

**Where are we in the Global Poverty Measurement? The Human Minimum  
Model as a veritable Option**

**Jonathan O. Chimakonam**

**Department of Philosophy**

**University of Pretoria**

**Jonathan.okeke@up.ac.za**

**Abstract**

A dominant conception of poverty among many researchers is that it is a form of deprivation. There is however more focus on the idea of poverty as physical deprivation than there is on psychological deprivation. I argue that poverty is as much a psychological deprivation as it is a physical deprivation and propose a new index that explicitly takes the psychological into account in poverty measurement. I show that most extant literature tend to focus more on physical deprivations which poverty causes. I discuss some poverty indices which are employed to measure levels of poverty and highlight their inadequacy. Employing the conversational strategy, I tap into Odera Oruka's ideas to offer the Human Minimum Measure (HMM) as a model that might also be desirable if the reality of psychological deprivation is taken seriously.

**Keywords:** poverty, human minimum, poverty measure, physical deprivations, psychological deprivations

Journal of Asian and African Studies 1–13

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DOI: 10.1177/0021909619885961

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## 1. Introduction

Can poverty measures accommodate physical and psychological deprivations such that in measuring levels of poverty, both the physical and the psychological aspects of those involved will be explicitly covered? This question will drive my inquiries in this paper but first, it may be important to observe how poverty as a phenomenon became a serious concern for academics, institutions and policy formulators in the recent human history.

The debate on global poverty largely arose in the 1990's but indices for measuring poverty levels have been around. These are two different but subtly related issues. The debate on global poverty which is fairly recent has highlighted the importance of indices or measures for assessing poverty levels. It is possible that the end of the Cold War helped to draw the attention of the Western world, specifically scholars and global institutions like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank to the dire levels of poverty and human misery in some parts of the world. The fall of the Berlin wall was not only an historical event that changed the course of world politics, it was also, to a large extent, a fall of a great hologram that prevented the major world actors and global institutions from seeing the deepening plight of human conditions in some parts of the world orchestrated by extreme poverty.

Following the fall of the Berlin wall in the early 1990's, a couple of programs were launched to study and stem the tide of global poverty. The World Bank for example

Journal of Asian and African Studies 1–13

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launched the World Development Reports (WDR) which has been running from 1990-date. UNDP also launched the Human Development Report (HDR) which has been running from 1990 to date. In 1995, however, the Copenhagen World Summit on Social Development (WSSD) took place and was the major event that provided documents from which the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals initiative was established in the year 2000. The MDG #1 called for the eradication of extreme poverty by the year 2015. Year 2015 has since passed and we are nowhere near that objective.

The goal of this paper is not strictly on how the world has failed or is striving to stem the tide of extreme poverty but the viability and comprehensiveness of the poverty measures with which we have arrived at some of these conclusions. This also involves our conception of the nature of poverty as a phenomenon which has been treated in the literature on poverty measurement mainly as a physical phenomenon than one that also, explicitly amounts to psychological deprivations.

In this work, I will survey some of the popular and emerging poverty measures in literature to show how they are not explicit about poverty as a phenomenon that also amounts to psychological deprivations. I will tap into the inspiration of Odera Oruka to formulate a new measure called the Human Minimum Measure (HMM) which I will diagram to demonstrate how it can be used to measure poverty levels more effectively and more comprehensively.

## **2. Where are we in the Global Poverty Measurement?**

Journal of Asian and African Studies 1–13

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Despite all the efforts made and different techniques that have been deployed in the fight against global poverty, reports in extant literature show that poverty of all kinds have continued to increase especially in the post-Cold War times (See. Pogge 2002; Buss 2010; Kozak et al., 2012; Greenstein, et al., 2014; Hickel 2016). The subject of poverty has also become one of the hotly debated topics in academia. Issues such as the causes and implications of extreme poverty on the wellbeing of human beings in different parts of the world are seriously being discussed. Clichés such as Third World, global South and under-developed, etc., have come to characterize regions of the world where poverty is endemic. Most importantly, the problem surrounding how best to measure world poverty at both individual and regional levels has led many academics, institutional researchers and policy formulators into what is now regarded as a global debate on poverty research (Mowafi 2004; Ravallion 2004; Deaton and Kozel 2005; Hvinden and Halvorsen 2012, Niemietz 2012). Part of this debate is on approaches that can be considered viable for the measurement of poverty levels in different parts of the world. Moses Kwadzo (2015) outlines four major approaches that researchers, institutions and governments employ to include; monetary poverty, capabilities poverty, social exclusion poverty and participatory poverty. As he explains, the monetary approach is “a commodity- or utility-based approach that defines poverty in the context of the distribution and utilization of goods as well as the fact of individuals possessing such goods” (2015: 3). This approach has a lot to do with the buying power of individuals which could determine where they stand with regards to the distribution, use and possession of goods. Lacking money to buy goods which one may consider

necessary for their own flourishing implies that one may be in a condition of lack, and the more acute this condition is, the higher one's level of poverty.

