

# OPHI

## Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative

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Rabiya, Bihar, India

### Multidimensional Poverty Index Profile



Mosammat<sup>1</sup> Rabiya is a 35 year-old daily wage labourer. She is a widow and lives in Gobindpur village in the Araria district of Bihar, India, with her two teenage sons.

Like hundreds of their co-villagers, indeed like millions of villagers across northern India, Rabiya's family owns no land. For years, they have worked the fields of local farmers, who paid them only a fraction of the legal minimum wage.

Rabiya's husband Siraj worked as an agricultural labourer in the northwestern state of Punjab, but

five years ago he died and she was left to bring up her two sons.

Today, Rabiya earns a living by continuing to work the fields of farmers in hers' and neighbouring villages, often more than ten kilometres away. She is paid in kind and can keep between one-ninth and one-tenth of the produce (depending on the generosity of the farmer) that she helps to harvest. At other times during the agricultural season, she is employed by farmers to do weeding, for which she is paid INR 25 (USD 2.8) a day. Again, such work lasts no more than two months a year and does not guarantee daily employment. Both of her sons are unemployed and help their mother around the house.

A typical day for Rabiya begins at 5am, when she wakes up and completes her morning chores. She sweeps the house, collects firewood to use as household fuel, and boils *chai*, a hot spicy tea, for the family. *Chai* is followed by a breakfast consisting of plain boiled rice or stale *chapatti* (leavened wheat bread) left over from dinner the previous night, along with some seasonal vegetable curry. Her sons help her with these chores and leave early to look for work to do. Usually, they come back empty-handed. By 8am, she is out of the house, on her way to a village where she has heard there is work. Her place of work is rarely less than an hour's walk from her house. The number of hours she works during a day varies according to the time of the year. She is usually back home by 7pm (if not earlier), depending on whether she stops at the bazaar to purchase groceries. If it is the day of the weekly *haat*, a smaller temporary market, she's more likely to be late, as she can buy her household provisions there at a cheaper rate.

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<sup>1</sup> A term commonly used to address widows in northern India

Rabiya hopes for a better future for her children. She regrets not being able to study herself or educate her children. She wants her children to be able to lead dignified lives. She would like them to be free from daily worrying about what to feed their families and to have a house to call their own, with toilets and access to clean drinking water. To that end, she hopes her family's situation will improve. "I want nothing for myself, just that my children should be happy," she says, tears welling up in her eyes. But money is important only so far as it helps them to be happy. "My husband used to be able to earn what was to us a lot of money, but that couldn't save his life. No amount of money can bring him back. It can't buy you happiness." She would like her sons to get married soon and be "good husbands and good fathers" who are able to protect their loved ones from harm, want and suffering. Above all, she hopes they will be hardworking and faithful to their families and to their employers in the way she and her husband have been.



"All my life I have been true to my family and my employers," she says. *Iman* (integrity) and *wafa* (faithfulness) have been the guiding principles of her life. These are more important to her than the religious rituals that occupy the religious elite. It is these qualities for which she would like to be remembered. It is the freedom to express these qualities that Rabiya declared to be essential to her well-being: "Well-being is about being able to abide by principles that are important to you. When I am able to demonstrate my integrity and faithfulness without being disrespected or humiliated, I am 'well'. But that is not what I see around me. Those who demonstrate these



qualities are further crushed, demeaned and broken. These principles are not allowed to flower. That is the root cause of ill-being."

Rabiya's household is poor according to the Indian Government's Below Poverty Line survey instrument used by the State Government of Bihar, a proposed Below Poverty Line instrument recommended for use by the Indian Government's Planning Commission and the MPI. The shaded boxes of the figure below show the deprivations that her household faces across the MPI.

