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We focus on a subjective measure of living standards amongst respondents to the Afrobarometer series of opinion surveys. We present a set of results written with the formation of a research agenda in mind and motivated by the following observation: amongst the poorest countries, there is no statistical relationship between GDP and subjective living standards. However, individual-level material deprivation is still a significant determinant, suggesting that, amongst this sample, GDP is an ineffective measure of material welfare. Consistent with much of the literature, we find that an individual's relative position (both in comparison to others, and to the same individual 12 months earlier) strongly determines subjective living conditions. The inclusion of these relative measures significantly reduces the effect of material deprivation. This suggests that variations in reference groups and in past income – or even in perceptions of past income – may be driving differences in subjective living conditions across poor countries with similar levels of GDP. We also document positive effects of education, employment, religion, and satisfaction with democracy, while observing significantly negative effects of crime, unfair ethnic treatment, and the prevalence of Aids. When we employ mixed estimators to allow for unobserved heterogeneity at the national level, we find that the effect of poverty on subjective living conditions varies significantly: being poor is much worse in some countries than in others.