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‘Lived poverty’ can inform Swazi anti-poverty efforts

By Siphon Kunene

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Introduction

Poverty continues to be a major challenge in Swaziland, exacerbated by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Almost two-thirds (63%) of the Swazi population were living in severe poverty in 2012 (Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, 2012). The 2012 Human Development Index (HDI) reported that in 2007, 40% of the population were surviving on food aid from the United Nations (UNDP, 2012), and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) reported that 66% of the population were unable to meet basic food needs while 43% were living in chronic poverty (IFAD, 2007). The government of the Kingdom of Swaziland’s 2000 Poverty Reduction Strategy and Action Plan (PRSAP) aimed to reduce the prevalence of poverty from 69% in 2001 to 30% by 2015 and to eliminate it altogether by 2022. The PRSAP also aimed to raise the quality of life of all people in Swaziland to levels outlined in the National Development Strategy and to encourage citizens to participate in the growth of their country (Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, 2000).

Twelve years after the PRSAP was formulated and implemented, the Millennium Development Goals Progress Report 2012 said that the prevalence of poverty, measured by the proportion of the population living on less than U.S. \$1 per day, had decreased from 69% in 2000 to 63% in 2012. The drop in poverty prevalence is attributed to a number of factors, among them improvements in the delivery of social services, such as subsidized health services; the introduction of free primary education; and grant programs targeting orphans and vulnerable children, social welfare clients, and the elderly. Other factors that contributed to the drop in poverty prevalence include a national economic growth rate of 3.5% coupled with a low marginal private consumption level that resulted in an increase in gross savings from 8% in 2011 to 18% in 2012, spurring investment levels (World Bank, 2015; African Development Bank, 2014).

While reported mild economic growth and declining poverty levels (African Economic Outlook, 2014) point to some improvement in the living conditions and quality of life for the Swazi people, others have suggested that recent economic growth has not benefited all Swazis. Freedom House notes that “wealth distribution among the 1.2 million Swazis is uneven” and that “an elite 10% [of the Swazi population] accounts for nearly half of total consumption.” This suggests that the benefits of economic growth have not reached the grass-roots level in Swaziland.

The Afrobarometer survey, which was conducted for the first time in Swaziland in 2013, provides insights into ordinary Swazis’ experience of poverty. Using an experiential measure through a series of survey questions about how frequently people go without basic necessities of life during the course of a year, the Afrobarometer survey offers an important complement to official statistics on poverty and development (Dulani, Mattes, & Logan, 2013).

As the government of the Kingdom of Swaziland prepares to review the PRSAP in 2015, policy makers and other stakeholders can benefit from a deeper understanding of the extent of poverty and deprivation experienced by ordinary Swazis in order to focus and improve poverty-alleviation strategies.

Using the Afrobarometer data, this paper focuses on Swazis' views of their current living conditions, their experiences of lived poverty, and their assessment of the government's performance in managing the economy in support of poverty-alleviation efforts.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is an African-led, 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 Round 6 surveys are currently under way (2014-2015). Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples of between 1,200 and 2,400 respondents.

The Afrobarometer team in Swaziland, led by activQuest, interviewed 1,200 adult Swazis in June 2013. A sample of this size yields results with a margin of error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level.

