

# Rooted Strength & Unlimited Resiliency

(Forest dwelling women safeguarding future generation)



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*This booklet is a humble attempt to recognise the autonomy, fortitude, and enormous contributions made by indigenous and forestdwelling women to the creation, preservation, and support of life on Earth. They are the ones who taught us that we belong to the earth, and we are a part of its eco system.*

*These are the tales of their adversity, struggle, triumph, and education—but most importantly, how these women have struggled for themselves, creating opportunity from every challenge and changed their life and the lives of others. The stories are mirrors reflecting the myriad faces of resilience, the not-yet-achieved dreams, and the boundless potential waiting to be realized. There are layers of societal norms, discriminatory practices, and systemic barriers that have, for too long, stifled the voices and aspirations of women and these are the landscapes of tradition, prejudice, and systemic challenges that have sought to confine and define women. Yet, against these backdrops, the narrative persists—a narrative of strength, courage, and unwavering determination that refuses to be confined by the limitations imposed upon it*

*At the intersection of this narrative lies the Forest Rights Act, a crucial legislative instrument that not only recognizes the rights of forest-dwelling communities but also serves as a powerful tool for women to assert their autonomy within these ecosystems as well our experience we gathered in a year working among these people.*

*We invite readers to reflect on the unique stories that make each woman's journey distinct. The women featured in these narratives are not just protagonists; they are the unsung heroines who have weathered storms, confronted adversity, and emerged stronger, echoing their resilience through time. May this inspire conversations, and foster a collective commitment to amplify the voices of women, recognize their rights, and unlock the untapped potential that lies within. I take this opportunity to thank Mr Bharat Bhusan Thakur, Ms Astha Saxena, Ms Sanghamitra and Ms Rosnara without whom this book would not have been possible. Their contributions, in the form of research, writing, editing, or other crucial aspects, have been instrumental in shaping the narrative. We are grateful to all women who has agreed to narrate their stories and inspiring us to take it forward. Their courage, resilience, and strength have laid the foundation for a powerful collective voice. By sharing their experiences, they have also illuminated the path for others to follow.*

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# Preface



## Content

01. Journey of Strength, Resilience, and Connection with Nature	01
02. Sharada: Leader of Leaders	02
03. Silent Steward with Loud Impact	03
04. Discovering Wisdom, Grace and Resilience	04
05. Bhagya's Journey of Unity and Empowerment	05
06. Dhanmati: Twilight in the Dawn of Rasipujupadar	06
07. DishantiApi : Nurturing the Earth	07
08. Soul of Forest	08
09. Hiran Nani: Cultivating empowerment among women	10
10. Wings of Self-Confidence	11
11. Rebuilding the Future	13
12. Phula: Swimming against the Tide	14
13. She turns challenges into success	15
14. Inspirational Journey from a humble beginning	16
15. Rajani: Eyes on the stars and feet on Earth	17
16. Harvesting Hope	18
17. Purnabasi: The moon that illuminates the path of many women	19
18. Some Learning from the community during our one - year work	20



## Journey of Strength & Resilience

Bdimbuli belongs to PangaKondh community that had thrived in harmony with nature for generations, relying on the rich resources of the forest for their sustenance. The name is given to her owing to her Bdimbulikia clan. Bdimbuli was born in Dasing village in Kandhamal, where life is woven into the fabric of the forest.

While talking about her childhood Bdimbuli's eyes sparkled with the reflections of bygone days, each sentence connecting the past to the present. She remembers going to forest with her parents for shifting cultivation, for collecting non timber forest produces. She says whenever I remember my childhood I see myself running through the forest alongside my parents. Her parents, wise in the ways of the forest taught her the secrets of the flora and fauna, the medicinal properties of plants, and the patterns of the seasons, edible and not edible leaves, fruits, and roots. Bdimbuli learned to read the language of nature and the messages in the calls of birds and leaves. The forest, to her, was an open book, and was a lesson for life and livelihood. Bdimbuli understood the delicate dance between humanity and the ecosystem, ensuring that every resource taken from the forest was reciprocated with care and gratitude and all their gods, goddesses, festivals revolved around forest.

