

STRATEGIC SHIFTS IN POVERTY ALLEVIATION: A KNOWLEDGE NETWORK AND TEMPORAL ANALYSIS OF GLOBAL POLICY, LIVELIHOOD, AND SUSTAINABILITY DISCOURSES IN SCOPUS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how global poverty alleviation research has evolved conceptually and strategically over time and situates this evolution within the broader agenda of sustainable development. The population of this study consists of all publications on poverty alleviation indexed in Scopus. Using a structured search strategy with terms such as “poverty alleviation,” “poverty reduction,” “livelihood,” “social policy,” and “sustainable development,” we identified a sample of 3,976 documents published between 1973 and 2025. A purposive sampling approach was applied to include only documents conceptually relevant to anti-poverty strategies. Bibliographic metadata (authors, keywords, abstracts, citations, affiliations) were collected from Scopus. The data were analyzed using Bibliometrix/Biblioshiny to generate performance indicators and VOSviewer to produce science maps. The findings indicate a clear thematic progression. Early studies framed poverty mainly in terms of rural livelihoods, land access, and agricultural survival. This was followed by a governance-oriented phase that emphasized public policy, redistribution, and social protection. More recent work links poverty reduction to sustainability, climate resilience, energy access, and institutional accountability, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. The study concludes that poverty is no longer treated only as a condition of immediate deprivation, but as a long-term structural challenge that requires integrated economic, social, and environmental strategies.

Key words: poverty alleviation; poverty reduction; sustainable development; bibliometric analysis

INTRODUCTION

Poverty alleviation is not only an economic imperative but also a moral and governance challenge that continues to test the legitimacy, capacity, and imagination of states, markets, and communities. It is also a formally global mandate. The first Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 1) of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda explicitly calls for ending poverty “in all its forms everywhere,” underscoring that poverty is no longer viewed as a local or sectoral problem but as a shared human obligation with transnational consequences (United Nations, 2015). This framing elevates poverty from an issue of income deprivation to a multidimensional condition linked to social protection, decent livelihoods, institutional stability, environmental resilience, and equitable access to resources. Across both the Global South and the Global North, poverty is therefore studied not only as “lack of money,” but also as exclusion, vulnerability, and limited ability to adapt to structural change. This widening of the poverty debate is visible in the contemporary research record. High-impact studies indexed in Scopus show that scholarship on “poverty alleviation,” “poverty reduction,” and “livelihoods” now intersects with themes such as rural development, land use policy, sustainability, public policy design, and the resilience of local economies. These studies have collectively generated significant global attention. For example, Ferraro et al., (2015) reflecting how questions of organization, governance, and social responsibility have moved into mainstream debates on poverty. Gautam & Andersen, 2016 and Liu et al., 2017 similarly point to rural studies as a core arena in which poverty alleviation is implemented, negotiated, and contested in daily life, rather than merely declared in national policy.

At the center of this evolving discussion is a shift from “poverty as a problem to be managed” toward “poverty as a structural condition to be transformed.” In land use planning, for example, questions of who controls and benefits from land and natural resources are now inseparable from questions of long-term livelihood security and intergenerational development. Research in land use policy highlights how spatial, ecological, and regulatory decisions directly affect rural opportunity structures, particularly in regions where agriculture remains the backbone of survival (Zhou et al., 2020). Rural poverty today is therefore examined not only in terms of household income but also in terms of resilience, adaptive capacity, and claims to territory. This resonates with work in World Development that situates poverty within broader debates about governance, equity, and sustainable growth, especially in lower-income and resource-dependent regions (Michler & Josephson, 2017; Ragasa et al., 2018). The literature suggests that poverty alleviation strategies are most durable when they are territorially grounded, institutionally legitimate, and socially inclusive. In other words, poverty reduction is not just about delivering aid; it is about shaping the political economy of land, production, and opportunity.

