

Multidimensional Poverty Index

CASE STUDY



Bibi Ayesha, India

Bibi Ayesha, 55, lives in a wooden box-like structure on stilts near a temple in Delhi. She supplements the salary she receives from cleaning a nearby homeless shelter by begging for alms from temple-goers. In her life, she has weathered many displacements and misfortunes, including injury, fire, and government relocation projects.

“She has weathered many misfortunes, including injury, fire and government relocation projects”

When she was a girl of 12, Bibi Ayesha migrated from Kolkata to Delhi with her father and aunt to work on the construction of a stadium for the Ninth Asian Games. Married to a man 16 years her senior, she gave birth at age 13 to a daughter who died at age 3. She separated from her husband decades ago when he returned to their village after falling ill. Until recently, Bibi Ayesha shared her current home with her 7-year-old granddaughter, Gulnihar, but she made the desperate decision to send her granddaughter away to an NGO-run home where she hopes the child’s opportunities will be greater. Her 23-year-old mentally ill son eats lunch with her, but he sleeps in a night shelter for the homeless. He recently began work as a night watchman where he will be paid Rs.5000 (\$84) per month; occasionally, he contributes towards her expenses.



Bibi Ayesha wakes up at 8 or 9am and uses the government restrooms near her shelter before drinking tea and has a deep-fried snack for Rs.14 (\$0.23). Decades ago, a car reversed over her legs as she lay sleeping outside her hut, and, more recently, they were re-injured so she is now unable to walk. She gets around via a hand-pedaled tricycle, which was provided by the government in 2008 for free; however, she travelled to Jaipur (about 270km from Delhi) to obtain it because in Delhi officials demanded bribes to facilitate the process. In the morning Bibi Ayesha roams around the area on her tricycle before cleaning a nearby homeless shelter and then returning to her hut. Devotees distribute lentils and rice at the temple daily at noon – if she is late or they run out, she receives none. Two to four times a week, Bibi Ayesha buys cooked vegetables from roadside restaurants for Rs.20 to eat along with the rice and lentils. On other days, she cooks herself wheat chapattis or rice and lentils. She prepares her meals on a mud stove and uses wood, which costs about Rs.8–10/kg, as fuel. After lunch, Bibi Ayesha sleeps until 4 or 5pm. In the evenings, she seeks alms in front of the temple for an hour and half to two hours. Most days, she collects about Rs.50–100, but when it rains and she must rush home, she only gets about Rs.20. Bibi Ayesha says she doesn't like to get wet because the damp chills her and it is difficult to warm up again. Much of the money she does manage to gather goes to pay for her medication to combat a serious and chronic respiratory condition. She reports the cost of her medicine is as high as Rs.10,000 per



