The problem of poverty in developing countries: essence, criteria for distribution and ways to overcome it

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Abstract. The economic state of developing countries and their problems directly affect the vast majority of humanity. This subsystem includes all Asian countries, except Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Israel, all African countries, excluding South Africa, as well as Latin American countries. They are characterized by an extremely variegated appearance, different conditions and levels of social and economic development. At the same time, there are a number of characteristics that unite developing countries into a special group of states. One of the most important criteria for identifying developing countries as a separate world subsystem is their similar economic problems, in particular, underdevelopment, backwardness and massive poverty of the population. The relevance of this topic is determined by the fact that currently the problem of poverty in developing countries has become global in nature and is one of the main problems of humanity. Large scales of poverty in developing countries pose a serious danger not only to national but also to global sustainable development. Social tension generated by backwardness and poverty multiplies conflicts in the developing world and increases the danger of international terrorism. The purpose of the work is to study the essence of the problem of poverty in developing countries and find optimal ways to overcome it.

Keywords: economic state, developing countries, poverty, sustainable development, backwardness.

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Introduction

The group of developing countries includes more than 4/5 of all national economies in the world. About 80% of the world's population lives in them. The economic state of developing countries and their problems directly affect the vast majority of humanity. This subsystem includes all Asian countries, except Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Israel, all African countries, excluding South Africa, as well as Latin American countries. They are characterized by an extremely variegated appearance, different conditions and levels of social and economic development. At the same time, there are a number of characteristics that unite developing countries into a special group of states. One of the most important criteria for identifying developing countries as a separate world subsystem is their similar economic problems, in particular, underdevelopment, backwardness and massive poverty of the population.

The relevance of this topic is determined by the fact that currently the problem of poverty in developing countries has become global in nature and is one of the main problems of humanity. Large scales of poverty in developing countries pose a serious danger not only to national but also to global sustainable development. Social tension generated by backwardness and poverty multiplies conflicts in the developing world and increases the danger of international terrorism.

The purpose of the work is to study the essence of the problem of poverty in developing countries and find optimal ways to overcome it.

In accordance with the goal, the following tasks are formulated:

- identify the causes and consequences of poverty in developing countries;
- consider the relationship between globalization and poverty;
- identify ways and means to overcome poverty in developing countries.

The empirical basis of this work consists of: educational economic literature that reveals the essence, causes and consequences of the problem of poverty in developing countries, scientific economic articles that examine poverty as a global problem for humanity, and also study ways to overcome poverty in developing countries. When writing the work, we actively used data from the World Bank Internet server, which provides statistical information that allows us to objectively assess the level of poverty in the world.

The work includes an introduction, a main part consisting of 3 chapters, a conclusion and a list of sources used. The introduction substantiates the relevance of the choice of topic and sets the goal and objectives of the study. Chapter one reveals the essence of poverty as a global problem for humanity. Chapter two examines in more detail the causes, criteria for determining and spreading poverty in developing countries; based on statistical data, an analysis of the current state of this problem in the world is performed. In Chapter Three, based on theoretical and practical data using the example of African countries, ways to overcome poverty in developing countries are formulated. In conclusion, conclusions are drawn on this issue.

Main Part

Poverty in developing countries as a global problem

Poverty is one of those global problems that the world community will have to search for answers to for decades to come. It is the root cause or accompanying, aggravating factor of many other global problems, which naturally complicates their solution. At the same time, it itself is the product of a number of factors operating at the global level.

In the era of globalization, the socio-economic polarization of humanity is intensifying at extreme points. At the beginning of the XXI century. The most developed countries account for less than 12% of the population and about 60% of world GDP. They play a leading role in such key international organizations as the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO and the OECD, which allows them, through these organizations, to determine the rules of the game on the "world chessboard". The group of world economic leaders includes approximately two dozen developing countries that have established fruitful cooperation with them. The share of least developed countries in the world's population is 12%, in world GDP – 1%. According to the Human Development Report, the richest 20% of the world's population accounts for 86% of global GDP, while the poorest quintile accounts for just 1% (Globalization, 2021). As a result, between the so-called "golden" and "hungry" billions there is a real gap in the level and lifestyle.

The inability of most of the poorest countries to escape poverty on their own has made the problem of poverty global, universal. There is a growing conviction in the world community that the gap between rich and poor countries and peoples cannot be bridged by relying on the natural course of events, without coordinated efforts at all levels – from local to global.

