

Why our work matters

Real numbers, Real lives,
Urgent need

A photograph of an elderly woman with a joyful expression, wearing a vibrant orange short-sleeved button-down shirt and a matching orange headwrap. She is standing in a field of green plants. A large, bright yellow abstract shape is overlaid on the top left of the image, containing the main text. A white, torn-paper-like border separates the yellow area from the rest of the image.

tearfund

Poverty: More than lack of income

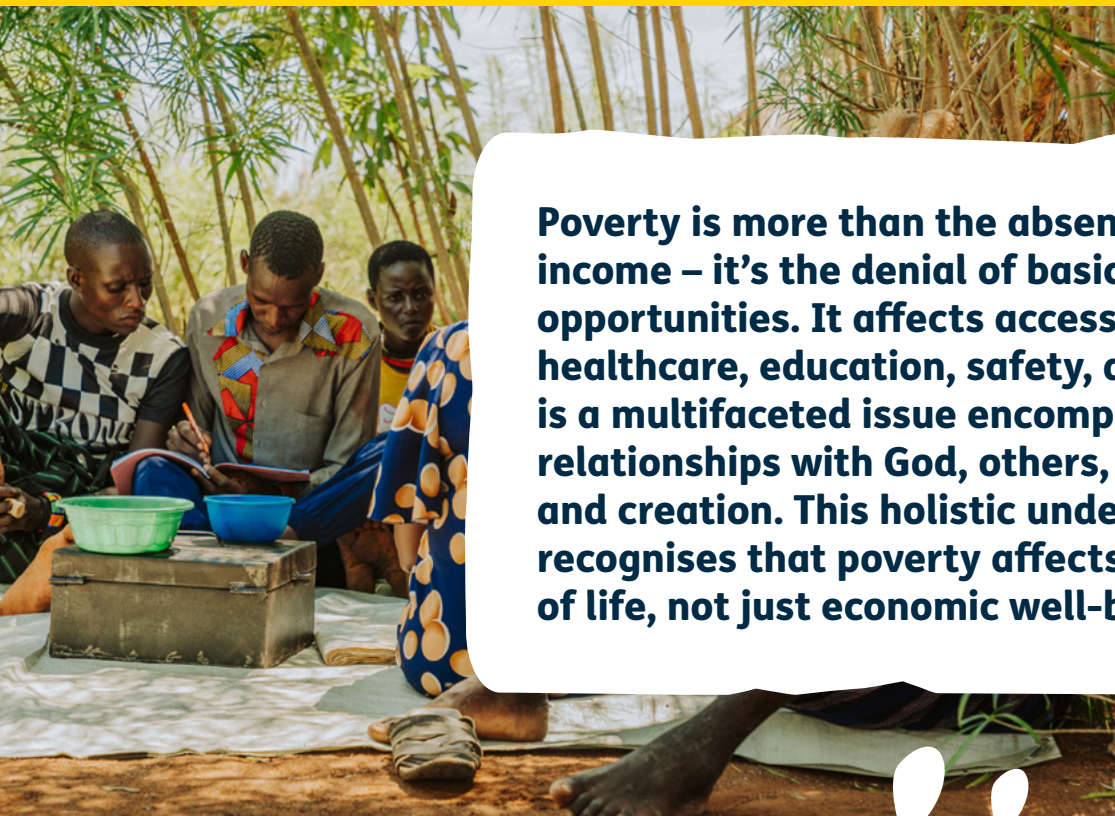
Merriam-Webster defines poverty as 'The state of one who lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions'.



But that only tells part of the story.

Poverty today is not just a matter of income. It's a web of barriers that hold people back from living out their God-given potential.

This report explores what poverty really looks like in the world today and how Tearfund, our local Christian partners, and supporters across Canada are responding with faith, courage, and practical tools to bring lasting change.



Poverty is more than the absence of income – it's the denial of basic rights and opportunities. It affects access to food, healthcare, education, safety, and dignity. It is a multifaceted issue encompassing broken relationships with God, others, oneself, and creation. This holistic understanding recognises that poverty affects every aspect of life, not just economic well-being.



The state of global poverty

Where it stands – and why we keep on moving



Reduction in the rates of poverty have stagnated in recent years as a result of overlapping crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, conflicts, and rising debt levels in low-income countries.

In 2015 the United Nations member states adopted the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, recognising that ending poverty can only be achieved by improving health and education, reducing inequality, and spurring economic growth, alongside addressing climate change and working to preserve oceans, forests and natural environments. These goals provided both a call to action and method of measuring progress.

As of 2024, the world is significantly off track in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the 2030 deadline.