At the policy level, scholars have increasingly emphasized that poverty alleviation is a question of design: Which instruments work, for whom, and under what political and institutional conditions? Studies in journals such as *World Development*, the *International Journal of Social Economics*, and the *Australian Journal of Agricultural*

and Resource Economics examine how governments, donors, and development agencies justify interventions, target beneficiaries, and evaluate success (M. Liu et al., 2020; W. Liu et al., 2020). This body of work shows that anti-poverty strategies are rarely neutral technocratic tools; they are embedded in governance logics, political bargaining, and competing definitions of “inclusion” and “development.” What counts as “effective,” in other words, is both empirical and ideological. This is consistent with analyses that link poverty alleviation agendas to broader questions of institutional responsibility, ethics, and accountability (Dembek et al., 2020). The emerging consensus is that anti-poverty programs can no longer be treated as isolated social policies. Rather, they are better understood as part of an evolving governance architecture that must reconcile economic development, social justice, and environmental stewardship, exactly the type of integrated development demanded by the SDGs (United Nations, 2015).

A particularly important turn in recent years is the integration of poverty alleviation with sustainability transitions. Much of the cited literature positions climate change, environmental degradation, and resource pressure as direct threats to livelihood security, especially for rural and agrarian communities (Gautam & Andersen, 2016; Ragasa et al., 2018). This changes the timeline of poverty policy. Alleviating poverty is no longer only about responding to present deprivation; it is also about protecting future capacity to live, work, and adapt under conditions of ecological stress. Research in Sustainability and Technological Forecasting and Social Change highlights this long-horizon perspective by arguing that energy systems, environmental protection, and social development are co-dependent rather than sequential: clean energy access, environmental governance, and inclusive growth are now framed as anti-poverty strategies in themselves, not just as parallel agendas (Paudel Khatiwada et al., 2017). In this view, poverty alleviation is inseparable from questions of energy equity, climate resilience, and technological transformation. This aligns with SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy), and SDG 13 (climate action), reinforcing that poverty reduction is interlinked with environmental security and the just distribution of adaptive capacity (United Nations, 2015).

Taken together, these strands of research point to several critical insights. First, poverty alleviation has moved beyond the narrow logic of income transfers and toward multidimensional strategies that embed questions of land, identity, institutional trust, and ecological stability. Second, policy design matters: governments are not just distributors of aid but architects of development trajectories, shaping who is recognized as a subject of policy and who is rendered invisible (M. Liu et al., 2020). Third, sustainability is no longer a distant environmental aspiration; it is a condition for the survival of livelihoods, particularly in rural and climate-vulnerable regions (Paudel Khatiwada et al., 2017). These insights collectively suggest that the study of poverty alleviation in the 21st century must be historically aware, spatially grounded, institutionally literate, and environmentally honest. The present study is positioned within this intellectual trajectory. It aims to map how poverty alleviation strategies have evolved conceptually and practically from rural livelihoods and land governance to social protection and sustainability governance, and to show how these strategies are being reimagined as part of a broader developmental pact between policy, society, and the planet.

METHOD

This study applies a bibliometric approach to map and quantify the global evolution of poverty alleviation research. Bibliographic data were retrieved from the Scopus database, which is one of the most comprehensive international abstract and citation databases used in prior bibliometric studies to evaluate intellectual structures, research performance, and thematic development across disciplines.

The search strategy targeted publications related to poverty alleviation and poverty reduction. The query string combined core terms such as “poverty alleviation,” “poverty reduction,” “poverty eradication,” “livelihood,” “rural development,” “social policy,” and “public policy,” capturing the multidimensional way poverty is now framed in relation to welfare policy, environmental sustainability, and development governance. The resulting dataset spans the years 1973 to 2025, reflecting more than five decades of scientific production on anti-poverty strategies. In total, the dataset contains 3,976 documents sourced from 1,161 publication outlets (journals, books, book series, and conference proceedings). The corpus displays an average document age of 10.6 years, indicating that both foundational and recent work are represented, and an average of 21.65 citations per document, suggesting sustained academic relevance over time.