The concern that the problem of poverty in the world causes is explained not only and not so much by the fact that it restrains global development and diverts funds from more profitable, from the point of view of economic efficiency, areas of capital investment. In its current form, globalization, which gives the world unprecedented integrity, does not destroy or smooth out its internal contradictions. On the contrary, it strengthens and aggravates it. As a result, growing interdependence turns into increasing mutual vulnerability.

The main danger of dividing the world into zones of prosperity and poverty is that in the context of global transformations, the connection between poverty and other global threats and risks – illegal migration, terrorism, the growth of transnational crime, etc.

Social tension generated by backwardness, poverty and poverty pushes politicians and governments of the poorest countries to search for internal and external enemies, multiplies conflicts in the developing world, and increases the danger of international terrorism. All states, regardless of their size, wealth or location, become vulnerable to new and old threats in the era of globalization.

Global poverty poses a serious problem for developed countries in another respect. Poverty existence, unsanitary conditions, and health undermined as a result of malnutrition make the population of the poorest countries easy prey to various infectious and epidemic diseases that pose dangerous threats to rich countries.

The problem of poverty is aggravated by the development of demographic processes. Although population growth rates will slow down in most developing countries by 2030, a strong positive impact on poverty and poverty reduction is not expected. In the next 20 years, the world's population will increase by almost 1.5 billion people. More than 97% of this growth will occur in developing countries. At the same time, the population in sub-Saharan Africa will increase by 320 million people, where poverty is stagnant and passed on from generation to generation (Ivanov & Goffe, 2010).

Today, three quarters of the world's poorest people live in rural areas. However, urbanization is fundamentally changing the incidence and nature of poverty. In 1950, the number of urban residents accounted for a third of the world's population, in the 2000s – half, and by the middle of the 21st century, according to forecasts, will reach two thirds. In 2005, 30% of the world's city dwellers – 1 billion people – lived in slums. The proportion of slum dwellers is highest in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, where in many cities it exceeds 70% of the population. If current urban population growth rates and income distribution patterns continue, the number of slum dwellers will reach 2 billion by the middle of the 21st century (UN-Habitat, 2010).

Life in slums means high levels of morbidity, infant mortality, crime and other manifestations of antisocial behavior. Closed life prospects create a breeding ground for instability and increase the potential for violence. "The world is sitting on a time bomb," is the conclusion of the authors of a study conducted by UN-Habitat (2010).

Thus, poverty in developing countries becomes a complex problem: economic, social, cultural, political, international with great destabilizing potential on a global scale. There is no doubt that in the coming decades it will be one of the most important problems of the world economy.

Causes and criteria for the spread of poverty in developing countries

Poverty has many faces and diversity, it changes over time and space. It is clear that in different countries and in different historical periods human needs are assessed differently. There are two main approaches to defining poverty. Within the economic approach, poverty is understood as a state of need associated with low levels of income and consumption of an individual or household. With an integrated approach, poverty is considered in a broad social context and is interpreted as the absence or extremely limited access to resources that determine the quality of life of an individual.

For the least developed countries, poverty is an absolute evil, a lack or absence of vital resources (food, clean drinking water, housing, clothing) that ensure biological survival, and basic human rights. Despite their importance, the intangible characteristics of poverty in these countries are still receding into the background. In general, poverty can be characterized as the inability to provide the simplest and most affordable living conditions for the majority of people in a given country.

The reasons for the existence of underdevelopment and poverty in developing countries are very different. Several internal and external circumstances should be highlighted.

First, in many developing countries, modern production is enclaved. The traditional economy often dominates, providing ineffective employment for the majority of the working population. Modernization of production is hampered by the lack of necessary investments.

Secondly, the existing education system is not able to provide the national economy with a qualified workforce. The situation is aggravated by the fact that skilled workers and even senior specialists often leave to work in developed countries of the world. A paradoxical picture emerges: developing countries spend their resources on the education, training and training of their workers, who then give back to the industrialized developed countries of the world, in fact helping them.

Thirdly, the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America constantly record fairly high rates of population growth (2 times higher than the world average). This circumstance is not the cause of backwardness and poverty, but it does, to a certain extent, hinder the development of countries, especially those that have undergone a "demographic boom".

Finally, in the developing world with its still unformed civil society, inter-tribal (inter-clan) clashes, coups d'état and armed conflicts quite often occur, which sometimes drag on for decades (in Angola, Bolivia, Congo, Ethiopia, Libya, Egypt, etc.) These conflicts not only destroy material production, but also generate flows of refugees. And people deprived of the means of subsistence are often involved in the drug business, illegal arms trade, and piracy. And the conflicting parties themselves direct funds not to the development of production, but to the purchase of weapons and modernization of the army.

