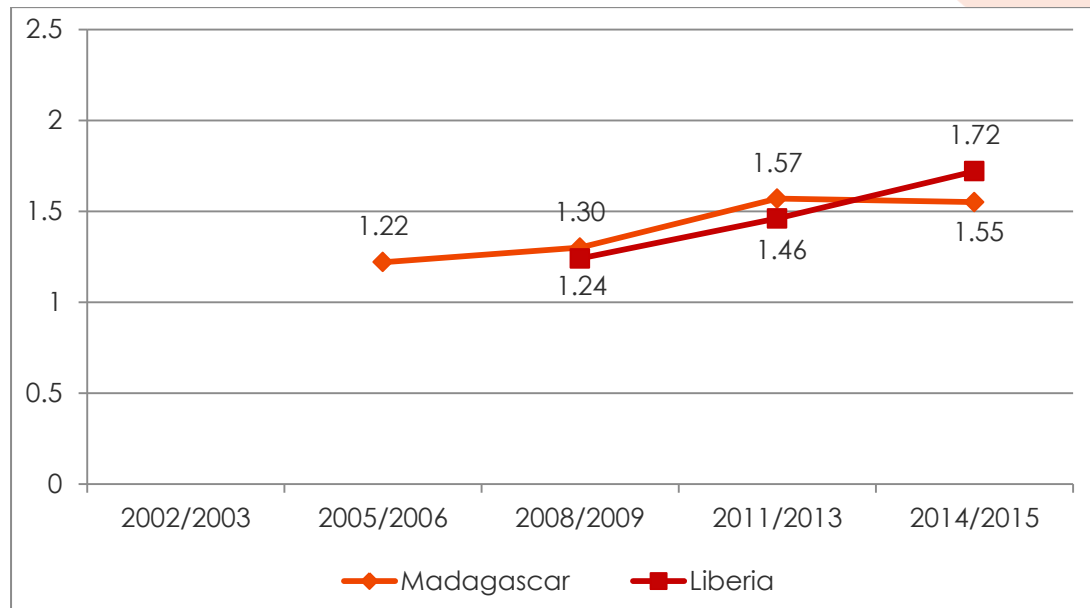


<sup>8</sup> In addition to the 16 Round 2 countries, these include Benin, Burkina Faso, Liberia, and Madagascar.

Poverty has been on the rise, however, in Madagascar (where we have measured steady increases since 2005) and Liberia (since 2008) (Figure 15). In the remaining 11 countries, there was no consistent downward or upward trend.



**Figure 15: Countries with recent increases in lived poverty | 20 countries | 2002-2015**



## Conclusion

The Round 6 findings on lived poverty offer a glimmer of hope to the African development debate. However, it is important to note that there is little evidence that the sustained poverty reduction of a handful of countries, and the more recent reductions across 22 countries, are the simple result of economic growth. The evidence reviewed in this paper suggests that sustaining these recent gains will require continued commitment to education and infrastructural development on the part of national governments and the continent's donor partners.

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## Appendix

Table A.1: Afrobarometer Round 6 fieldwork dates and previous survey rounds

Country	Months when Round 6 fieldwork was conducted	Previous survey rounds
Algeria	May-June 2015	2013
Benin	May-June 2014	2005, 2008, 2011
Botswana	June-July 2014	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012
Burkina Faso	April-May 2015	2008, 2012
Burundi	September-October 2014	2012
Cameroon	January-February 2015	2013
Cape Verde	November-December 2014	2002, 2005, 2008, 2011
Côte d'Ivoire	August-September 2014	2013
Egypt	June-July 2015	2013
Gabon*	September 2015	N/A
Ghana	May-June 2014	1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012
Guinea	March-April 2015	2013
Kenya	November-December 2014	2003, 2005, 2008, 2011
Lesotho	May 2014	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012
Liberia	May 2015	2008, 2012
Madagascar	December 2015-January 2015	2005, 2008, 2013
Malawi	March-April 2014	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012
Mali	December 2014	2001, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2013
Mauritius	June-July 2014	2012
Morocco*	November 2015	2013
Mozambique*	June-August 2015	2002, 2005, 2008, 2012
Namibia	August-September 2014	1999, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2012
Niger	April 2015	2013
Nigeria	December 2014-January 2015	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2013
Sao Tome & Principe*	July-August 2015	N/A
Senegal	November-December 2014	2002, 2005, 2008, 2013
Sierra Leone	May-June 2015	2012
South Africa	August-September 2015	2000, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2011
Sudan	June 2015	2013
Swaziland	April 2015	2013
Tanzania	August-November 2014	2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012



Country	Months when Round 6 fieldwork was conducted	Previous survey rounds
Togo	October 2014	2012
Tunisia	April-May 2015	2013
Uganda	May 2015	2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012
Zambia	October 2014	1999, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2013
Zimbabwe	November 2014	1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2012

\* Round 6 data from Morocco were not available at the time of writing but will be available by February 2016.

# AFRO BAROMETER

LET THE PEOPLE HAVE A SAY



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Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) in Ghana, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

Core support for Afrobarometer Rounds 5 and 6 has been provided by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the World Bank.

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