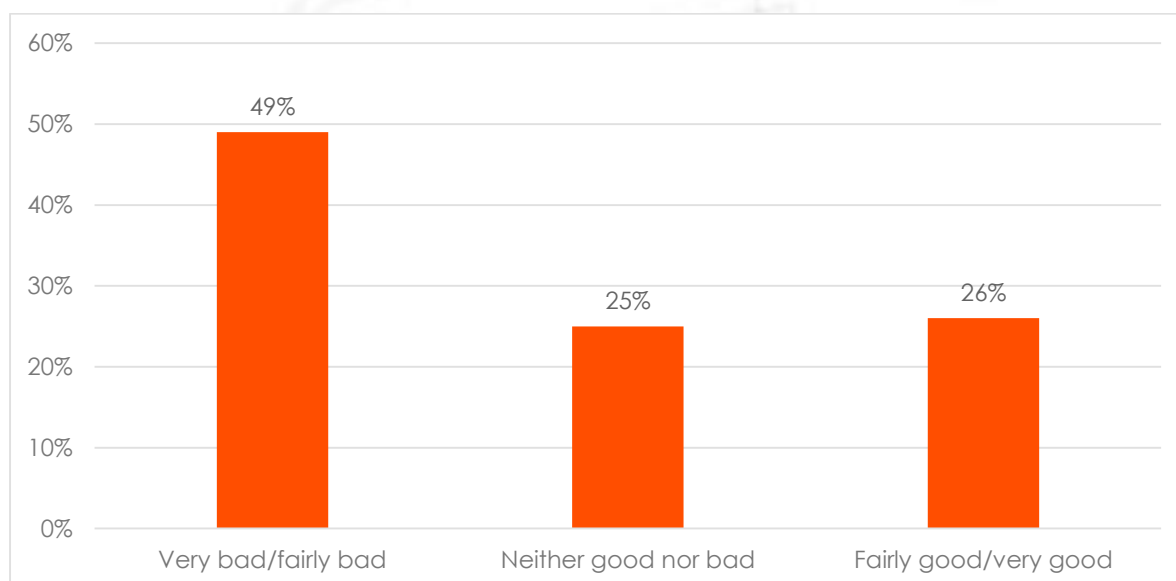
Key findings

- More than eight in 10 Swazis (85%) experienced deprivation of one or more of the basic necessities, such as food, water, medical care, cash income, and cooking fuel, at least once in the previous year.
- Most Swazis (85%) went without a cash income at least once during the year, including 47% who went without a cash income many times or always, while 68% reported going without enough food at least once.
- Unemployment is the most frequently cited priority that government must address, followed by poverty.
- A majority of Swazis say that the government is performing poorly in keeping prices down, narrowing the gap between rich and poor, and creating jobs.

Perceptions of their living conditions

Nearly half (49%) of Swazis characterize their current living conditions as "fairly bad" or "very bad," while 26% say their living conditions are "fairly good" or "very good" (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Current living conditions



Respondents were asked: *In general, how would you describe your own present living conditions?*

The data shows that among those who say their living conditions are very bad or fairly bad, 42% say their situation became “worse” or “much worse” over the previous 12 months, while 35% say their situation remained unchanged and 23% say their situation, though bad, actually improved over the previous year (Table 1).

Table 1: Present living conditions compared to 12 months ago

		Your living conditions compared to 12 months ago		
		Worse/much worse	Same	Better/much better
Your present living conditions	Very bad/fairly bad	42%	35%	23%
	Neither good nor bad	24%	52%	25%
	Fairly good/very good	19%	40%	41%
Among all respondents		32%	40%	28%

Respondents were asked:

In general, how would you describe your own present living conditions?

Looking back, how do you rate your present living conditions compared to 12 months ago?

(Note: Due to rounding, subtotals may not add up to 100%)

Lived poverty

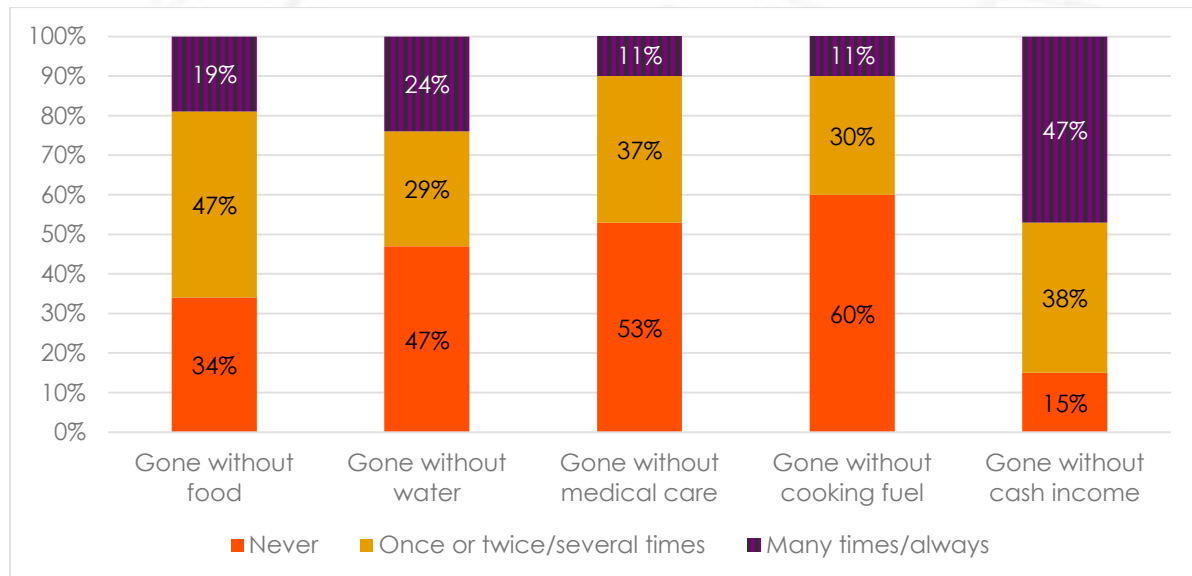
Poverty is multidimensional. The PRSAP points out that poverty can include multiple deprivations, including a lack of food and nutrition, health, safe water, sanitation, clothing and shelter, and education. Afrobarometer examines “lived poverty” by asking, “Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or your family gone without enough: Food to eat? Clean water for home use? Medicines or medical treatment? Enough fuel to cook your food? A cash income?” Response options are “never,” “just once or twice,” “several times,” “many times,” and “always.”