After export from Scopus, the raw metadata (authors, title, abstract, keywords, source title, affiliations, year, citations, DOI) were standardized. This harmonization step followed common bibliometric workflows used in previous studies, which rely on structured preprocessing prior to statistical mapping and network visualization. Two main tools were used: (1) Bibliometrix, accessed through the Biblioshiny interface, was used to compute descriptive bibliometric indicators and to generate performance analytics and (2) VOSviewer was then employed to construct and visualize bibliometric networks.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and interprets the empirical patterns that emerge from the bibliometric analysis of 3,976 Scopus-indexed documents on poverty alleviation, spanning 1973–2025. We begin by describing how the field has grown in volume, collaboration, and citation influence, and then move to its intellectual structure as visualized

through co-occurrence networks, temporal overlays, and thematic mapping. Together, these results allow us to trace how the study of poverty has evolved from a narrow focus on rural subsistence and social policy toward a broader, sustainability-centered development agenda.

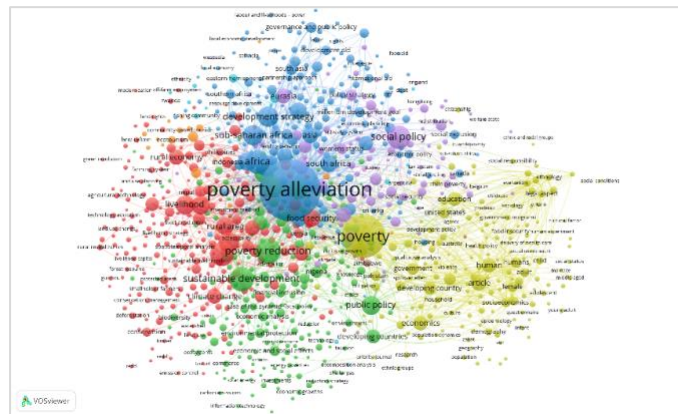


Figure 1 Network Visualization

Figure 1 visualizes the intellectual structure of poverty alleviation research using a keyword co-occurrence network from the Scopus dataset. Each node represents a recurring concept in the literature, and clusters of nodes indicate themes that scholars frequently discuss together. The central position of “poverty alleviation,” “poverty reduction,” and “poverty” shows that these terms act as bridges across otherwise distinct conversations. This confirms that poverty is now viewed as a multidimensional condition rather than a purely economic problem. It is approached simultaneously as an issue of livelihoods, governance, social justice, demographic vulnerability, and sustainability, which is fully aligned with the global framing of poverty in Sustainable Development Goal 1 (“no poverty”), where poverty is defined as structural exclusion, not just insufficient income.

The red–green cluster on the left links “livelihood,” “rural economy,” “rural area,” “land reform,” “agricultural technology,” “food security,” “climate change,” “sustainable development,” and “conservation.” This cluster frames poverty as a territorial and ecological struggle. Here, poverty is tied to who controls land, how people produce food, and how communities adapt to environmental stress. The appearance of terms like “smallholder farmers,” “farming system,” “biodiversity,” and “emission control” shows that sustainability is not treated as an abstract ecological goal; it is treated as a survival condition for rural households. In this narrative, climate resilience, access to resources, and sustainable land use are not parallel agendas.

The blue cluster in the upper area connects “development strategy,” “governance and public policy,” “policy strategy,” “development aid,” and concrete geographies such as “sub-Saharan Africa,” “south Asia,” “Indonesia,” and “Philippines.” This is the governance and planning dimension of poverty. Poverty alleviation is presented here as something actively designed, negotiated, and implemented through state intervention, donor agendas, and long-term development strategies. The frequent pairing of “governance” and “local economic development” indicates that poverty reduction is not only national; it is also territorialized in regions, districts, and municipalities. This supports the view that anti-poverty work is inseparable from institutional capacity, legitimacy, and accountability.

The purple cluster on the upper right is organized around “social policy,” “social exclusion,” “social justice,” “welfare state,” “redistribution,” “social security,” “education,” and “child poverty.” This cluster gives poverty an ethical and rights-based vocabulary. Here, poverty is described not just as material deprivation but as systematic exclusion from public goods, including health care, housing, childcare, and education. This strand of the literature treats poverty alleviation as a question of dignity and inclusion. It is closely aligned with the SDG agenda that links poverty to universal access to basic services and social protection systems.