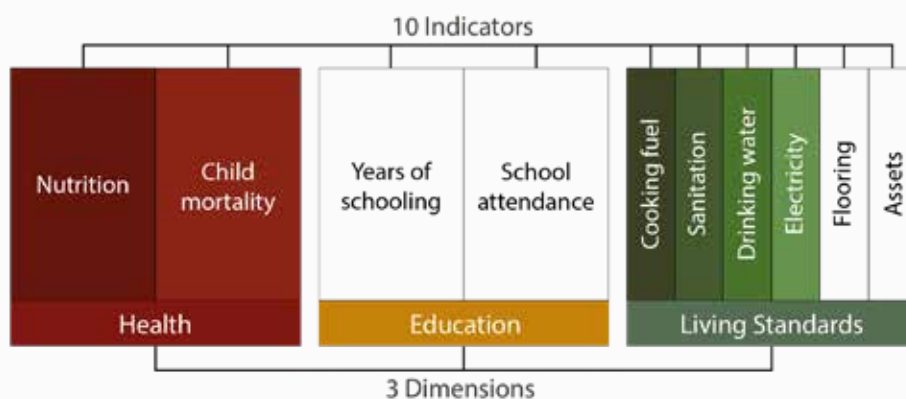
Bibi's medication



Bibi's belongings

month. After returning to her shelter, she listens to music or the radio on her son's mobile phone, which she charges at the homeless shelter. On days she can afford dinner, she spends about Rs.80–90 to feed herself and her son, or Rs.60 on herself alone. If she doesn't have money to buy vegetables, rice, or wheat flour, she boils some potatoes and eats them. She once had a ration card (which entitled her to a given amount of rice or wheat every month), but she lost her card in a fire almost 10 years ago. Bibi Ayesha's life has been shaped by a series of forced relocations. Shortly after she separated from her husband, she lived in a mixed-income community near Nizamuddin in South Delhi. She had her own hut, and it was there that her legs were damaged by a careless driver. At that time she made money selling biryani and, because she was earning a decent amount, had a one-room concrete dwelling. Her income was supplemented by clothes, food and money distributed by the wealthy to the poor during the festival season. But, in 1994, their homes were destroyed as part of a slum redevelopment initiative, and Bibi Ayesha was forced to leave. Some neighbours were assigned new housing but she was not, so she lived beneath the Nizamuddin flyover for two years. Bibi Ayesha then lived in rented slum housing and, from 1998–2000, in a transit camp. In 2000, her second daughter was married, and Bibi Ayesha spent Rs.10,000–11,000 on the wedding. When her first daughter's husband died in an accident (also in 2000), the daughter returned home. During this time they earned a living through a roadside teashop, and Bibi Ayesha also begged for at least a few hours a day. After a couple of years, she used her savings to build a two-room hut; one room was cemented and the other not. In this home she had a TV, fan, and furniture. Life was comfortable despite the difficulties, but when her daughter remarried, the new in-laws refused to accept her three previous children, and so the granddaughter was left with Bibi Ayesha. Between 2005 and 2008, four fires broke out in the settlement. In the 2005 fire, Bibi Ayesha lost her home and all her belongings, including Rs.180,000 kept in her hut. When asked why she kept so much money in the house, Bibi Ayesha explains that she did not have a bank account and that she collected the money because she hoped her son would be married at a young age, and that early marriage could cure his illness. From 2005 to 2008 her only income came from begging.

Before the Commonwealth Games were held in Delhi in 2010, many slums were razed in order to beautify the city and construct new flyovers, parking spaces, etc. The government launched a slum development scheme to relocate the residents of various slums to the outskirts of the city. As Bibi Ayesha's house was slated to be demolished, she applied for relocation. Unfortunately, however, she registered using the name of a man she was partnered with at the time. Bibi Ayesha's partner, who was violent and abusive, then left her for another woman – leaving Bibi Ayesha unable to get a new home. After her old home was demolished in 2008, she lived on the street for a month, hoping to rebuild, but the police continually Bibi Ayesha's medication Bibi Ayesha with her belongings harassed her. She then moved with her son and granddaughter to the grounds of the Sai Baba temple, located in an upscale part of Delhi not far from Nehru Stadium. They have been living in this locality (on and off) since then. After moving, the police continued to trouble them, especially when a minister or politician was passing and the police would clear out the homeless from the streets. When this happened, she would wrap her then one-year-old grandchild in a cloth sling, load whatever belongings she had onto her tricycle, and flee for a few hours (and sometimes more) to beg at a traffic light. To escape the increasing police harassment that accompanied the build-up to the Commonwealth Games, Bibi Ayesh rented a room for Rs.500 in Narela (approximately 40km away, near the Delhi-Haryana border). She stayed in Narela for four months but when she could not find ways of earning a living there, she traveled to Kashmir, to beg at the Makhdoom Shah Dargah. After three months in Kashmir, her legs were re-injured in another accident and her tricycle was damaged. Until that point, she had been able to use her legs a little, but after this second accident, Bibi Ayesha lost the ability to walk. She stayed in Kashmir for nine months before returning to Delhi, believing she could get better medical treatment. She also felt freer in the more familiar surroundings. When she returned to Delhi, she retrieved her things from the room she had rented in Narela. Most of what she had saved in Kashmir went towards paying off the backlog of rent. When the landlord began to demand payment for water and electricity (an additional Rs.300) despite her spending only one or two days a week in the room – the rest of her nights were spent in front of the temple – she decided to stop renting. Now, she stays only in her box-like shelter near the temple. She lacks electricity, a proper floor, and her own toilet (she uses a public toilet during the day and must use the gutter during the night), and relies on water trucked in by an NGO. When asked, Bibi Ayesha says that her life has worsened over the past decade. She believes she had the best quality of life when she lived near the Nehru Stadium and ran the teashop. Even though she earned more when she sold biryani in the mixed-income Nizamuddin, she felt out of place among the wealthy who would stop by. At Nehru Stadium, she felt a sense of belonging, because her neighbours had similar incomes and many were also differently abled. She could interact with everyone, and there was a sense of community. She also had more assets, including a TV and a bed. When her house was demolished (again) in 2005 and she became responsible for the care of her granddaughter, her quality of life declined. Her health has continued to deteriorate, and she feels that her current neighbours are not a true community. She says she is lacking medicine, money, and love. Sending her granddaughter away to the NGO-run home has left her alone. She hopes, however, that her granddaughter will study and make her proud. She wants the girl to one day say: "What my parents couldn't do for me, my grandmother did."



Bibi Ayesha is poor according to the Global MPI.

The coloured boxes show the deprivations she faces across the MPI.