External reasons are even more significant.

Firstly, this is an unequal exchange. TNCs that control world markets set inflated prices for their high-tech products and low prices for purchased raw materials. "Price scissors" cut off a significant portion of the income of developing countries in favor of developed countries.

Secondly, the current financial system provides for the provision of loans to developing countries at interest and for a certain period. If the loan is not repaid by the due date, then default or bankruptcy or debt restructuring at new interest follows. The loans and debts provided have become a powerful lever of influence on the national economy and, at the same time, a source of enrichment for industrial powers.

According to scientists, industrialized states that have created a consumer society accounted for 13.89% of the population in 2010. But they consume 40% of raw materials and almost 50% of fuel and energy resources, which are annually withdrawn from developing countries by $100-200 billion through "price scissors," loans, and so on. Countries that supply raw materials to the world market actually play the role of sponsors of the economies of developed countries (Shkvarya, 2011).

Thirdly, labor migration plays a controversial role. Workers who came from developing countries (initially from colonies) help rebuild and modernize the economies of developed countries. Of course, part of the income of migrants sent home contributed to the development of national economies, but the direct participation of workers not at home, but in industrial countries, was much more important for developed countries than remittances to donor countries.

These are the main causes of backwardness and poverty in developing countries. There are a number of smaller reasons, often of a country or regional nature.

There are national and international poverty levels. The national poverty rate is the proportion of the population living below the national poverty line. In most countries of the world, the national poverty line means income below the subsistence level, i.e. does not allow covering the cost of the consumer basket – a set of the most necessary goods and services by the standards of a given country in a given period of time. In many developed countries, people with an income of 40-50% of the average income in the country are considered poor.

The international poverty level is income that provides consumption of less than US$2 per day PPP (purchasing power parity). The international level of extreme poverty (or otherwise – ultra-poverty) is also determined – income that provides consumption of less than $1.25 per day according to PPP. This is essentially the extreme level of poverty in terms of human survival. These criteria were proposed by the World Bank.

According to World Bank estimates, the total number of poor, i.e. living on less than $2 a day, is 2.5-3 billion people in the world. Including the total number of people living in extreme poverty (less than $1.25 a day) – 1-1.2 billion people. In other words, 40-48% of the world's population are poor, and 16-19% are ultra-poor (Bulatova, 2011).

Since the 80s XX centuries to the beginning of the XXI century the number of people living in extreme poverty fell by about 200 million. This was mainly due to a decrease in the number of ultra-poor in China. Since the beginning of the 90s. There is a tendency towards a reduction in the number of ultra-poor in another populous state – India. At the same time, in sub-Saharan Africa over the past 20 years, on the contrary, there has been a constant increase in the number of ultra-poor.

The distribution of the poorest people by region of the world has not changed significantly since 1980. At the beginning of the 21st century, two thirds of the world's poor still live in East and South Asia and one quarter in sub-Saharan Africa. Most of the poor are concentrated in rural areas of developing countries.

If we compare the indicators presented in Table 1 with the results obtained in 2002, we can conclude that in the series of regions: Middle East and North Africa (9% of the ultra-poor in 2002), CEE and Central Asia (2%), Latin America (9%) – there has been a slight decrease in the level of ultra-poor. In other regions, on the contrary, there is a tendency to increase the share of the ultra-poor population.

In the current situation in the global economy, the task of identifying ways and means to overcome poverty in developing countries comes to the fore.

Ways to overcome poverty in developing countries (using the example of African countries)

The most important problem of the world economy at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century was overcoming poverty and underdevelopment in developing countries. In some developing countries, the problem of poverty has long reached critical levels. For example, in 2010, 76% of the population of Zambia, 81.3% of Madagascar, 67.9% of Tanzania, 32.7% of India consumed goods and services for less than $1.25 per day (World Bank, 2020).

Table 1 – Poverty levels in regions of the world, 2009-2010

Region	Share of ultra-poor in the region's population, %	Share of poor people in the region's population, %
Sub-Saharan Africa	47.5	69.2
Middle East and North Africa	2.7	13.9
CEE and Central Asia	0.5	2.2
East Asia	14.3	33.2
Latin America	6.5	12.4
South Asia	36.0	70.9

Source: World Bank, 2020

As a result, about 800 million people suffer from malnutrition in the world. In addition, a significant portion of poor people are illiterate. Thus, the share of literate people among the population over 15 years of age according to the World Bank in 2007-2011 makes up approximately 18% of the population in Mali, Niger, and Chad (World Bank, 2022).