The second is the social exclusion approach. Explaining this approach, Laderchi et al (2003) say it is the conditions of deprivation or need, which one suffers in terms of access to basic commodities and services, which are available to others in the society. What this approach focuses on is the condition of acute need which one is unable to fulfil. This condition could be as a result of lack of access to necessary goods and services like food, water, electricity, health care, etc., which one needs for proper functioning. This type of condition may leave the affected individual deprived of things they needs for their flourishing. In this way, an individual could be said to be poor and the level of their unfulfilled needs determines their level of poverty.

Going forward, Kwadzo (2015: 5) has defined the capabilities approach which is the third, as “the deprivation of a person or the failure of a person to develop capabilities to achieve a certain level of functioning”. What this approach suggests is(are) the condition(s) that affect or impair one's ability or capability to obtain goods and services that can enhance his functioning. These conditions could be as a result of one's abilities failing them as a result of health challenges or lack of requisite skills or qualifications, or; even being deprived of their abilities by others or circumstances beyond them. This same approach can also be conceived in terms of different phenomena. According to Wolff et al., (2015), Amartya Sen conceives

it in terms of deprivation of freedoms for individuals, while Martha Nussbaum extends this idea of deprivations to cover traditionally under-represented demographics like women. No matter which way one conceives the deprivation, the point is, the higher the deprivation, the higher one's poverty could be assumed.

The fourth one known as the participatory approach is explained by Laderchi et al (2003) as involving a mechanism for getting the poor to be part of the conception and measurement of poverty. This implies tapping into the ideas and experiences of those who are in the condition of poverty. The point must be that understanding poverty, its causes and effects, requires the experiences of those who are poor. The idea is that it is one thing to deal with statistics and data about poverty and the poor, it is quite another to deal with the actual experience of poverty which those who are in conditions of poverty offer. This is the focal point of the participatory approach in conceding and measuring poverty levels of individuals and regions of the world.

Despite the promises of these four approaches, each of them, namely; monetary, social exclusion, capabilities and participatory, however, appear to come short of an adequate measurement model for poverty levels. This may not be as a result of their origins in the global North's scholarship, but because they are fractional or fail to address the issues of poverty from a broad perspective that takes into account different but related experiences in affected parts of the world. I argue that poverty is not strictly about money or social exclusion, or capabilities or something that affects a section of the society as these four approached tend to hold. There may be so much more to the conditions of poverty people face in different parts of the

world. So much more, that some of the four perspectives might even be present in one or more contexts at the same time. As a result, my major objection to these four perspectives is not about their error or failure to account for how poverty levels can possibly be measured but about their limited scope. I am here concerned about the psychological sphere, and it has to be admitted that there is a sense in which the capabilities approach could be said to cover this sphere. For example, the list of capabilities would include items such as emotion, senses, imagination and thought, but my reference to psychological deprivation is an explicit case in which the experience of poverty could directly determine negative behaviors such as suicide, murder and all forms of criminalities in victims.

In recent times, new approaches have emerged in scholarship which claim to conceive and measure poverty levels better. Ashish Singh for example, attempts to create a new poverty measure called the 'Inequality of Poverty Index' or D-index of poverty which combines both poverty and inequality data. He observes that most known poverty indices "measure the overall level of poverty in a society but fail to capture the differential intensity of poverty across different socioeconomic groups" (2012: 96). His argument is that both poverty and inequality measures are used separately to assess the welfare and capture the social improvements in a society but wonders why the two cannot be combined in a single measurement technique for a more comprehensive outcome in poverty measurement. This was the goal he pursued in his paper which saw him adapt a technique that measures inequality called the 'dissimilarity index (D),' into a procedure that can measure both poverty and inequality of poverty in a society. According to him (2012: 99), D-index of

poverty “measures the extent of inequality associated with the distribution of poverty across different subgroups. The proposed index is a version of dissimilarity index (D), widely used in sociology and applied to dichotomous outcomes.” Singh further explains that “the D-index measures the dissimilarity in the probability of falling below poverty line (i.e., falling in poverty) for groups defined by socioeconomic factors or characteristics (e.g., religion, ethnicity/caste, gender, or location) compared to the average probability of falling below the poverty line for the population as a whole (2012: 99).” This involves a trick that grants more expressive power to the new poverty measure Singh devised that measures not only poverty levels but inequality of poverty levels as well. Yet, it is hard to conclude that Singh’s technique is adequate for poverty measurement in different regions of the world. In a later section, I will discuss the psychological conditions of poverty that may prove to defy even Singh’s measure.

