

Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) – Case Studies from the Ground



Rosaline – Far North Region, Cameroon



Harvesting peanuts on the subsistence-level farm

A dry scratching noise accompanies the motions of Rosaline's short hoe as it scrapes the arid soil. Torso bent low to the ground, 55-year old Rosaline, working with several other members of her family, manages to harvest one modest-sized bowl of peanuts as the family talks and affectionately teases each other. She, along with her husband, co-wives, and their eleven children, also farm millet and other cereals on their subsistence-level farm in the Far North Region of Cameroon near the border of Chad. They migrated here, to the town of Guidiguis, 15 years ago from another village 20 miles away. However, given the area's very long dry season and a lack of irrigation and modern agricultural practices, coaxing any production from the earth remains difficult.

Each morning Rosaline leaves her mud-brick home to draw water from a nearby public tap, a recent addition that was funded by international aid. Although her family now has access to an improved water source for drinking and washing, they have no toilet and must use the bush – as must their neighbours. The household also lacks electricity. Rosaline then looks after the children and gets those who attend ready for school. She also does the cooking and washing.

Afterwards, she walks with members of her family to the farm, enjoying the time she has to spend with them. Not all of the family's school-age children are in school. Some remain at home and work. Those who do attend school stop by after classes to help work on the farm, too.

While out, Rosaline must also collect fuel – wood, crop waste, and dung – for cooking. In addition to cultivating peanuts and cereal to eat, Rosaline's family ferments some of the millet to brew an alcoholic drink known locally as 'arkee.' In the afternoons, Rosaline takes the arkee to sell at the market. Rosaline must then fetch more water for preparing the evening meal, washing dishes and clothes, and bathing.



One of the children



Rosaline and other members of her household coax peanuts, millet and other cereals from the earth

Although her family is intensely poor, Rosaline notes that there have been positive changes, including the new water tap, as well as corn milling machines. They also have access to more markets. Still, their farming requires enormous inputs of labour for small returns, and Rosaline would like to see better agricultural equipment and resources for their farming; perhaps then it would not take seven people to harvest a bowl of peanuts. Despite the material stresses, however, the ambience around her is more playful and light than one might imagine.



Rosaline is poor according to the Global MPI. The coloured boxes in the graphic (right) show the deprivations she faces.

