

Poverty Stoplight, South Africa

Background

Possibly the biggest question facing organisations working to alleviate poverty is “How do we know if we are moving the needle of transformation?” Research shows that few programmes have a methodology or metric for impact assessment that can categorically prove that they are meeting their mandates. The majority of outcomes and impacts for poverty-related programmes are measured using income generation or household costs as the main indicators and there has been little effort to use M&E tools beyond the traditional money-metric method. For example, South African reports tend to define poverty using the “food poverty line” and “lower-and upper-bound poverty lines” which are calculated in currency ZAR (Statistics SA, 2014). And although poverty lines are important tools that allow for statistical reporting of poverty levels and patterns, as well as planning for poverty reduction in any population, they do not take into consideration all the dimensions of poverty.

South Africa has thousands of programmes aimed at reducing and alleviating poverty, carried out by government and the private and public sectors. However, we don’t seem to be making much of a difference. Reducing or alleviating poverty is not good enough; it must be permanently eradicated. Our viewpoint is that we are failing because:



- We do not see people in poverty as the **main actors** in eliminating poverty from their lives.
- We plan around individuals instead of **families** and we measure our programme’s impact against individuals, not realising that it is the family unit that is in poverty; additionally, poverty does not affect families uniformly, therefore solutions out of poverty will differ for each family.
- We don’t engage with individuals and families in **self-diagnosis** and, as a result, we implement programmes based on what we think people need (issues of exclusion).
- Once programmes are running, we **measure** only certain aspects of poverty that supports our pre-determined criteria for success, forgetting that poverty has many dimensions that are interconnected and may block our programmes from achieving greater impacts in the long-term.

What is Poverty Stoplight?

Poverty Stoplight is an approach used to measure aspects of multi-dimensional poverty in the families of the beneficiaries that we serve and the people with whom we work.

It is an innovative, practical methodology and self-evaluation visual survey tool that allows families struggling with socio-economic issues to self-diagnose their situation, as a first step in developing a personalised strategy to lift them permanently out of poverty.

Founded by Martin Burt and his team at Fundación Paraguaya in Paraguay, Poverty Stoplight is experiencing huge success in Paraguay.



poverty stoplight

Poverty Stoplight assesses six poverty dimensions:

- income & employment
- health & environment
- housing & infrastructure
- education & culture
- organisation & participation
- self-awareness & motivation



The survey contains 50 indicators set within the six dimensions, with three conditions for each poverty indicator:

- not poor (green) - “I’m doing ok” (I can do this, I am building confidence in my abilities and experience)
- poor (yellow) - “I’m trying but struggling” (I could use assistance)
- extremely poor (red) - “I’m stuck” (help me)

The tool uses stoplight colours, photographs, tables, electronic devices, and simple software developed for Android devices to create innovative maps that enable individuals and families to see and understand the ways in which they are poor.

How does it work?

1. A family, in the company of a trained facilitator, performs a self-assessment (often at the beginning of a programme) to record a baseline. The family completes the survey, on paper or using the survey application on a device, by selecting the definition for each indicator that most reflects the family's current circumstances. The result is a Poverty Stoplight scorecard that is easy to understand and use in follow-up processes.
2. This allows each family to reflect, prioritise, and plan how to resolve the socio-economic problems that affects the family, with the assistance of organisations that have competencies relating to each indicator, via a referral pathway. The family discusses the results and sets targets and practical action plans for selected indicators.
3. The family discusses who can help them achieve their goal and starts to engage friends, family, community, role models, NPOs, etc.
4. Progress against the plan is measured regularly (coaching, mentoring, rewards) and integrated into programmes and initiatives. The results are formally measured every 12 months by doing another assessment survey.
5. The organisation is able to report on "real" impact results.

Poverty Stoplight assists to create a clear line of sight into specific aspects of the challenges each family faces, as well as enables organisations to encourage people to make changes in those areas of their lives that they are in control of.

As families systematically work on moving their quality of life issues from red to green, regular application of this survey allows for more comprehensive measurement and mapping of social and cultural wealth, which until now has been a challenge for the development sector.

Additionally, data can be aggregated and mapped using online geo-referencing, offering a better perspective of the real issues at hand in specific areas of the country, and scaling for a national snapshot in time. These maps can enhance decision-making for government services such as electricity and sanitation and can influence priorities for engagement. Similarly, the corporate social investment sector could use these maps to identify the issues of greatest need within their geographical footprint.

Benefits

Organisations delivering social impacts through poverty-related programmes, enterprise development initiatives and upliftment and empowerment community-based projects will benefit greatly from Poverty Stoplight.



Beneficiaries

- Provides snapshot in time of socio-economic status
- Contrasts 'poor' with 'not poor' - enables people to understand the ways in which they are poor
- Provides line of sight for way out of poverty – aspirational
- Promotes ownership and responsibility for journey out of poverty
- Encourages self-reflection in journey from dependence to dignity



Organisation

- Assists in identifying clients (families in need)
- Helps better understand client's needs
- Categorises indicators of poverty
- Defines level of poverty in target communities
- Assists in generating poverty elimination plans for clients
- Helps develop partnerships
- Measures the organisation's impact - organisation is able to report on "real" impact results

The power of the green light  You don't know what you need until you know what you've got!

Contact details

For more information and to sign up as a Member of The Poverty Stoplight Movement, contact:

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