Finally, the yellow cluster on the lower right connects “public policy,” “economics,” “developing countries,” “government programs,” “food insecurity,” “health policy,” “household,” “female,” “child,” and “demography.” This is the technocratic and programmatic layer. Here, poverty alleviation is evaluated in terms of who benefits, how targeting is done, and what measurable outcomes are achieved in nutrition, health, or education. The presence of demographic markers (for example, “adolescent,” “infant,” “female”) signals that vulnerability is unevenly distributed across gender, age, and household structure. This reflects a policy logic that views poverty reduction as a matter of designing, delivering, and assessing interventions for specific at-risk populations.

Taken together, these clusters tell a coherent story. The literature treats poverty as ecological (livelihoods under climate stress), institutional (governance and policy strategy), ethical (social justice and welfare), and programmatic (targeted public interventions). The map shows that these perspectives are not isolated, but interdependent and increasingly integrated. In practical terms, this means that ending poverty as demanded by SDG 1 is not only about economic growth or social assistance. It requires coordinated action across land governance, climate resilience, social protection, development planning, and demographic targeting.

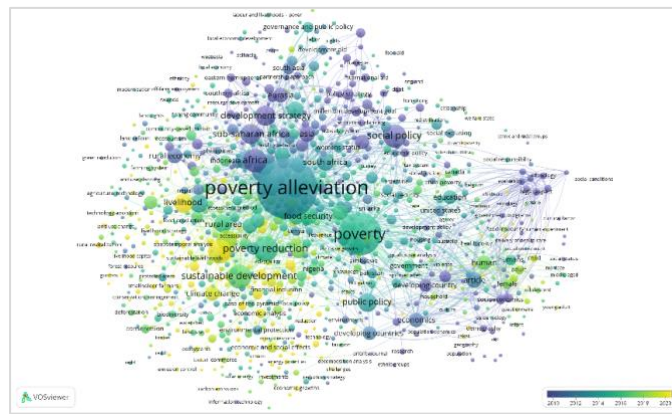


Figure 2 Overlay Visualization

Figure 2 shows how global poverty research has evolved over time: earlier studies (darker nodes) focused on survival in rural settings, “livelihood,” “rural economy,” “land reform,” “farming system,” and “food security” treating poverty mainly as an agricultural and land-access problem in regions such as sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia; this was followed by a governance turn, where terms like “governance and public policy,” “development strategy,” “social policy,” and “welfare state” emerged, reflecting a shift toward state-led intervention, redistribution, and targeted social protection; most recently (yellow-green nodes), attention moves to “sustainable development,” “climate change,” “environmental protection,” “financial inclusion,” and “public policy,” indicating that poverty alleviation is now framed not only as immediate income support, but as building long-term resilience to ecological stress, economic exclusion, and climate risk.

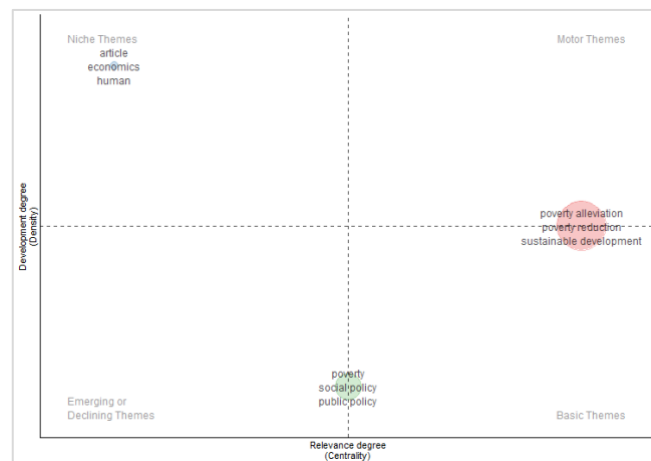


Figure 3 Thematic Evolution

Figure 3 shows the thematic map positions research clusters along two dimensions: relevance to the wider field (centrality) and level of internal development (density). The cluster consisting of “poverty alleviation,” “poverty reduction,” and “sustainable development” sits in the quadrant of basic themes indicating that it is conceptually central to contemporary scholarship yet still in active maturation. This placement suggests a structural shift in how poverty is understood. Poverty is no longer treated only as income deprivation or short-term welfare provision; it is increasingly framed as a long-term development challenge that must be addressed through environmentally sustainable, socially inclusive, and institutionally coordinated strategies.