The huge scale of poverty and backwardness raises doubts about whether it is even possible to talk about normal development and progress of human society, when most of the planet's inhabitants find themselves below the line of a decent human existence. The problem is aggravated by the fact that the achievements of global scientific and technical progress are bypassed by many developing countries, their enormous labor resources are little used, and these countries themselves, for the most part, do not actively participate in the international division of labor.

It would be extremely unreasonable not to see the dangers that arise from the continuation of such a situation. Thus, it forms in the broad public consciousness of these countries a negative attitude towards the existing order in the world, which creates a threat to the stability of the world economy.

The most important factor in overcoming poverty is economic growth. A brief overview of the economic situation in a number of countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America shows that these countries have the necessary potential for “catch-up development”. However, for its effective use, a new model of world development is needed, fragments of which have been repeatedly recorded in the documents of the UN and its committees.

Among the UN recommendations, the following can be highlighted (Shkvarya, 2011):

– Reorganization of the activities of the IMF, World Bank and WTO and the description of most of the debts of developing countries. Limiting the destructive activities of TNCs.

– Liberalization of trade in high technologies and their sale at affordable prices. The lifting of developed countries' sanctions against rogue countries.

– Increasing the role of the state in the development of countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

– Adoption of laws on the free movement of labor and equal pay for foreign workers.

– Preserving the possibility of original development without retreating into autarky.

Foreign capital and TNCs have a great influence on the socio-economic development of developing countries. TNC enterprises in Central America, the Caribbean, and Asia are connected to the domestic market and use local raw materials and semi-finished products. According to the World Bank, the distribution of private capital is represented by: 40% in East Asia, 37% in Latin America and the Caribbean, 18% in Central Asia, 3.5% in South Asia and 1% in the Middle East, East and North Africa (Kozak & Lebedeva, 2011).

The economic development of developing countries is conditioned by the implementation of the task of overcoming backwardness. The economic policy of developing countries is based on the privatization of previously created state-owned enterprises, the opening of the economy to the outside world, and the struggle to expand access to the markets of developed countries.

In the mid-1960s developing countries created the so-called group of "77" at the UN – according to the number of countries that formed it. Currently it includes 132 countries. The group sought to have developed countries transfer 1% of the value of total GDP annually to developing countries, including 0.7% in development aid. Developed countries have not officially accepted this requirement, but these figures have become a kind of yardstick for quantifying the resources flowing from developed to developing countries.

The influx of long-term investment into developing countries has increased and outpaced GDP growth. At the same time, the share of official resources in the total investment flow decreased to 27%, but the influx of private resources increased 4 times (up to 72%) (Kozak & Lebedeva, 2011).

Thus, private capital has become the main element of foreign income to countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. It should be noted that foreign direct investment accounts for more than half of all funds coming from private sources. This was facilitated by the policy of openness of foreign economic relations, facilitating access of foreign capital to the national economy (large-scale privatization of state-owned enterprises was open to foreign investors), cheap labor and facilitating the entry of developing countries into the markets of developed countries.

However, as can be seen from the Figure 1, the distribution of foreign investment is extremely uneven.