According to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024, only 17% of the SDG targets are on track, nearly half are showing minimal or moderate progress, and progress on over one-third has stalled or even regressed.¹

only
17%

SDG targets are
on track

Poverty in numbers

Approximately **692 million** people²,
or **8.5%** of the global population,
live in extreme poverty.



What does 8.5% really look like?

Big numbers can feel a bit hard to grasp.
So here's a simple way to picture it.

8.5% = about 1 in 12 people

If you have a birthday party and would like to invite
12 friends, one of your friends won't get to come.
That's what extreme poverty looks like: being left
out of something everyone should have.



864 million people around
the world today,

face severe food insecurity, going
without food for a day or more.

122 million girls are currently out of school.³



Approximately **282 million** people,
across **59 countries** and
territories faced high levels of acute
food insecurity.⁴

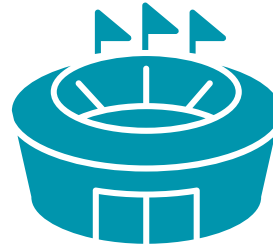


How BIG is 282 million people?

It's hard to imagine 282 million people going hungry.
So let's try.

Picture the Rogers Centre.
At full capacity, it holds 55,000 people.

**To fit 282 million people, you'd
have to fill it up 5,127 times.**



x 5,127

Over **473 million** children,⁵
more than **1 in 6 globally**
are living in areas affected by conflict.



Drivers of Poverty



Broken Relationships

Poverty stems from fractured relationships at various levels – spiritual, social, personal, and environmental.

- Broken relationship with God: we are following our own way, not God's way
- Broken relationship with self: we feel shame and don't have our identities in God
- Broken relationships with others: we are in conflict with each other
- Broken relationship with creation: we are damaging God's creation

“Poverty is the result of a social and structural legacy of broken relationships with God, a distorted understanding of self, unjust relationships between people, and exploitative relationships with the environment.”

[Tearfund Canada](#)



Economic Injustice

Economic systems that prioritise profit over people often widen the gap between the rich and the poor.

Global and local policies that favour large corporations, fail to regulate exploitative labour, or ignore the informal sector can prevent fair wages, limit job opportunities, and concentrate wealth in the hands of a few. As a result, millions are trapped in poverty despite working long hours in difficult conditions.



In 2023, the richest 1% owned 47.5% of all the world's wealth

[UBS Global Wealth Report](#)



Lack of Access to Education and Healthcare

Education and healthcare are foundational for human development, yet millions lack access to both. Without education, individuals are limited in their ability to gain employment, understand their rights, or make informed decisions for their families. Poor health, especially when untreated, reduces a person's ability to work or care for their children, creating intergenerational cycles of disadvantage.

“About 258 million children and youth are out of school around the world.”

[UNESCO](#)



Conflict and Displacement

Armed conflict and violence disrupt lives, economies, and development progress. Displacement uproots people from their communities and safety nets, forcing them into refugee camps or overcrowded urban areas where resources are scarce and opportunities are limited – making it incredibly difficult to escape poverty.

2023 saw more conflicts than at any time since World War II and that an all-time high of 117 million people were forced to flee their homes due to conflict, disasters and other factors.

[UNDP and Oxford](#)



Climate Change

Climate change exacerbates poverty, especially in communities reliant on natural resources. Extreme weather events destroy crops and livelihoods, pushing more people into extreme vulnerability.

“Climate change will affect us all but it is people living in the world's poorest communities who are being hardest hit, despite contributing least to the problem and being the least resourced to adapt.”

[Tearfund Australia](#)



Poor Governance and Corruption

Weak governance and corruption prevent resources from reaching those who need them most. Misuse of public funds and inefficient systems hinder access to essential services, deepening inequality.

Poverty is complex. These are the forces that hold people back – and the reasons our response must be holistic.





‘He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?’ declares the Lord.

– Jeremiah 22:16

Endnotes

1. UN Secretary General SDG Progress report 2024
<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/report/2024/SG-SDG-Progress-Report-2024-advanced-unedited-version.pdf>
2. World Bank. 2024. “Poverty, Prosperity, and Planet Report 2024: Pathways Out of the Polycrisis.” Overview booklet. World Bank, Washington, DC. License: Creative Commons Attribution CC BY 3.0 IGO
3. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/girlseducation>
4. FSIN and Global Network Against Food Crises. 2024. GRFC 2024. Rome.
<https://www.fsinplatform.org/report/global-report-food-crises-2024/>
5. Østby, Gudrun & Siri Aas Rustad (2024) Children Affected by Armed Conflict, 1990–2023, Conflict Trends, 1. Oslo: PRIO.





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