Reminding of the younger days Bdimbuli remembers we did not have so many things to eat earlier. There were many types of tubers from bitter to sweet, mushrooms, leaves were available in the forest. And from land they were getting mostly different millets. Rice was not available every day. The money lenders used to take most of the rice cultivated. She also remembers how they run away to forest if they see an outsider. During her childhood, the boys would leave the house and carry knives with them and the girls used to put a small knife if not an iron pin in the hair for their protection. Bdimbuli did not close her eyes but her mind transported her back to the days of her youth. Bdimbuli reminds her marriage with Patunga in Khaliamunda and how her in-laws gave 7 cows and buffalos to her parents along with other things at that time.

After marriage Bdimbuli had additional responsibility of household work along with agriculture and forest work to which Bdimbuli did not complain as she has seen her mother, sister and friends doing the same thing. With passing time Bdimbuli became mother of 4 children from whom 3 children survived.

Slowly Bdimbuli saw changes around her. She saw Social workers, Govt officials coming to their village, schools opening in their village, healthcare facilities being established, and efforts to promote development practices that would benefit. Bdimbuli initially wary of these strangers, and observed their efforts from a distance. Language was also major barrier for her as her mother tongue was Kui and she was able to understand Oriya.

One of the social workers who learned Kui language to talk to the women folk in the village developed a new vision for Bdimbuli and many like her. Because through her they could understand the development process. They discussed health and hygiene, nutrition, immunisation, child care, drinking clean water and many things like that and Bdimbuli was a natural leader to practice the new things. She found women in her village and in community suffer a lot without having access to education and health care services. Slowly they formed self help group.

Along with leading saving and credit programme she became an active participant in the development initiatives, bridging the gap between her tribal community and the outside world. Bdimbuli learned about new agricultural practices and introduced sustainable farming methods to her fellow people. She emphasized the importance of education and convinced families to send their children to the schools. She taught women to attend different meetings and get new ideas. They learnt about different Government schemes and Acts like MGNREGS, Forest Rights Act. Through Forest Rights Act Bdimbuli and 33 families in her village has ownership of land which was of significant value for them. This ownership empowered them with a sense of autonomy and control over resources. And allowed to make decisions regarding the use of the land, crop selection, and agricultural practices. They also have MGNREGS job card and the work in proper wage. Along with rights they also understood to protect the forest from fire and to take care of land.

Bdimbuli emerged as a bridge between tradition and progress, ensuring that her people retained their cultural identity while embracing positive change. She wants the children to study more as well to protect forest. Today at the age of 60 she also wants to learn new things, new laws. Through her unwavering determination and belief in the power of knowledge, she turned a chapter of change in the lives of her people, leaving a legacy of inspiration for generations to come

Empowered against odds





## Sharada: Leader among Leaders

Sharada has proven to be an excellent example of a Community leader who overcame her personal grief to become a crusader for her community's rights. Belonging to the Kondh tribe and born in Jurakhaman village of Urladani Panchayat in Kalahandi district of Odisha, she has played a role that depicts the power of conviction and commitment.

Like any others in the village, Sharada's childhood was marked by poverty, deprivation, and all the problems associated with it. But her inner urge to learn could not prevent her from studying. She was the only girl in her village who was going to school, which is around four kilometres from her village, which she had to walk alone. She continued her study in spite of all the hindrances, which included seeing a tiger on the road. With all the effort, she could study up to the 10th standard. But by the time she completed 10th grade, around 16 girls from her village were going to school. At the age of 17, Sharada got married according to community tradition. Unfortunately, her husband died, leaving Sharada and her two daughters when she was only 23 years old.

