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Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative

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Sangay, Bhutan

Multidimensional Poverty Index Profile



Sangay is 58 years old and lives in a small Bhutanese village in Wangdi Phodrang with his wife Mindu, who is 30 years old, and their three children: Jigme, 10; Sonam, 3; and Tshering 1. Both Sangay and his wife were both born in the village, and they have been married for about 11 years. The village is about a three-hour drive plus an additional two-hour walk from Thimphu, the capital city.

Sangay is a lay monk which means that, though he has no fixed job, he is always on call, ready to help when any member of the village needs him to come to their home.

Upon receiving notice that he's needed, he will go out to villagers' homes to perform a Bhutanese ritual or 'blessing', according to what the situation or problem requires. He will be offered anything from 100-200 Ngultrum a day (US\$ 1.95-US\$3.9) in return for his assistance, but there is obviously no guarantee or stability to this.

Because of his role as a lay monk, he owns no land or property. The family's home is a hut that is a temporary residence attached to the job of being community caretaker of the temple (or Lhakhang). The Lhakhang is at the heart of the village and serves as a general community hall for gatherings and meetings.

Mindu, a young, strong, active woman, has no paid employment at all and is further restricted by a broken hand, which makes caring for her family very difficult. None of the three children have started school so her time is filled with caring for them all day and night. There is a vegetable plot behind the hut that she tends a few hours a day, which helps supplement their food intake. In addition, she maintains the upkeep of the home and cooks for the family. She does all this with Tshering, their youngest





child, strapped on her back, who is very curious about it all!

The couple also keep an essential firewood store. A typical day would begin with Sangay awaking at 5 am and preparing the temple in order to give prayers for the rest of the community. Incense is a very important part of these ceremonies, and he is therefore responsible for its correct use, as well as the daily cleaning and care of the building.

This takes about three hours, and then he is free to return home, where the family will have breakfast together.

Because money is scarce, this breakfast often consists of tea and some snacks. They can't afford fresh rice every day, so, if they are lucky, they will have roasted rice from the day before to supplement their meal. Sanagay is then on call, so meal times aren't at regular hours, but lunch is normally between 12 and 1 pm and consists of curried vegetables and rice. There is also a lot of corn grown here in the region, so at any meal a toasted corn/maize dish (something like Bhutanese version of Corn Flakes) may accompany or replace the rice.

The family relies on what others give them to supplement their diet, and while there is electricity in the village, there is none in their hut, so they cook on a wood fire. This causes respiratory problems in poorly ventilated homes when the smoke and particulates are breathed into the lungs. Because they have no electricity, their bedtime varies according to the natural light levels in each season.



Since Sangay is a lay monk, he doesn't have the opportunity to travel to look for more work and income. Sangay and Mindu's highest hope is to send their children to school so they can study and get a decent job in the future. But unless a school opens in their village, this is impossible for now. They can't afford the cost of transporting the children to another school nor pay boarding fees so the children can stay there. Their other hope is to have some land on which to build their own house. This is unlikely unless they are given the land, though as a lay monk he is offered gifts all the time.

Sangay and Mindu are poor according to the MPI. The shaded boxes of the figure below show the deprivations that they face.

