

OPHI

Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative

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Sonam, Bhutan

Multidimensional Poverty Index Profile



Sonam is 45 years old and has lived in a small village in the province of Wangdi Phodrang all her life. She lives with her five children: Parash, 21; Ugyen, 20; Bikash, 19; Tashi, 12; and Pemo, 3. Located in western Bhutan, their village does not lie on any road and is difficult to reach. The capital city of Thimphu is approximately a three-hour drive plus an additional two-hour walk away.

Sonam was married to her husband for over 20 years, but he no longer lives at home with the rest of the family. She didn't go into detail about when her husband left or if she asked him to leave. She did share that he had a serious alcohol problem, was often drunk, and therefore "not very useful, nor did he pay for anything". Still, it has been a struggle to bring up the children on her own.

A typical day starts at 6 am when Sonam prepares incense for burning - an important daily ritual in Bhutan for most households. She then prepares a breakfast of rice and curry and heads out to work on her own in her vegetable fields. This work varies according to the season, and it's quite a sizeable plot for one person to look after. As three-year-old Pemo is too young for school, she accompanies her mother all day.

While this work gives the family fresh food to eat, Sonam also earns money when possible by working on other peoples' land as a day labourer, where she can earn up to 100 Ngultrum a day (US\$ 1.95). This extra income helps to pay for her children's education. While the eldest is now working, the middle three children are all at a boarding school some distance from the village. This is a remarkable achievement given the challenges she faces,





and she worries greatly about having enough money to continue paying for her children's education.

She typically takes lunch at about 12 or 1 pm, which is eaten either at home or in someone else's fields depending on where she is working. Typically this also consists of rice and vegetable curry, but occasionally, if an animal dies, there is meat (as Buddhists, the villagers don't kill animals in order to eat them).

After resuming work in the afternoon, Sonam returns home to prepare dinner for her family about 6 or

7 pm. The family have electricity, which they use for cooking, but the house is in very poor condition and is largely unmaintained. The wooden roof needs replacing as it leaks terribly in the heavy rains of summer. With no husband to help, Sonam said she felt there was no chance of repairing this alone, even if she had the money and materials to do so. The poor state of repair is a great worry for Sonam, which she says makes her feel as if she has no real accomplishments in life.



Her main hope is that her children will be able to continue their education and then find decent employment. This would help to relieve the constant pressure of looking for extra labouring work to make ends meet. She also hopes that this could enable them to get a new roof for the family's house. A sound roof would mean the family and their belongings could remain dry and that they need not fear the heavy rains so much.

Sonam is poor according to the MPI. The shaded boxes of the figure below show the deprivations that she faces.