None of these setbacks could kill her indomitable spirit; they just propelled her to fight for her community's rights. Motivated and supported by Seba Jagat, Sharada, transformed herself into an effective grassroots leader, mobilising the tribal community to assert themselves and demand their rights. As a woman denied access to familial property and left penniless, Sharada recognises the importance of women's ownership of resources like land and motivates tribal women to fight for land rights. She has also been instrumental in the setting up of Jailaitamu Mahilamandal (a network of tribal women), which addresses contentious issues in the villages. Sharada created awareness about health and sanitation among women, which she found to be at a very primitive stage.

As time passed, with different exposures, Sharada became a Member of Ekta Parishad, the largest network of Civil Society Organisations for the Land Right, and was also chosen as an Ekta Parishad activist. With the newly acquired knowledge through Ekta Parishad Sharada slowly transformed her into a dynamic and effective leader. She took up the challenge of changing the mind-sets and behaviours of her community and has been instrumental in increasing their access to government schemes through providing information. She has been instrumental in increasing Institutional births and child immunisation, improving the nutrition and health of mothers and children, and ensuring the access of eligible beneficiaries to different pension schemes. Her way of counselling is really effective because Sarada counsels beneficiaries as well as family members. With all her leadership qualities, she became a ward member and the Naib Sarapanch of her Panchayat.

Sharada has proven herself not just as a leader but as a leader of leaders, setting an example of what a seemingly hapless Adivasi woman could achieve.



## Silent Steward with Loud Impact



Duked is a small village in Uraladani Panchayat of Kalahandi district inhabited mostly by Gond tribe. Ama Patra who lives in Duked, stands as an example of empowerment within her indigenous Gond community. Ama was born in Makadkhola village in a forest dwelling agricultural family. From her mother and grandmother she learned the values of nurturing communities, fostering environmental sustainability, and preserving cultural heritage with interconnectedness with nature. Though had a little school education up to 5<sup>th</sup> standard but she came to her in laws house with deep rooted traditions and wisdom passed down through generations.

During the discussion Ama sitting at the entry of her modest home suddenly lost in reflection, retracing the footsteps of her life since the day of her marriage. The journey began with learning new things from her in law, standing together through thick and thin, compromise and understanding. It was nothing new. She had seen her mother and grandmother doing this. Her mother in law helped and taught her doing household work. Motherhood, an unexpected but delightful chapter, had brought a new dimension to her identity. The challenges, too, had left their mark. Ama remembered the times of shared worries and reassurances. Through financial ups and downs, health scares, and the inevitable challenges of life, they stood united.

With a soft-spoken nature and a genuine concern for the well-being of others, she gained the trust and respect of the women in her community. Ama initiated a women's group that became a catalyst for change. This collective of diverse talents and backgrounds became a powerful force under her guidance. Ama's approach was inclusive, with humbleness, ensuring that every woman's voice was heard and valued. Through dialogue and shared experiences, the women discovered their common goals and aspirations.

Ama understood prioritized the health of the women in her community. Awareness campaigns, health check-ups, and discussions on hygiene not only improved physical well-being but also fostered a sense of collective care. Ama advocated for education as a tool for empowerment. The women's group organized awareness programs, ensuring that all children get education and it became accessible to those who had previously been denied the opportunity. Ama's leadership extended to community engagement. Under her leadership, the women's group actively participated in community development programmes, addressing issues such as sanitation environmental conservation, agriculture development, organising feeding programme in school. They recognized the importance of solidarity during difficult times. The women's group, under her guidance, became a support network, providing emotional and practical assistance during crises.

Ama's approach to empowerment is not just about achieving individual success but fostering a sense of unity and strength within the community. Her humility served as an inspiration, breaking down barriers and creating an environment where every woman felt valued. Ama's humility is the cornerstone of her leadership style, a harmonious blend of independence and togetherness



Strength and resilience





## Discovering Wisdom, Grace and Resilience

Annapurna is a resilient and determined woman whose very name echoes divinity of food and nourishment, is named after the benevolent provider of sustenance for all living beings on Earth. Annapurna's life journey embodies the essence of a natural leader who, against the backdrop of changing environmental conditions and external challenges, emerged as an example of hope for her community. Hers is a narrative woven with threads of leadership, humbleness, and a profound connection to the land, as she emerges not only as a leader in her community but as a symbol of sustenance and empowerment.

