

## Challenges notwithstanding, Akhila prospers

***Precariously balancing on his bicycle, Akhila eked out a living by selling his ware...***

Akhila Sahoo is orthopedically challenged, with a club feet and lives in Saliasahi (a settlement in Ward 63 of Bhubaneswar city) with his wife and children. He has been an inhabitant of this settlement for the last 35 years.

Riding on his bicycle in spite of his physical limitations, Akhila peddled children's garments, toys and small kitchen accessories. He literally moved door to door for 10 years to meet the needs of his family. His earnings in a day varied from Rs 500 to Rs 800 because of his toils. His feet was not to cut his abilities.

***Akhila has a cart now – more space and ease to do business.***

But he certainly needed to expand his little business, and desperately needed something more than a bicycle to hold his goods and his dreams, so that his little endeavour would flourish and grow. CFAR responded to his needs by giving him a cart- cycle rickshaw. In that rickshaw, he could now pack a lot of things and move around selling his merchandise with greater ease. This increased his income and helped him to live more comfortably.



***Then came the Pandemic....***

And then came Covid 19. As the lockdown was declared there were Government imposed restrictions on mobility. Akhila started selling his products from home. People came to his house and bought their essentials, but his income levels dropped substantially and he found it difficult to run his family of five.

***Relaxation of restrictions helped him restart...***

With reduced income, his challenges further multiplied. Unlike the past, he lost the financial wherewithal to maintain a stock of goods for which there was high demand. His earnings dropped to rupees 50 to rupees 200 per day, but thanks to the cart- rickshaw he was able to cover more settlements and make a little more, even in these difficult times. At the end of the day though his legs are weary of the day's travails.

***A community change agent***

Akhila is an enthusiastic participant in various programs organized by CFAR on WaSH, and may well be called a change agent. He is passionate about the cause of persons with disabilities so he meticulously makes a list of those who are deprived of access to government benefits, such as disability pension and other benefits. He also generates awareness among PWDs on their entitlements and rights. Akhila has also taken the initiative to connect the drain in his settlement to the sewer by mobilizing funds from his neighbors and making a substantial contribution to the initiative himself.

***What does the future hold?***

He hopes to buy an auto-rickshaw which is battery operated, which will give him far greater mobility, will be energy efficient and environmentally friendly. He is working towards giving wheels to his dreams.