For this analysis, the responses regarding food, water, medical care, cooking fuel, and cash income were combined using the SPSS multi-response procedure. No lived poverty index was calculated.

Looking at the experience of deprivation, more than eight in 10 Swazis (85%) report experiencing deprivation of one or more basic necessities at least once in the previous year

(Figure 2). Cash-income deprivation is experienced by most Swazis (85%); almost half (47%) report going without a cash income many times or always. About one-fourth (24%) report going without water many times or always, while one in five (19%) report going without enough food to eat many times or always in the previous year.

Figure 2: Experience of deprivation in the previous year

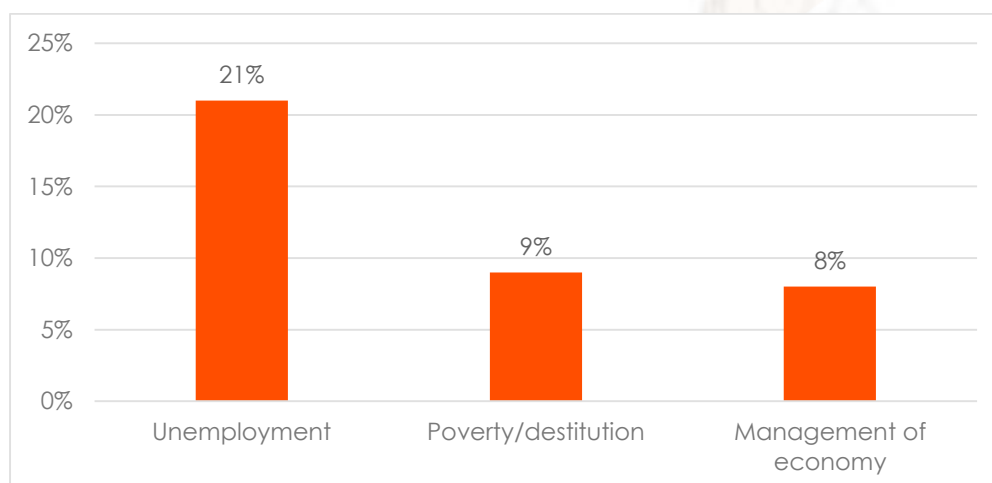


Respondents were asked: *Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or your family gone without enough: Food to eat? Clean water for home use? Medicines or medical treatment? Enough fuel to cook your food? A cash income?*

Most important problems facing Swaziland

The Afrobarometer survey asks respondents to list the most important problems they believe the government should address and records up to three responses. Using respondents' first answers (understood as top-of-mind responses), we see that the most frequently cited issue is unemployment, mentioned by 21% of respondents (Figure 3). Next is poverty/destitution (9%), followed by managing the economy (8%). This finding is consistent with the earlier finding that most Swazis have experienced not having a cash income.

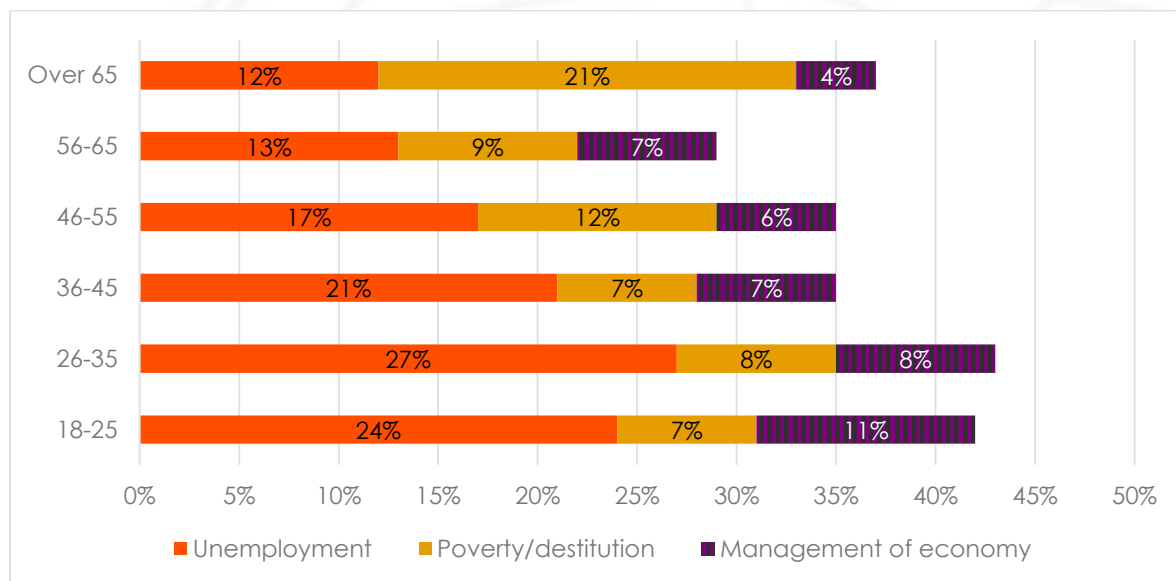
Figure 3: Most important problems facing Swaziland