She was born 60 years ago in a forest setting agricultural village in Kandhamal district. Born in a Gountia family (agricultural head of village) from a young age, Annapurna displayed an innate connection with the land and its people. Raised in a close-knit agricultural family, she imbibed the values of hard work, and above all, the importance of family bonds. Her parents and grandparents understood the importance of education and at home she was able to read and write. She remembers how the teacher used to take 50 paisa per month.

At the age of 16 she got married in Harlanga village of Kalahandi. She remembers during her marriage gold was 250 per tola ( approximately 11.7gms) and slowly she got integrated into her husband's social circles and family, adapting to new traditions, customs, and social expectations which was both enriching and challenging for her. She learnt household work and with passing time she became mother of 4 children.

As Annapurna grew older, she witnessed the struggles faced by the women in her community. Inspired by her upbringing, she embarked on a journey to bring positive change. She started by fostering awareness about women's rights and health within her community. Through informal gatherings and discussions, she discussed with other women about the challenges. When Annapurna learned about Self Help Group she motivated women of her village to form a SHG which became a platform to empower women, by providing them with a platform to voice their concerns, share experiences, and collectively work towards solutions. As a next step they started promoting the social and economic empowerment of women through skill development, education, and the creation of opportunities for income generation. Annapurna and other members created awareness about health and hygiene practices within the community, leading to improved health outcomes and a reduction in preventable diseases. They taught women about reproductive health care system which is a less discussed topic in the community. They took many activities including strengthening education of children, equal wage for women, facilitating access to financial resources, equipping women with skills that enhance their employability, income-generating capabilities, and overall quality of life, facilitating the dissemination of information about government-sponsored social welfare programs, ensuring that eligible community members can avail themselves of the benefits, establishing a support system within the community for handling crises such as natural disasters, health emergencies.

Armed with wisdom passed down from her ancestors and a deep understanding of the land, Annapurna began advocating for sustainable agriculture practices within the community. Her vision was not only to secure the present well-being of her people but also to ensure a bountiful future for generations to come. Her compassionate nature and ability to listen made her a trusted mediator in resolving conflicts, further solidifying her role as the community's natural leader.

As the years passed, Annapurna's impact reached far beyond her village. She became a respected figure in regional and national forums, advocating for sustainable practices and environmental conservation. Her story became an inspiration for other communities facing similar challenges.

Now, at the age of 60, Annapurna continues to lead her community with unwavering dedication. Her legacy is not just the thriving landscape around her village but the empowered and united community that stands as a testament to the transformative power of one woman's vision and leadership in harmony with nature.



## Bhagya's Journey of Unity and Empowerment



Connecting with Nature

Rangapadar situated in the border of Kalahandi district towards Kandhamal is a small tribal village at the edge of forest. Villagers engaged in traditional farming practices, cultivating crops that thrived in the rich soil. The forest, in turn, provided a source of sustenance. The villagers of Rangapadar lived a life deeply rooted in their tribal heritage. Elders passed down age-old traditions. Bhagya aged around 40, like many women in Rangapadar, faced the daily challenges that came with being a member of the Gond tribe. Limited access to education and economic opportunities had long kept the women of the village in the shadows. However, Bhagya has a vision for change, a vision that would enlighten the lives of her fellow villagers. Bhagya was born in a nearby village Mandalpadar in Kandhamal district. When she was 8 years old, her mother died while giving birth to a sister. The little opportunity she had to go to school was stopped after her mother's death. Bhagya's life took a significant turn with this profound loss. In the absence of the guiding force that was her mother, Bhagya and her sister found herself thrust into a world where responsibility became her constant companion. With her mother's passing, Bhagya's role in the household transformed. She took on various responsibilities, diligently managing household chores and supporting her father in cultivating the family's small patch of land along with taking care of the small child. The once playful and carefree days of childhood were replaced by a sense of duty and a deep understanding between their modest homestead and the surrounding forest. But there was another tragedy in her life. Her younger sister died at the age of two. Even now she blames herself and said maybe I could not take care of her properly. Her small but dedicated efforts contributed to the well-being of the family. Together with her father, Bhagya learned the nuances of traditional farming, recognizing the importance of sustainable practices along with household work. At the age of 16 following traditional norms her father got her married in Rangapadar village.

