

Let's Get Serious About Reducing Poverty

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World leaders gathered during September this year at the United Nations in New York to adopt an Agenda for Sustainable Development by 2030. In part, the summit celebrated progress toward reaching an earlier set of United Nations goals adopted to tackle the global challenge of extreme poverty in the 21st century.

Developed by the United Nations in the year 2000, the Millennium Development Goals had established measurable objectives for reducing extreme poverty, hunger, disease, and other obstacles. The specific goal, focused on developing countries, was to cut the number of people whose 1990 daily income was less than \$1.25 by half in 2015.

In concert with the September gathering this year, the United Nations reported, "Globally, the number of people living in extreme poverty has declined by more than half, falling from 1.9 billion in 1990 to 836 million in 2015." The 47 percent of the world's population living on less than \$1.25 per day in 1990 had fallen to 14 percent in 2015. Most of the progress, the report assured, had occurred since the year 2000.

Buoyed by the progress, this year's Agenda for Sustainable Development extended the older Millennium Development Goals. The new set of measurable objectives, called Sustainable Development Goals, highlight an agenda that urges change in all countries. The United States and the other 192 members of the United Nations unanimously agreed upon the goals.

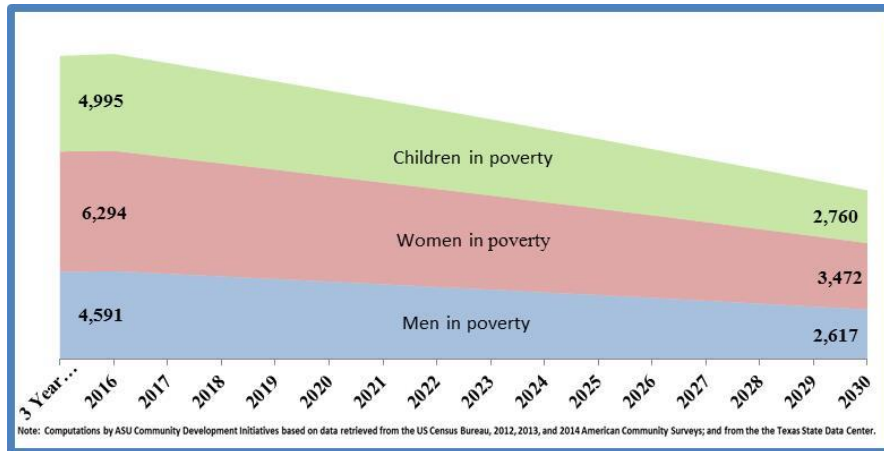
Because this month ushers in a season of hope, we decided to see what change the new Sustainable Development Goals envision by applying just one of them to our local community. One measurable objective for 2030 is to reduce at least by half the current proportion of men, women, and children living in poverty using each country's particular national definition.

In the United States, the Census Bureau is responsible for following the number of Americans living in poverty. The Bureau determines this by comparing the pre-tax income of households against a threshold set at three times the cost of a minimum food diet with adjustments for household size, composition, and the age of the householder. The Bureau counts men, women, and children living in households below the threshold as living in poverty.

Over the three years from 2012 to 2014, the Census Bureau estimated that an average of 15,880 or 14.6 percent of residents in Tom Green County lived in poverty. This included 4,591 men, 6,294 women, and 4,995 children.

Using these averages as a starting point and taking expected population growth into account, we calculate that the local community can do its part to reach the Sustainable Development Goal for 2030 by reducing the number of men in poverty to 2,617, the number of women in poverty to 3,472, and the number of children in poverty to 2,760. These reductions would bring the Tom Green County poverty rate down to 7.3 percent of 121,881 residents projected by the State Demographer's Office to be living in Tom Green County in 2030.

Sustainable Development Poverty Level Goals



Reducing poverty by these magnitudes, however, requires the local community to take actions that will lift more than 7,000 people out of poverty by 2030. Some previous articles from the Standard Times provide perspective.

Michael Kelly reported on a development in the September 26 edition of the Standard Times that is sure to be a banner headline for many local leaders reflecting on the community's accomplishments as New Year's Day draws near. Under a headline reading, "Area ranks No. 2 in U.S.," Kelly reported newly released economic data showing the San Angelo metropolitan area grew by 11.4 percent from a \$4.3 billion gross domestic product in 2013 to \$4.8 billion in 2014.

Ironically, just a few months earlier in June, our Pathways column reported updated data from the Census Bureau indicating that "Vastly different neighborhoods highlight huge local inequality" in San Angelo. Then, in the following month's Pathways, we reported data from a nationwide Equality of Opportunity Project at Harvard University showing that "Tom Green County is below the average of counties in the study at helping poor children climb the income ladder." A rising economy, even one racing at a record-setting pace, does not guarantee, as the saying goes, to lift all boats. The evidence in San Angelo is that too many are not.

Those falling through the cracks, moreover, are exactly the people who must rise from poverty to move forward toward the Sustainable Development Goal for 2030. Among an average 2,744 Tom Green County households in poverty during that record-setting period of local economic growth, for instance, 59 percent were female-headed households. Sixty-seven percent of nearly 8,000 people over age 24 living in poverty had no more than a high school education, and Hispanic men, women, and children comprised 49 percent of the poor over those breakneck years of economic growth.

This month ushers in a season of hope, and we have the audacity to hope the local community takes new steps forward toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goal to cut poverty in half by 2030.

Some citizens, we know, view the prospect of reducing poverty in a way that recalls the nineteenth century German critic Friedrich Nietzsche, "In reality, hope is the worst of all evils, because it prolongs man's torments." We choose the advice of Martin Luther King, Jr., "We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope."