

Sukumari Rout: Turning adversity into opportunity

Context

The story of Sukumari Rout, an elderly artist with disability traces her day to day predicaments as an elderly disabled woman, who faces multiple barriers of gender, age, weak financial situation and is forced to compromise her sense of personhood at various levels. Undoubtedly the support from Water for Women Project team and the key stakeholders has enabled her to both cope and come out of the worst. There are many like Sukumari who are struggling every day to deal with multiple problems and need the unflinching support of government, private sector agencies and communities to live a life of dignity.

Sukumari Rout, a 65 year elderly woman, lives in Salia Sahi,, where she moved from her village in Nayagarh district, Khandapada block, in the 1990s . Sukumari realised her dream of performing on stage when she was employed as a singer in local theatres called 'Pala' for over 15 years. She lives in a joint family with her husband, Kailash Rout, 70 years, son Sridhar, daughter-in-law Binodini, three daughters, their spouses and her two grandsons.

Many challenges

The couple set up a small grocery store close to their house in Salia Sahi. They eventually lost out to the competition posed by larger outlets and were compelled to close it. Sukumari receives some financial assistance under the Mukhyamantri Kalakar SahayataYojana or Chief Minister's Assistance for Artists Scheme as 'Kalakar Bhatta' or Artists Honorarium which helps her to meet her daily needs.

An accident in 2004 changed her life for the worse. She fractured her hand and was under treatment for two years. She could no longer travel freely and her mobility was restricted. She could neither meet her friends, nor take care of household work. What made her feel helpless was the fact that she could not use the toilet without help and this made her feel obliged to others and this in turn made her sad.

We do not have a proper toilet at home. I use the traditional toilet. We are not able to renovate the toilet as we do not have any steady income

A new beginning has been made

It was at this time that she met Shantilata Pradhan, community worker who not only gave her hope but also provided her the much needed support. Sukumari and Shantilata have been friends for over two decades and she is able to share her feelings candidly with Shantilata.



As the first step Shantilata helped Sukumari to make a request for wheelchair and walking stick, to the Artificial Limbs Manufacturing Corporation of India (ALIMCO) an agency that works with the Department of Social Security and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, Government of Odisha.

In December 2021 she received a wheelchair, walking stick and also a knee support belt. *The wheelchair and walking stick has helped me in moving around the house and using the toilet. My son no longer has to carry me around and this is a big relief for all of us. Sometimes my husband also uses the walking stick*

Shanti lata is helping Sukumari to get associated with a self-help group where she can learn new skills and use it to restart the grocery shop, the family business or train young artists in semi—classical music.