The last new measure I will discuss here is the Oxford University developed Multidimensional Poverty Index also known as the Alkire Foster model named after Sabina Alkire and James Foster who invented it. The Alkire Foster model covers three basic dimensions, that is, education, health and standard of living each of which has other sub-indices—the reason it was named the Multidimensional Poverty Index. Most of the common poverty indices concentrate on one of the three dimensions above, that is, standard of living with specific focus on income. But the Alkire Foster model includes education and also health as a separate dimension. It is said to go beyond a traditional focus on income to accommodate the multiple



deprivations that individuals in the condition of poverty face with regard to education, health and living standard. According to Sabine Alkire and Maria Santos:

The MPI assesses the nature and intensity of poverty at the individual level, with poor people being those who are multiply deprived and the extent of their poverty being measured by the extent of their deprivations. The MPI creates a vivid picture of people living in poverty within and across countries, regions and the world. It is the first international measure of its kind and offers an essential complement to income poverty measures because it measures deprivations directly. The MPI can be used as an analytical tool to identify the most vulnerable people, show aspects in which they are deprived and help to reveal the interconnections among deprivations. This can enable policy makers to target resources and design policies more effectively. (2010: 1)

The MPI definitely makes a lot of claims including not only the capacity to measure deprivations directly but also ‘across countries, regions and the world’. My objection to the comprehensive power of the MPI is with regard to its acclaimed power to measure poverty in different regions of the world.

To begin with, it is easy to see that this model like many others represents the mindset of the West and its perception of poverty. The MPI explicitly accommodated more dimensions of physical deprivations and less explicitly, the dimensions of psychological deprivation. The logic of the MPI is that one can be

Journal of Asian and African Studies 1–13

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deprived of education, and the level of one's deprivation in this regard may determine their level of health care deprivation; together, their level of deprivation in the two dimensions can determine the deprivations they may suffer in the third dimension. To analyze an individual's or a society's poverty level using the MPI will, in the final analysis show areas of deprivations or poverty as shaded boxes while the areas of non-deprivations or non-poverty are non-shaded boxes. This is the same multidimensional approach which Bjørn Hvinden and Rune Halvorsen (2012: 23-24) favor as being more comprehensive, but as clever as the idea behind this measure might be, it is difficult to argue for its delivery on all of its claims let alone on its comprehensiveness.

The MPI claims to assess the nature and intensity of poverty but all that can be seen is a concentration on physical deprivations in terms of education, health care and general standard of living. Typical of most measures developed so far, the MPI does not explicitly cover psychological connection which poverty may have. Individuals in the conditions of poverty may be deprived of things other than physical, things like dignity for example. Thus, the MPI cannot claim to assess the nature and intensity of poverty if it loses sight of the psychological aspect of the phenomenon. But why cannot poverty measures accommodate the two aspects of the individual; physical and psychological? This is the question that informs my proposal called the Human Minimum Measure (HMM) and it is not about the individual alone; it measures the poverty levels of the society as well, because; even the society has a

psychology. In this work, I will restrict my inquiries to the individual's psychology and leave that of the society for another project.

### **The Problem of lopsided conception of Poverty**

On the whole, what these various poverty measures from monetary poverty to MPI discussed above have in common is their conception of poverty as physical lack and consequent sidelining of psychological deprivation as part of the harm suffered by those living in conditions of poverty. The lack of explicit treatment of the psychological dimension is indeed a telling one on different poverty measures since 1969 when the US government launched the countries first official poverty threshold for various family sizes. Michele Rossi and Karen Curtis (2013: 112-113) explain that the 1969 US threshold was adopted from the calculations of Social Security researcher Mollie Orshansky whose figures presented levels of income inadequacy and showed how much, on an average, was too little. This threshold continues to be re-calculated every year but Rossi and Curtis (2013: 113) indicate that it is grossly inadequate because, it undercounts those living in poverty and fails to capture the effect of poverty alleviation policies. Down the years, criticisms for the US threshold mounted, culminating in the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) recommendation of changes to the official national poverty measure in 1995 which brought in a number of improvements and specifics relating to food, shelter, clothing, transportation, etc. Rossi and Curtis (2013: 113) report that these recommendations were adopted but not as replacement to the existing threshold

rather; they were adopted to strengthen the threshold. Yet, these new improvements proved to be inadequate again.