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (% citing issue as their first of three responses)*

Disaggregating responses by age group, we find that young adults are about twice as likely as their elders to cite unemployment as a priority for government to address (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Most important problems facing Swaziland | by age group



Employment status

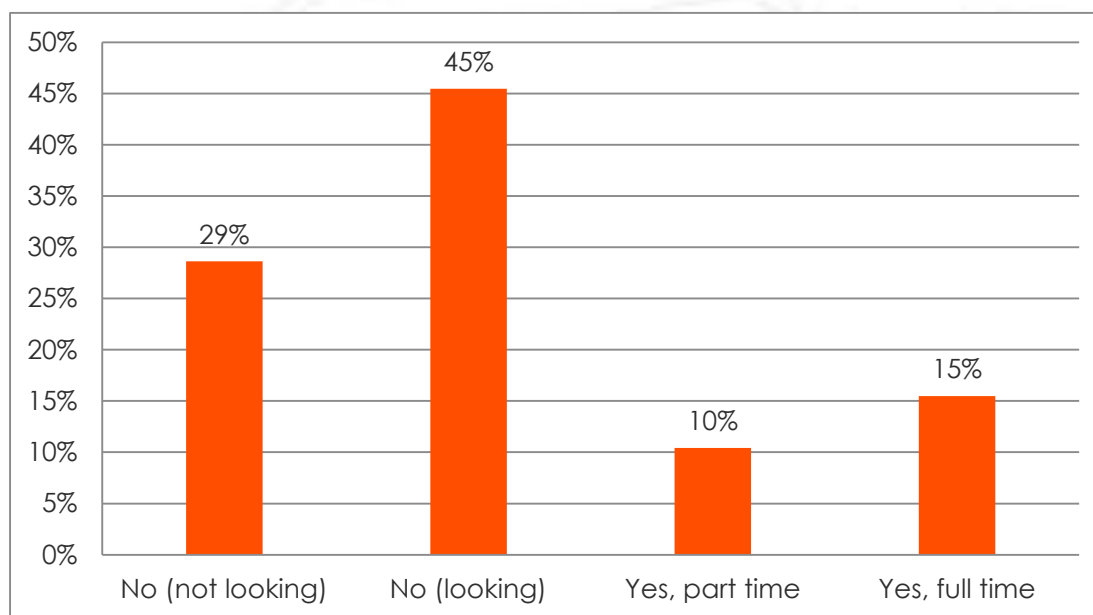
Given that lack of a cash income is the most widely experienced form of deprivation, we consider the dynamics of unemployment in the Swazi context. Obviously, without jobs many Swazis cannot access a cash income that would enable them to meet their basic needs.

According to the Swaziland Labour Force Survey, Swaziland’s unemployment rate stood at 28.5% of the labour force (ages 15 and older) in 2010, which represents a slight deterioration from 28.2% in 2007 (Central Statistics Office, 2010). If discouraged workers (i.e. those who have stopped looking for jobs) are included, the unemployment rate rises to 40.6%.

Unemployment among youth (ages 15-24 years) is considerably higher than the national average, at 53.3%.

When Afrobarometer asks citizens directly about their employment status, a different picture emerges (Figure 5). Three-fourths (74%) of Swazis say they are not employed, including 45% who say they are looking for jobs. One-fourth (25%) of respondents say they are employed either part- or full-time. The finding that almost half of all respondents say they are unemployed and looking for jobs suggests that Swazis’ perceptions of their employment status are not in sync with official definitions of employment and that current efforts by the government to tackle unemployment may underestimate the extent of the problem.