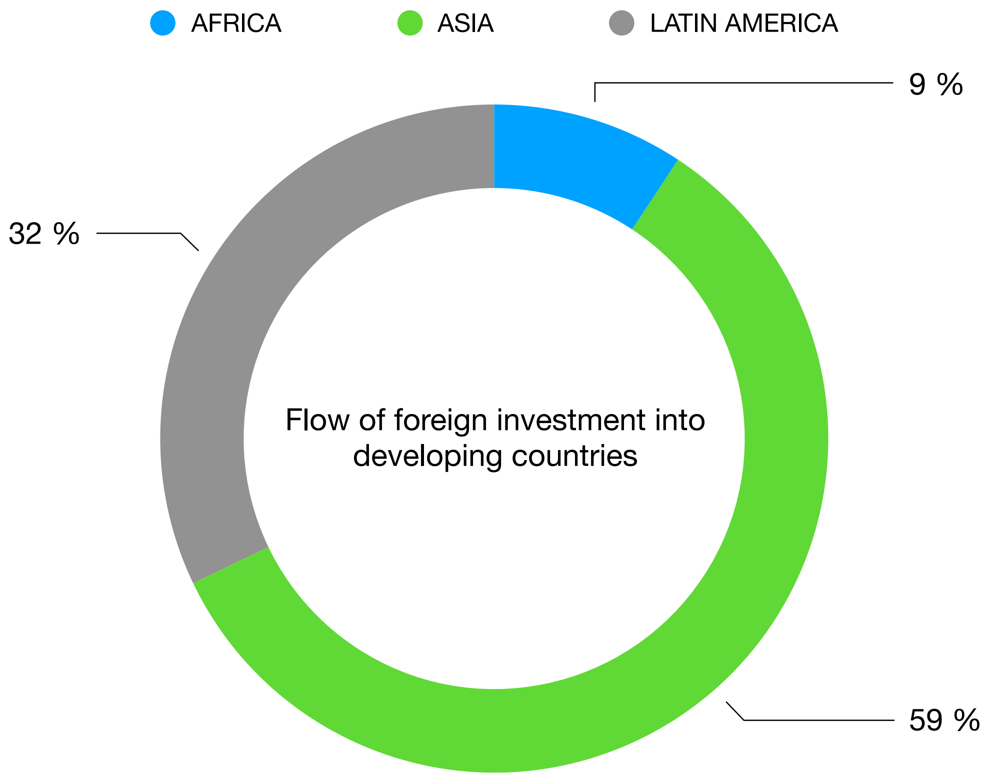

Figure 1. Inflow of foreign investment into developing countries

Source: Shkvarya, 2011

However, attracting foreign capital has not led to a complete solution to the problems facing developing countries, in particular, to overcoming poverty and underdevelopment. Moreover, some of them have become worse:

– uneven development increased as investment was directed primarily to those countries where there were prospects for their correct placement (China, India, Brazil, Mexico);

– competition to attract foreign investment has intensified;

– the benefits provided to foreign capital often went to the detriment of the interests of local entrepreneurs.

Thus, we can conclude that attracting foreign capital and foreign investment has contradictory results. On the one hand, attracting foreign capital, when used effectively, has proven to be quite effective in accelerating the economic development of a number of developing countries (India, China, Brazil). On the other hand, the problem of poverty and backwardness in African countries has only worsened.

The problem of poverty is most acute in African countries. Most African countries belong to the least developed group. Many of them are landlocked and have little connection with the outside world. These countries have an extremely low average annual income per capita ($500-1500), pre-industrial forms of labor predominate everywhere, and agriculture dominates the economy. There are 52 developing countries in Africa, most of which (38) are among the poorest and underdeveloped countries of Sub-Saharan Africa. In modern conditions, tropical Africa accounts for no more than 5% of the total influx of foreign investment into developing countries. For most countries on this continent, external debt exceeds 70% of GDP and 2.5 times export earnings.

Over the past decades, the differentiation of African countries in terms of the dynamics of socio-economic development has deepened significantly. At one pole are the least developed states – financial bankrupts with a destroyed and criminal economy (Liberia, Sierra Leone, Chad, the Republic of Congo, Somalia, etc.). The other pole is formed by South Africa, which is an industrial-agrarian giant by African standards, as well as countries (Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Kenya and others) that have a more or less developed industrial sector based on mining and processing of agricultural raw materials.

The nature and pace of economic growth in African countries is influenced by a number of constraining factors:

– poor economic infrastructure;
– internal political instability;
– interstate conflicts;
– reducing the influx of financial resources from outside;
– deteriorating terms of trade;
– difficulty in accessing international markets;
– overpopulation, famine and mass disease.

The African continent has rich reserves of various natural resources, but they are distributed extremely unevenly, which deprives a number of countries of the opportunity to receive so-called resource rent. The main specialization of African states in the world economy is agriculture and raw materials. In these countries, TNCs are widely active and invest in agricultural production, services, mining and processing industries, as well as in the development of communications.

Difficulties in reforming the economies of African countries are directly related to the circumstances of implementing the recommendations of the IMF and the World Bank, the low level of creditworthiness of states, the growth of their external debt, and political and military conflicts. The economic development of African countries is achieved by increasing the production and export of agricultural and primary goods, which are subject to significant market fluctuations. Realizing that the raw material orientation of industrial production and foreign trade does not provide any chance for equal integration into the world economy, representatives of African states decided to create the Union for the Industrialization of Africa, the purpose of which is to promote the industrial development of African countries, increase the competitiveness of their products, and encouragement in the region partnerships in the field of industrial production.