By 2010, in President Obama's administration, further improvements were made to create what is called the "Supplemental Poverty Measure," (SPM). Rossi and Curtis (2013: 113) cites K. Short as saying that this new measure was "based on previous research that has produced alternative poverty measures and the NAS recommendations as a basic format. The new measures include adjustments for geographic differences in the costs of living, household groups that include nonmembers and out-of pocket medical expenses, while also accounting for tax credits and subsidies." These improvements were aimed at clearly drawing the line between who qualifies as poor so that effective policies could be enacted and implemented to assuage their conditions. Until the poverty index is correct, questions would continue to be asked whether those deemed as non-poor in national statistics are actually non-poor. For the lingering uncertainty, a new idea emerged in the American society that refocuses the argument from a veritable poverty index to minimal wage and much later, living wage. Those who wedge this campaign are convinced that it is easier to calculate the income level that can sustain citizens and which will lift people out of poverty than to enact and implement several economic policies which are expected to, collectively, shoot people beyond the national threshold. To make matters more complicated, no one actually is sure of the credibility of these thresholds.

My hunch is to establish a case that different poverty measures from the last century continue to be criticized for being inadequate which has led to several revisions of such measures whether in Europe or in North America or the Third World countries. The definition of the poor or the criteria used in determining those who are poor have never been stable nor credible in any society and my claim is that this uncertainty, besides statistical anomalies can also be caused by a marginal conception of the nature of poverty as a phenomenon. Conceived in some places as the condition of physical lack or deprivation, different poverty measures are then created to assuage physical lack.

Thus, while a given poverty measure declares certain individuals who survive on the so-called food stamps, free medical benefits, tax credits and the like, such individuals may still consider themselves as poor and criticize the national statistics that rank them as non-poor. The first official US threshold was criticized for not taking into consideration some of these national poverty alleviation policies and failing to report on the successes of such programs, its alternative created in the 1990s took care of these omissions but many of those it considered as non-poor resisted such conclusion warranting yet another revision. This is also the case in many other countries, and it is simply because; these measures were designed to focus on assuaging physical deprivations. But the truth is; there is no way an individual that lives in homeless shelter, feeds on food stamps, dresses in donated cloths; cannot take a wife or has a wife but cannot shoulder the responsibility of providing for their family and paying their children's school tuitions, can consider

themselves non-poor, no matter how comfortable the homeless shelter is; no matter how well the food stamps feed them and no matter how expensive the donated cloth is. There is a psychological yearning in all humans; for every physical food, shelter or cloth, there is a psychological food, shelter or cloth; and until these psychological yearnings are assuaged in an individual to a certain minimal level, it is hard for that individual to consider themselves lifted from poverty.

In the end, challenges posed by seeming intractable nature of poverty measurement are beginning to push researchers to rethink the conventional ideas about poverty definition and measurement. However, some of these attempts are mere charade as they simply re-create the same problem in a new light. Merely changing the title of an irritating song rather than the song-text cannot make those who found the song unpleasant to change their minds. Sondra Beverly (2001) for example, called for a switch from income-based measures to hardship-based measures or, at least, the later to supplement the former. According to the proposal:

Although there has been much discussion in the United States regarding the definition of economic poverty, we continue to measure poverty almost exclusively in terms of current income. However, there are many reasons to supplement measures of income-poverty with measures of material hardship. First, material hardship and income-poverty represent alternative conceptions of poverty. Second, material hardship is of both normative and instrumental concern. Third, hardship measures are useful tools for

policy analysis, particularly in the context of welfare reform. (2001:

23)

The interesting thing about the above proposal is that Beverly admits that measuring “poverty almost exclusively in terms of current income” is lopsided and inadequate. But the call for a material hardship-based measure still confines poverty measurement to physical aspect of humans leaving out the psychological aspect. I maintain in this work that the psychological is as important as the physical in the wellbeing and flourishing of human beings. Otherwise, how do we assess the impact and effects of social stigmas that are associated with poverty if they do not have a connection with human psychology?

