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Measuring Poverty around the World. By Anthony B. Atkinson. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019. 408 pp. Illustrations, tables, index. Cloth, \$29.95. ISBN 978-0-691-19122-5.

Reviewed by Malcolm Sawyer

This posthumously published book provides a most comprehensive treatment of poverty around the globe. As its title suggests, it is focused on the concept and measurement of poverty in a global context and the extensive coverage of the scale of poverty, drawing on statistics compiled by the World Bank and from national sources.

Tony Atkinson worked during his terminal illness on this manuscript, which was incomplete at the time of his death in January 2017. *Measuring Poverty around the World* is a final statement from someone who devoted his academic career over five decades to the study of inequality and poverty, and policies to reduce inequality and poverty. The book's editors, John Micklewright and Andrea Brandolini, have added notes on the sections that Atkinson did not complete, with thoughts on how he likely would have finished these sections. In afterwords, François Bourguignon discusses the relationships between growth, inequality, and poverty reduction, and Nicholas Stern covers poverty and climate change.

Chapter 1 starts with a discussion of the salience of poverty statistics for motivating political action and the design of effective action. In the analysis of poverty, there is a need to go beyond the standard economic utility-maximizing framework to investigate the division of resources within the household and to consider the role of the household in the wider community. Atkinson then sets out the reasons to be concerned about the scale of global poverty. The international poverty line (IPL), based on the purchasing power parity (PPP), of \$1.90 person per day (in 2011 prices) plays a prominent part in the book: those below the IPL falling from 1,850 million in 1990 (35 per cent of world population) to 767 million in 2013 at just over 10 per cent of population. One of the UN Millennium Development Goals adopted in 2000 was to halve extreme poverty between 1990 and 2015.

Chapter 2, a masterful review of What Do We Mean by Poverty, will surely become the major reference on concepts of poverty. It opens with what are termed political definitions of poverty that are related to policy formulation and then moves on to the basic needs approach that has historically formed much of the discussion on the meaning of poverty. The chapter explores

poverty as deprivation of capabilities (in the sense of Sen), the rights approach based on minimum human rights and poverty, and the ways in which poverty has been approached in an “absolute” way (based on some measure of minimum consumption level) and adhered to both in real terms and in a “relative” manner (whether viewing a poverty line as a proportion of median income or recognizing that the definition of a minimum acceptable level of consumption changes). Throughout, Atkinson emphasizes the issues around applying these concepts of poverty in a global setting—that is, relating poverty to the economic and social conditions of the individual country though still able to make comparisons between countries, or how a people’s own perceptions of what constitutes poverty can be reflected.

Chapter 3 covers the wide range of issues that arise when measuring the extent of poverty, including thinking in terms of consumption or income, the accounting period over which poverty would be assessed, and considering inequality within households, among others. Atkinson then reviews the multidimensional nature poverty and considers how the extent of poverty is to be reported (in terms of head counts and poverty gaps). These measurement issues become particularly important in comparing degrees of poverty—whether across time or across societies—and designing policies to combat poverty.

Chapter 4 addresses the compilation of data on poverty, including sampling and interviewing techniques, the comparability of different data sources, and price indices.

Chapter 5 focuses on global poverty and the Sustainable Development Goals. It provides a short history of the World Bank’s global poverty measures from the 1970s onward, with the development of the \$1 a day measure that was subsequently increased to \$1.90 a day, reflecting a shift from 1985 PPP to 2011 PPP. Atkinson notes the switch to a consumption-based rather than income-based approach to the measurement of poverty. A major section of the chapter discusses estimates of global poverty, detailing the levels and trends of poverty around the world, dependent on the differing measures of poverty, and particularly the national views on what constitutes poverty. This is followed by a section on nonmonetary poverty measures including access to basic services, leading into multidimensional poverty indices, and asking whether these multidimensional measures confirm or confront the other global poverty measures. The chapter closes with a section called “Drilling Down: From Global to Local” that serves as introduction to the subsequent four chapters: “One of the principal aims of this book is to build vertical bridges

between the global estimates [of poverty] produced by international agencies and national studies of poverty” (p. 261[]).

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 report on poverty in Asia and the Pacific, Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean, respectively. Chapter 9 turns to poverty in rich countries. These chapters draw on an appendix of 140 pages detailing the national poverty reports.

Chapter 10—the book’s conclusion, entitled “Beyond \$1.90 a Day”—provides an overview of the main themes of the book, such as the challenge of going beyond national boundaries in the measurement of poverty. Atkinson emphasizes that poverty is a multifaceted concept and that the ways in which it is measured and viewed in policy terms have to allow for a diversity of approaches. He argues that it is important to understand how poverty is being measured because that has a major impact on appropriate policy measures. Sections not completed by Atkinson include those on monetary and nonmonetary poverty, growth, inequality and poverty (though covered in Bourguignon’s afterword), and a number of others. The book ends with the clear statement that while there are complexities in the conceptualization and measurement of poverty, and gaps in statistical and other information, “the failure to take effective action cannot be attributed to lack of information” (p. 335). Alongside tackling global poverty is another major challenge: “ensuring sustainability in the face of climate change and shortage of resources” (p. 336).

Malcolm Sawyer is emeritus professor of economics, University of Leeds, U.K. His most recent books are Can the Euro be Saved? (2017) and Frontiers of Heterodox Macroeconomics (coedited with Philip Arestis; 2019). His book The Power of Finance: Financialization and the Real Economy is forthcoming.