

# OPHI

## Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative

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Rolando, Dominican Republic

### Multidimensional Poverty Index Profile



Rolando is 61 years old and lives in a mountainous area of the Dominican Republic, known for sugar and coffee plantations. He lives with his wife, Beatriz, and gets up every day at 5am when he has a coffee without milk since he and his family cannot afford milk. His wife makes the coffee and he leaves the house no later than 6am.

To get by, he spends most of his time out picking left over coffee from the ground at a nearby coffee plantation. He picks the coffee that falls to the ground and would be otherwise lost. "I get to it before the rats do," is how he describes this work. Once collected, he takes it to a coffee milling plant across the street from his house and mills it there himself, selling it on by the pound. He gets 60 pesos

(US \$1.57) a pound that way -, a bit more than if he did not grind it. This averages out at around 200 pesos every two weeks (US\$ 5.26).

When there is no coffee harvest, he goes out to see if he can find some work with his machete; at times he finds work for 300 pesos a day; at times the work can pay as little as 150 pesos. He said: "here they pay so little that it is not worth the while to work."

He comes home at 6pm to have dinner. He says: "if I stayed in the house, it would be a prison. I cannot be locked up in the house with my wife; I have to go out. If I don't, we don't eat." After dinner he watches TV until 11pm if there is electricity; if not, he is in bed early.

He and his wife own their house. He built the house himself and is very proud of the construction. It has cinder blocks and a tin roof. He does not own the land it sits on; that is a loan from someone in the community. He did not have enough to build a kitchen, so the kitchen is



not built from cinder blocks and the rain gets in. His hope is to be able to build a proper kitchen and install a proper floor (currently the kitchen still has a mud floor, unlike other rooms in the house).

He built the house because he won the lottery, getting 100,000 pesos (US \$ 2,632). It took that much to buy the cement, blocks, the iron rods, tin roof, etc. He has no debts and owns the house outright. But he has no land or plot to grow food – only some banana trees next to the house.

He buys everything from rice to beans to oil in the local shop. He said that the shop-owners ('colmado') were tigers; everything was overpriced and getting more expensive. He now owes the shop-owners 5,000 pesos (US \$ 131.57). He usually pays within a month; but if they did not sell to him on loan, he would not eat.

He has gone without eating and suffered hunger. It is almost a daily fact of life at some points in the year. Some days he might eat a single banana and have a cup of coffee for dinner. He has gone to work all day with just coffee in the morning. He used to smoke and he would have coffee and cigarettes all day. But he quit almost 2 years ago; he feels better.

Beatriz does all the household's cooking and cleaning. When she goes out to mass, that's about the only time she goes out. She fell recently when coming down the mountain following a Saint's day festival. She now has a plate in her lower leg and cannot move well.

Sadly, the couple's three children were all lost during childbirth so they have no children. He went to school for one day when he was younger but got in a fight. His father came to the school and took him out and told him that that was enough schooling. He cannot read or write.

"No one helps me here. Only God. The people who own land let me take the coffee that falls on the ground. They help me by doing that."

However, there are also tensions in the community between the locals and the Haitians who to pick coffee or work in sugar plantations. The issue is that the Haitians work more cheaply than Dominicans. The Haitians listening to this conversation said that if they were to go, then the coffee would not be picked as Dominicans just will not do coffee picking.

Rolando says: "I live with what I have. God helps me. I will not steal or take what is not mine. I will not beg. I live with dignity. I don't owe a penny to anyone, except for what I owe at the store and he knows that I pay that off when I have money".

Rolando is poor according to the local income poverty line and the MPI. The shaded boxes of the figure below show the deprivations that he faces.