In poverty research, there is a lot of cross-disciplinary cooperation among scholars in economics, sociology and development studies, but this cooperation hardly involves psychologists. It is as if psychologists are isolated from this cooperative research partnership and the effect of this lack of research sharing and partnership with psychologists is telling on everything including the viability of poverty measures devised which so obviously, are not designed to cover the psychological twist of poverty as a phenomenon.

Interestingly, some psychologists actually pay serious attention to the problem of poverty as Scott Sleaf (2015: n.p) observes and their conclusion is that poverty as a human experience is something that affects the brain and impacts negatively on victims’ self-esteem. As Sleaf put it, “[P]art of the fuel for poverty’s unending

cycle is its suppressing effects on individuals' cognitive development, executive functioning, and attention..." He explains following evidence from research that there are "psychological effects of living with scarce resources and low socioeconomic status (SES)" when compared with affluence and security. This confirms my assumption in this work that there is a psychological dimension to poverty; it is not only physical deprivation that poverty induces, it also induces psychological deprivation which may even translate to more negative consequences in the life of the victim.

Some researchers like Farah et al., (2008) have variously shown that according to research findings available, people who experience conditions of low SES like low family income, limited or lack of access to health care, lack of security and discrimination, are likely to have mental stress, poor educational performance, and low IQ scores. What is implied here is that the psychological feeling which conditions of poverty induce demoralizes a victim and makes it difficult for such a person to maintain a mental health that is sound enough to enable them live out their best potentials and attain a reasonable level of success. Sometimes, it is possible to conclude that conditions of poverty have a way of determining behaviors that reinforce poverty in the lives of the low SES.

A. K. Shah et al, have argued for the immediately preceding point in their article titled "Some consequences of having too little". As they put it:



The poor often behave in ways that reinforce poverty. For instance, low-income individuals often play lotteries, fail to enroll in assistance programs, save too little, and borrow too much. Currently there are two ways to explain this behavior. The first focuses on the circumstances of poverty, such as education, health, living conditions, political representation, and numerous demographic and geographic variables. Put simply, the poor live in environments (for sociological, political, economic, or other reasons) that promote these behaviors. The second view focuses on personality traits of the poor. But we suggest a more general view: Resource scarcity creates its own mindset, changing how people look at problems and make decisions. (2012: 682)

The point made is that poverty usually has overwhelming psychological influence in the life prospects of its victim. Most people who live in conditions of low SES are too occupied with things like where the next meal is going to come from to have time and calmness of mind to make long term life plans. Sometimes, their pre-occupation with a short-term quick solution leads them to make hasty, if not bad decisions which can only escalate their conditions of poverty. This is partly what Shah et al, mean when they say in the above that the poor live in sociological, political, economic circumstances that promote the behaviors that reinforce their poverty.

Following from the above, it is compelling to argue that experience of poverty from childhood may impact one's life up till adult. Sandra Fortier (2006) and especially Farah et al., (2008) have conducted a research on childhood poverty and shown its mental implications on the individuals even till adulthood. Farah et al., conducted research in which they tracked children of low SES from 4 years till they were about 20 years of age and reported that the degree to which their childhood poverty affected and determined their adult lives was high. Their report also shows specifically that the bulk of the burden is psychological even though they may appear secondary. Most times, the physical deprivations caused by poverty like lack of food, health care, shelter, cloths, etc., tend to be of primary concern. The reason is that these challenges are so obvious, and their biting pain is immediately felt but the secondary effects which are psychological may be regarded as more destructive.

Two scholars who have documented the primary and the secondary effects of childhood poverty are Wayne and Fran Busby in their article "Children in Poverty: The Fundamental Issues" (2008). Their analysis shows that the psychological effects of poverty on children are fundamental and may have ripple effects on not only the person but on the community as well. They state that "[P]overty is pervasive in nature; its impact goes well beyond economic deprivation. It is a major factor underlying almost every other social problem in the lives of children" (2008: 69). Wayne and Fran Busby go on to explain that poor children are "susceptible to developmental disabilities, ill health, mental illness, child abuse, delinquency, and substance abuse, and with our children doing less well academically in school..."

These are all psychological fallouts of experience of poverty which are by far more devastating than the immediately obvious physical effects. It is for this that Yoshikawa et al, (2012) declare that the effects of poverty on children and youth are not only physical but also mental, emotional and behavioral. It is on the basis of this overwhelming evidence that I make a claim that 1) poverty amounts to both physical and psychological deprivations 2) and the failure by some poverty researchers to also take the psychological aspect into consideration may have been responsible for the proliferation of lopsided poverty measures. My hunch, therefore, is to attempt to address this lopsidedness by devising a new poverty measure that might not only be attractive and desirable in global poverty research but takes the psychological aspect explicitly into account.