Figure 5: Employment status



Respondents were asked: *Do you have a job that pays cash income? If yes, is it full-time or part-time? If no, are you presently looking for a job?*

Looking at employment disaggregated by age, the data shows that while large majorities in all age groups consider themselves unemployed, the proportion of respondents looking for jobs decreases with age (Table 2). Two-thirds of people ages 18-25 are unemployed and looking for jobs, while a majority of citizens 56 and older are unemployed and not looking for employment. It is clear that for Swaziland, unemployment in general and youth unemployment in particular remain key challenges for improving living conditions in the country.

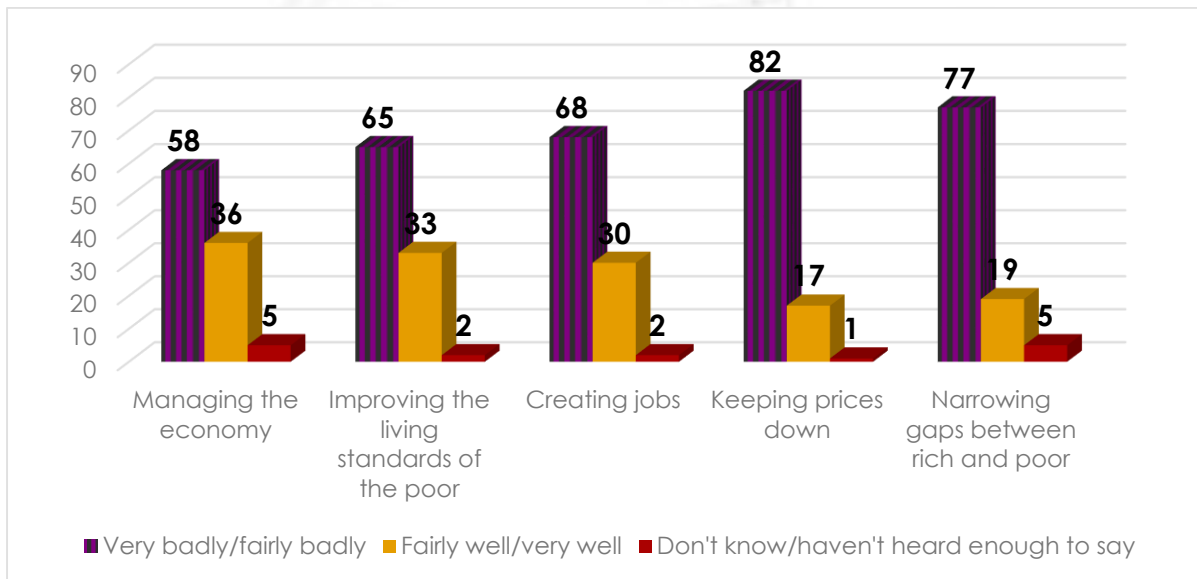
Table 2: Employment status | by age group

Age group	Employed?			
	No (not looking)	No (looking)	Yes, part time	Yes, full time
18-25	17%	65%	10%	8%
26-35	11%	49%	14%	26%
36-45	28%	37%	12%	24%
46-55	38%	38%	9%	14%
56-65	57%	31%	7%	5%
Over 65	77%	18%	3%	1%
Total	29%	45%	10%	16%

Government performance in managing the economy

Poverty levels are generally linked to the performance of a country’s economy. A majority of Swazis say their government is performing “very badly” or “fairly badly” on a range of economic management issues, including keeping commodities prices down (82%), narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor (77%), creating jobs (68%), improving the living standards of the poor (65%), and managing the economy (58%) (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Government performance in managing the economy



Respondents were asked: *How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say?*

Conclusion

After more than a decade of implementing the PRSAP, the levels of poverty in Swaziland remain high. About half of all Swazis perceive their current living conditions as bad, in many cases worse than a year earlier. About two-thirds of Swazis have experienced some form of deprivation of basic necessities in the past year, with a majority of those having repeatedly or frequently gone without a cash income, enough food to eat, or clean water. Unemployment is a top priority among problems that citizens say the government must address.

But most Swazis say that the government is performing badly in managing the economy, particularly on job creation, keeping prices down, and narrowing the gap between rich and poor. These are key issues that have a significant impact on citizens' ability to meet their basic needs.

It is imperative that in reviewing and consolidating the PRSAP and in developing other poverty-alleviation strategies, the government and other stakeholders focus on addressing the socioeconomic issues such as unemployment, high commodities prices, and food insecurity that make up the deprivation experienced by a majority of Swazis.

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Sipho Kunene is managing director for activQuest Research & Analytics in Ezulwini, Swaziland. Email: sipho@activquest.com.

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.

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