

Pregala Pillay & Chris Jones*

Every year on 17 October we observe [International Day for the Eradication of Poverty](#) which can be traced back to 17 October 1987 when more than 100 000 people gathered in Paris to honour victims of extreme poverty, violence, and hunger. For them poverty violated human rights and they came together to ensure that these rights are respected.

Global poverty

According to the United Nations (UN), the good news is that [global poverty was more than halved between 2000 and the Covid-19 pandemic](#), especially in countries within Eastern and Southeastern Asia. However, Covid-19 has had a devastating effect, [pushing an estimated half a billion people \(back\) into poverty](#).

Before the pandemic (2015) about 10% of the global population lived in extreme poverty (at or less than \$1.90), struggling to fulfil basic needs such as health, education, access to water and sanitation. That's down from 16% in 2010 and 36% in 1990.

In 2016, more than half of the world's population (55%) or four billion people did not benefit from any form of social protection.

The first of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to [end poverty in all its forms by 2030](#). The aim of Target 1 of the first SDG is to "Ensure significant mobilization of resources from a variety of sources, including through enhanced development cooperation, in order to provide adequate and predictable means for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, to implement programmes and policies to end poverty in all its dimensions."

However, extreme poverty remains a major concern in Africa as well as in the least developed countries, small island developing States, in some middle-income countries, and countries in situations of conflict and post-conflict countries. For example, up to [42% of people in Sub-Saharan Africa continue to live below the poverty line](#), while 160 million children worldwide could remain trapped in poverty by 2030. And we know that growing up in poverty, and experiencing the negative effects of deprivation, can have ramifications that last a lifetime.

In the light of these concerns, the UN General Assembly proclaimed their [Third UN Decade for the Eradication of Poverty](#) (2018-2027). The aim of this initiative is to keep momentum generated by their Second UN Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2008-2017).

In 1995 the [World Summit for Social Development](#) identified three core issues namely the eradication of poverty, generating employment and social integration in order to build secure, just, free and harmonious societies creating opportunities and higher standards of living for all.

This is supported within the UN system by the [Division for Social Policy and Development](#) of the [Department of Economic and Social Affairs](#).

The nexus between poverty and corruption

Rightly so, a lot is being done across the globe to eradicate poverty with all its negative effects. But there is another important aspect that needs to be understood, and that is the vicious cycle of poverty through the nexus with corruption.

Peter Eigen, the founder of Transparency International (TI), [argues](#) that “Corruption is a major cause of poverty as well as a barrier to overcoming it. The two scourges feed off each other, locking their populations in a cycle of misery. Corruption must be vigorously addressed if aid is to make a real difference in freeing people from poverty”.

The World Economic Forum [points out](#) that corruption costs the world at least \$2.6 trillion annually, or 5% of the global gross domestic product (GDP) and this obviously undermines efforts to reduce poverty. According to the World Bank, adding to this, businesses and individuals pay [more than \\$1 trillion in bribes every year](#).

In 1994 South Africans had so much hope. As the newest democracy on the continent, there was so much promise to address poverty, unemployment and inequality, and to establish meaningful and sustainable economic growth.

Sadly, 30 years later, we are in a state of melancholy. Due to gradual deterioration in ethical behaviour in our government, but also in the private sector and wider society, greed, the desire for power, self-interest and corruption have made the great hope and euphoria evaporate, according to Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Learning and Teaching at Stellenbosch University, Prof Deresh Ramjugernath. He [says](#), “corruption perpetuates the cycle of poverty!”

The way forward

In our latest book [The Nexus between Poverty and Corruption: Quo Vadis?](#) that we co-edited with Sakhile Zondi and Purshottama Reddy, we introduce perspectives by experts from different African countries on how we can address the various challenges on our continent – especially regarding corruption that facilitates poverty, because the former not only corrodes public trust, but also investor confidence. In addition, it undermines democratic gains and the rule of law; leads to the violation of human rights; disempowers citizens; and erodes the credibility of a nation in the global arena, as well as the quality of life.

On this International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, we should heed the [words](#) of Ramjugernath that “it will require a significant change in broad populist understandings of ethics, integrity, morals and values, and a strong emphasis on accountability, consequence management, good governance, and responsible leadership” if we want to make progress in addressing poverty and corruption, in order to, among others, realise the vision of [Agenda 2060: The Africa We Want](#).

***Prof Pregala Pillay is a professor in the School of Public Leadership at Stellenbosch University (SU). Dr Chris Jones is chief researcher in SU’s Department of Systematic Theology and Ecclesiology, and also head of the Unit for Moral Leadership.**