### **3. The Human Minimum Measure (HMM)**

The inspiration behind this approach is due to the African philosopher Odera Oruka who addressed the problem of poverty and international economic aid in Africa leading to his insightful theory of the “human minimum”. For Oruka (1989/1997) the “human minimum” is the sum of basic provisions (physical needs) a state must guarantee to its citizens without which it is impossible for citizens to act rationally (psychological need). Where an individual lacks the human minimum (physical deprivations), Oruka contends that such an individual will suffer from compromising poverty that will rob him of his dignity and lower his self-concept (psychological deprivations).

The human minimum, for Oruka, consists of three broad needs, namely; subsistence, health and security (1989/1997). These are physical needs which will amount to physical deprivations when one lacks them. However, being deprived of these needs may also amount to psychological deprivations in terms of lack of self-confidence, loss of dignity, poor self-concept and low self-esteem. These psychological needs are as important as the physical needs because; the individual has two, equally important aspects. So, one observes that poverty is not about education, food and health care alone, as some of the popular and emerging measures like Singh's 'inequality of poverty index' and the Alkire Foster (MPI) model earlier discussed tend to show.

To make my proposal, I first rethink the conception of the nature of poverty and give an indication as to why poverty is both a physical and a psychological problem. Poverty is a complex phenomenon that is not so easy to define or comprehend because it affects the two aspects of the individual. It is possible that different people would conceive it differently depending on how it affects them. The views of a poor woman in the Congo regarding what poverty entails may not be the same with the views of a poor woman in Germany. A poor woman in the Congo would include lack of security and access to quality health care in her definition of poverty; her counterpart in Germany might not. But one thing that may be common between the two is that poverty affects not just their physical wellbeing but their psychological wellbeing as well.

We must understand that poverty is not just a lack of money; that is too simplistic. Existing poverty measures like that of the World Bank and the US are based on a certain amount of money one is able to live by daily. This will make little sense in most parts of the global South where poverty is endemic. Many people in those places live above the World Bank benchmark but are obviously poor. Food is not the only basic need which humans require for proper functioning as rational entities. Thus, I will conceive poverty as the condition of life lacking in opportunities of decent income and self-development as well as basic amenities and social services which negatively affects one's self-concept and dignity. This definition is broader than the conventional ideas in scholarship which are limited to statistics of people who are starving and are lacking material things, which Nyasulu (2010: 154-155) describes as inadequate and misleading.

Living below this bar at which one ceases to function as a normal rational human is what poverty entails. One can observe from my definition above that I placed premium on 'opportunities of decent income and self-development' rather than, what is usual, 'food, clothing, and shelter'. The reason is because having access to food, shelter and clothing does not remove the stigma and other psychological burdens poverty places on people. One may receive daily food stamps from one of the world's food aid programs, accompanied by donations of other needs like cloths and maybe a makeshift shelter as we see in different camps; by the definitions that focus on money and other physical necessities like we have in the D-index of poverty and the MPI, such a person will not be categorized as poor, which is

erroneous and curious. My attempt here is therefore to tap into Oruka's idea of the human minimum to create a new poverty measure that accommodates both the physical and the psychological aspect of the individuals in conditions of poverty.

Poverty is something that goes beyond food, shelter and clothing, etc. One can have all of this and still be poor if one has no opportunities to earn decent income and achieve personal development, thereby providing for oneself, one's basic needs not just in a sustainable way but with *dignity*.<sup>1</sup> Because one works and earns decent income and pays one's taxes to the state in addition to fulfilling other obligations one may owe the state, that means one is also entitled to basic social services and amenities which the state is in a position to provide (Chimakonam 2019). We must therefore imagine a bar, let us call it the 'Human Minimum Bar (HMB)' and let us treat it as the poverty indicator line in the HMM diagram. Anyone who lacks the opportunities of decent income and self-development and is denied of basic amenities and social services, which a state has to provide, lives below the HMB irrespective of the fact that they may feed well, are clothed and have a place to lay their head all by the grace of people or aid programs. One who depends on other people or aid programs for all of these basic things has lost their dignity as a human being and are consequently poor. For not taking the idea of human dignity into consideration, the Alkire Foster model (MPI) and other measures also come short of

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<sup>1</sup> A few other scholars have taken the idea of dignity into account in conceptualizing poverty as something that should rightly undergird our discussion of poverty rather than money and other physical assets. See M. Munroe (2003), Nussbaum (2008) and G. Nyasulu (2010). What I have done in this work was to properly connect the idea not only with the definition of poverty, but with its measurements and remedy.

a veritable poverty measure in places like the sub-Saharan Africa where hundreds of thousands of people living in camps and depend on food aid programs.