In contrast, terms such as “poverty,” “social policy,” and “public policy” fall into the emerging/declining quadrant, where both centrality and density are lower. This indicates that traditional welfare-state and public-policy framings, while historically important, are no longer the main engines of conceptual innovation in the field. Instead, their language is being reorganized into broader sustainability-oriented narratives. Meanwhile, the niche quadrant hosts terms such as “economics” and “human,” which develop depth within specialized sub-communities without strongly structuring the field as a whole.

The thematic evolution shown in the map can be read as a theoretical evolution in how poverty itself is defined and governed. Classical poverty theory has long distinguished between absolute poverty (inability to meet basic needs) and relative poverty (exclusion from socially acceptable living standards), and this thinking informed early policy responses centered on income transfers, safety nets, and social protection. In this frame, the state is responsible for reducing deprivation through redistribution, welfare programs, and targeted public policy, which is reflected in the cluster around “public policy,” “social policy,” and “poverty.” This approach treats poverty as a condition that can be corrected administratively and fiscally: identify the vulnerable group, intervene through

subsidies or services, and evaluate outcomes in health, nutrition, or education (M. Liu et al., 2020). The fact that these terms now fall into the “emerging/declining” quadrant suggests that while the protection-based model of poverty remains normatively important, it is no longer theoretically sufficient to organize the current research agenda. Poverty is no longer viewed only as lack; it is also viewed as structural exclusion from assets, decision-making, resilience, and voice.

This shift is visible in the rise of the “poverty alleviation / poverty reduction / sustainable development” cluster, now positioned as a basic. Here, poverty is theorized not only as an income and welfare problem, but as a systemic development problem tied to land access, ecological stability, institutional accountability, and intergenerational security. Studies in rural development and livelihoods show that poverty is deeply embedded in control over land, production systems, and adaptation capacity, especially for smallholder farmers facing climate and resource stress (Gautam & Andersen, 2016). Work in governance and public policy extends this by arguing that poverty alleviation is not a temporary corrective, but a strategic commitment that must be designed, coordinated, and sustained by states and development actors (Ferraro et al., 2015). More recent contributions explicitly connect poverty reduction to sustainability transitions, arguing that access to clean energy, environmental protection, and climate resilience are now preconditions for dignified livelihoods, not optional add-ons (Paudel Khatiwada et al., 2017). This is consistent with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which reframes poverty eradication (SDG 1) as inseparable from social inclusion, ecological responsibility, and long-run adaptive capacity (United Nations, 2015). In short, the field is moving from “how do we compensate the poor?” toward “how do we design a development system in which poverty cannot reproduce itself?” a conceptual shift from poverty management to poverty transformation.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that research on poverty alleviation has undergone a clear conceptual transformation over the past five decades. Earlier work treated poverty primarily as a question of rural survival, land access, agricultural productivity, and livelihood security, especially in regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia (Beck & Nesmith, 2001; Gautam & Andersen, 2016). Subsequent scholarship brought poverty into the domain of public policy and social protection, framing it as something that governments and development agencies could design, target, and evaluate through welfare programs, redistribution, and state-led intervention (Ferraro et al., 2015; M. Liu et al., 2020; W. Liu et al., 2020). The most recent stage links poverty reduction to sustainable development, climate resilience, energy access, and institutional accountability, suggesting that poverty is not only an economic deficit but a long-term vulnerability embedded in environmental instability and governance capacity (Paudel Khatiwada et al., 2017).

Taken together, the evidence positions poverty alleviation, poverty reduction, and sustainable development as the central, organizing themes of the field. This reinforces the logic of SDG 1, which defines ending poverty as a structural and collective obligation rather than a short-term compensatory act (United Nations, 2015). The field has moved from “managing poverty” to “preventing its reproduction,” implying that effective anti-poverty strategy must integrate livelihood security, social inclusion, and ecological sustainability. In practical terms, this means that poverty policy can no longer be isolated within ministries of social affairs; it must be embedded in climate policy, rural development policy, energy transition policy, and territorial governance. Future research, therefore, should not only document poverty, but also interrogate the political, ecological, and institutional conditions under which poverty becomes possible and challenge those conditions directly.

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