Thus, African countries are faced with a number of serious problems on the way to overcoming economic backwardness and, as a consequence, mass poverty. Having analyzed the current socio-economic situation in African countries, we can identify the following ways to overcome economic backwardness and poverty:

– reorganization of the economy, further industrialization and counteraction to TNCs, which are pursuing an active policy in their own interests to redistribute spheres of influence, sales markets, capital flows and access to raw materials;

– further integration of African countries, the creation of trade and customs unions on the continent for the purpose of mutual assistance among African countries, countering the destructive activities of TNCs and a number of developed countries on the continent;

– maintaining military-political stability on the mainland, preventing civil and interstate conflicts;

– focus on the internal resources of countries – the creation of a domestic sales market;

– strengthening the legal framework – legislative protection of property rights and creation of conditions for their strengthening, including in the informal sector of economics;

– budget discipline – the budget deficit should not exceed reserves that allow it to be, financed without rising inflation; the current account deficit should be kept to no more than 3% of GDP (Kozak & Lebedeva, 2011);

– changing the priorities of government spending – spending should be reoriented from the political sphere (governance, defense, military spending) to the economic and social sphere (health, education, infrastructure);

– introduction of compulsory secondary education in all countries of the continent; creating favorable conditions for obtaining higher education;

– creating our own research base, increasing R&D expenses;

– increased healthcare costs – mandatory medical examinations and free treatment;

– carrying out a competent demographic policy – in some countries it is necessary to implement a policy to curb population growth;

– tax reform – reducing rates and expanding the tax base using a progressive tax scale;

– foreign direct investment – creating favorable conditions for attracting foreign capital, creating competition in the domestic market between foreign and national firms (at the same time, it is necessary to support the national manufacturer, small and medium-sized businesses);

– for the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa it is necessary to increase the role of the state in the economy, the creation of new jobs and enterprises by the state;

– for more developed countries in Africa, denationalization of enterprises in order to increase the efficiency of their activities;

– adoption of laws on freedom of movement of labor on the mainland and equal pay for foreign workers.

Thus, the development of effective national development strategies based on internal economic resources based on an integrated approach is of decisive importance in solving the problem of poverty and underdevelopment in African countries (Lomakin, 2010). With this approach, not only industrialization and post-industrialization, liberalization of economic life and transformation of agrarian relations are considered as prerequisites for creating a modern economy and achieving sustainable economic growth, but also educational reform, improving the healthcare system, mitigating inequality, pursuing a rational demographic policy, and stimulating problem solving employment. It is necessary not only to ensure economic growth, but also to change the consciousness of the people of African countries. At the same time, African countries should strive for mutual integration and mutual assistance. Developed countries need to provide targeted support to the economies of African countries, write off debts to these countries, liberalize trade in high technologies, not incite military-political conflicts on the continent (Libya can be considered as an example) and also lift sanctions against rogue countries. However, it should be noted that each of the African countries has its own socio-economic, political and cultural characteristics, therefore, when determining ways to overcome poverty and backwardness, it is necessary to take into account the characteristics of each specific country.

Conclusions

Thus, the problem of poverty in developing countries goes far beyond purely economic issues. It is becoming a complex problem: economic, social, cultural, political, international – with great destabilizing potential on a global scale. There is no doubt that in the coming decades it will be the most important global problem for humanity.

The problem of poverty in developing countries is an integral part of the complex of fundamental challenges that humanity faces in the context of globalization. We are talking about preserving the natural environment, preventing the threat of nuclear war, resolving interethnic and interfaith conflicts, improving the quality of life and developing human creative potential.

In the era of globalization, the socio-economic differentiation of countries and regions of the world is intensifying. It would be extremely unreasonable not to see the dangers that arise from the continuation of such a situation. Thus, it forms in the broad public consciousness of the poorest countries a negative attitude towards the existing order in the world, which creates a threat to the stability of the world economy.

In this situation, the search for optimal ways to overcome poverty in developing countries comes to the fore. Of course, the most important factor in overcoming poverty and backwardness in developing countries is economic growth, since it is economic growth that leads to an increase in GNI, through which the consumption fund is formed.

The problem of poverty is most acute in African countries. Most of which (38) belong to the poorest and underdeveloped countries of Tropical Africa (Sub-Saharan Africa). African countries face a number of serious constraining factors on the way to overcoming poverty and backwardness: underdeveloped economies, low levels of education and health care, weak political and legal structures, military conflicts, etc. In this regard, to solve the problem of poverty in African countries, an integrated approach is needed, affecting all spheres of society.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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