Poverty is not just a physical phenomenon; it is a psychological one as well. A human being is made up of the physical and the psychological aspects both of which must strike a high equilibrium before one can be said to live at a normal human level. Thriving on aid and by the grace of people might pitch one's physical aspect high but will leave the psychological aspect low. Also, rejecting aid and gifts of food, clothing and shelter, by which one obviously would do better with respect to preserving one's dignity, might pitch the psychological aspect high, but will leave the physical aspect low. In these two scenarios, one can be described as poor irrespective of what one thinks or what people perceive. This is part of what makes poverty a philosophical problem which will be the subject of another inquiry.

First, the state, as social contractarians explain, is a pact among the people to give up their unbridled freedoms and empower the state to manage them for mutual benefit. For this, there are duties which the state owes to the individual to enable them to live above the HMB so that in turn, they can fulfil their part of the pact for the functioning and stability of the state. Where the state fails in its duties, the individual is released from their own debts to the state which might lead to the collapse of the social contract. This collapse normally has ripple effects on some ethical concepts like rights, freedom and justice. For example:

1. *Rights*: the state might fail to guarantee or protect people's basic rights, which could impoverish the people, rob them of their dignity, push them below the HMB, and could destabilise the society.
2. *Freedom*: people might resort to the exercise of their unregulated freedoms in order to survive or go above the HMB, which will lead to crimes, crisis and maybe chaos.
3. *Justice*: in a situation where rights are not protected and where the people have resorted to taking the law into their own hands, norms of justice and fairness might collapse in a mad struggle to go above the HMB.

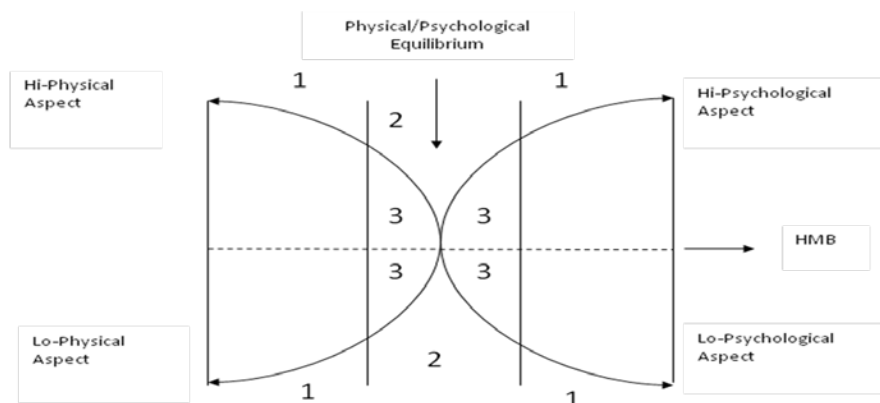
For this, I asked in a recent work (Chimakonam 2017), where the state has failed in its pact with the people, who then has the right to determine who should be punished and who should not be? And has the state any moral right to punish its citizens for not honoring the social contract pact where it has failed to honor its part? It should therefore be part of the concern of the philosopher to study how poverty can wreck the moral fibre of the state and why it is important for the state to fulfil its duties to its citizens from which it derives its moral authority over the people (Oruka 1976/1985).

I, therefore, adopt Oruka's idea to articulate the Human Minimum Measure (HMM) as a model for poverty measurement. One is not above the poverty line just because one receives food stamps or money that is enough to provide one's basic physical needs each day, neither has one escaped poverty by upholding one's dignity (and rejecting physical aids) even though one languishes in physical penury. Bringing both the physical and the psychological aspects of the human being in



different parts of the world to an equilibrium above the HMB should be the target of all united in the war against poverty and this war should be a concerted effort of all poverty researchers across all cultures, institutions and disciplinary orientations. But this is not happening at the moment. Hence, the debate on poverty research is not yet a global one.

**Fig. 1: Diagram of the Human Minimum Measure (HMM):**



*\*Interpretation of spaces labelled in Arabic numerals: 1 highest, 2 high, 3 low [Hi]; 3 bad, 2 worse, 1 worst [Lo].*

The HMM diagram above can be analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively: in the first, we have Hi and Lo which measure degrees of affluence and poverty respectively; and in the second, we have physical and psychological which measure the range of deprivations. Each of these quantitative aspects has two qualitative dimensions namely; physical Hi and physical Lo which measure degrees of affluence and poverty as well as the range of physical deprivations simultaneously; and psychological Hi and psychological Lo which measure degrees of affluence and poverty as well as the range of psychological deprivations simultaneously. The

technique also contains two divisions: the Hi and the Lo divisions which exclusively measure degrees of affluence and poverty respectively. Each of these two divisions contains a mix of the qualitative and the quantitative; that is, Hi physical and Hi psychological [Hi division] which measures degree and range of affluence and Lo physical and Lo psychological [Lo division] which measures degree and range of poverty. Further, each of the two divisions has three stages that measure degrees of qualitative mobility of affluence for the stages labelled in Arabic numerals 1-3 and degrees of qualitative mobility of poverty for the stages labelled in Arabic numerals 3-1 in reverse order. In the Hi division, labelled 1-3, 1 represents the highest level of condition of affluence, 2 represents the high while 3 represents the low. The order of these three stages are reversed in the Lo division, labelled 3-1, 3 represents the bad condition of poverty, 2 represents the worse while 1 represents the worst condition of poverty. There is also a further twist; some of the spaces have two chambers like 1 and 3 while 2 has only one chamber in both divisions. It is possible to have an individual's poverty assessment report spill into the two divisions. For example, one's poverty profile may report 1 or 2 or 3 in Hi division and report 3 or 2 or 1 in the Lo division, a phenomenon I will explain later. But one is only non-poor or affluent when both of his physical and psychological aspects report in the Hi division. Whenever one's poverty profile spills across the two divisions or both report in the Lo division, such a person is poor.

One of the things that the analysis above shows is how complex the phenomenon of poverty is. Taken lightly, it is easy to assume that poverty only amounts to physical

deprivations. HMM goes beyond the physical in analyzing poverty. As a matter of fact, the whole indices which a multidimensional approach like the MPI could measure are exhausted mainly in the physical index in the HMM alone. Thus said, the HMM might be the most comprehensive measure yet.

As possible objections, one might argue that there are three weaknesses in Orluka's human minimum namely, the intractability of the idea of human rationality, the human minimum is not a formal poverty measuring technique and Orluka did not clearly recognise psychological deprivations in his theory of poverty. I have attempted to address these in the HMM first, Orluka's human minimum uses human rationality as an index whereas HMM uses human dignity index. The reason I made this switch is because it is difficult to measure human rationality and to determine that lack of certain basic things in life is the only thing that can cause one to behave irrationally. We have seen people who have all the good things of life behave in a most irrational way, but dignity is something one retains or loses by choices he makes, or the ones imposed on him. Poverty belongs to the category of choices imposed on the individual. It is never in doubt that every 'normal' individual knows when he loses his dignity by imposed choices.

Second, HMM is a formal poverty measuring technique. Orluka's Human Minimum was never developed to that point. It remains at the level of a theory that pontificates about some of the effects of poverty.

Third, HMM recognises the psychological deprivations of poverty more clearly than Oruka's human minimum and hence, accommodates opportunities of 'decent income' and 'self-development.' With the former, one can provide one's physical needs with dignity and with the latter, one can fulfil better, one's socio-biological and psychological yearning for growth and progress. So, what I attempt to do in this work is an extension and strengthening of Oruka's idea embedded in his theory of the human minimum and the transformation of the idea into a veritable poverty measure.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In this paper, I argued that poverty does not only affect the physical aspects of the individual but his psychological aspect as well. Most poverty measures available tend to concentrate on discussing poverty as a phenomenon that imposes physical deprivations on its victims. In the course of my argument, I highlighted a number of poverty measures in literature including classical and new models and showed that one thing they all have in common is their conception of poverty as physical deprivations whether in terms of money, capability, health, education or general standard of living. These measures, therefore, are not only inadequate but are incomprehensive.

I contend that poverty measures can be both physical and psychological. This spurred me to tap into Odera Oruka's idea of the human minimum and find inspiration to create a new measure that did just that. I call it the Human Minimum

Measure (HMM) and produced a diagram to demonstrate how it could be used to measure poverty levels in both the individual and in the society. The Human Minimum Measure (HMM) might be a comprehensive poverty measure better than the conventional ideas trending in scholarship including the D-index of poverty and the MPI models.

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