Bhagya's life took a different turn. Once again she got her mother back. Her mother-in-law treated her as her own daughter with unconditional love and support. There was a sense of unity, understanding, and mutual respect, ultimately strengthening the family bonds and creating a supportive foundation for generations to come. Bhagya felt herself lucky enough to have family like this. Her mother-in-law shared responsibilities with Bhagya in managing household affairs, agricultural work, or supporting each other in their individual work with utmost care.

In the midst of her daily responsibilities and motherhood of 3 children, Bhagya had a dream. A dream of not just survival but of wellbeing for the women of Rangapadar. The skills she acquired in managing the household, supporting agriculture, and understanding the forest became the foundation for a vision she had yet to fully articulate which lay the groundwork for the creation of the Subhashree Mahila Samiti—the Self-Help Group that later transformed the lives of the women in Rangapadar. They acquired new skill of leadership, discussing about their issues, problems and taking up new initiatives like organic agriculture, mushroom cultivation, increasing millet production, asserting the land right. Even the Mahilamandal took a lead role in closing the illegal liquor shop in their village.

In the period Bhagya also got her son married and following the legacy of her mother-in-law she too treated her daughter-in-law like her own daughter. Bhagya is an inspiration not only within Rangapadar but also in neighboring tribal communities. Her leadership and determination showcased the potential for positive change when a community, particularly its women, unites towards a common goal.





## Dhanmati: Twilight in the Dawn of Rasipujupadar

Dhanmati literally means a person who brings wealth, and, true to her name, she distributes the fragrance of love, affection, and wisdom not only in her family but also in the community. And to everyone's surprise, the community also accepted daughter-in-law like Dhanmati as real wealth. Born into a traditional forest-dependent Gond tribal family in the hilly Bamni village of Kondhamal district, neither her parents nor she understood the importance of studying, so they didn't send her to school. Like other girls in the village, she was also engaged in household work. But among all the girls, Dhanmati was a little different due to her humble and simple behaviour. Though very much a favourite of the community, it has not been easy going for Dhanamati till date.

At the age of 18, her father got her married to Bidyadhar of Nagjhari village in Urladani Panchayat of Kalahandi district. Dhanmati did not think much, as she knew that like her friends, her mother, and relatives, she would also do the same work at her in-laws house. But soon after her marriage, there was a plan in the village to leave for a new place where they were already cultivating. As per the plan in the family, young Dhanamati and Bidyadhar also went there, and a new struggle started in their lives. The new place was a waterlogged area, and they had to construct the house along with cooking, cleaning, and doing agricultural work. Dhanmati remembers that many nights they were not able to sleep because rainwater and the water level also rose from under the soil. In a very hard situation, they settled in Rasipujupadar. While sharing the memories, Dhanmati sometimes cries and also laughs at times. She also remembers that, as there was no bridge in the rainy season, people who could not cross the nearby Budha River also stayed with them when they saw the houses. Dhanmati and others say how they were accommodating the passers-by when they did not even have enough space and food for days together until the water level went down. There was another problem arising, as they didn't have ownership of the land they were cultivating, which was inside a forest and they were afraid if someday they will lose the land

But instead of getting frightened, they stayed stronger, as it was their life and livelihood and they had nowhere else to go. In the meantime, they also formed a self-help group and started saving. They were also searching for ways to secure their livelihood. When they learned about the historic Forest Rights Act, they applied according to procedure. Though some of them did not believe, they felt they had nothing to lose if they applied. Their hard work in the past gave them the result. In the year 2012, 23 families got land, and Dhanmati also got 2 acres of land. For them, it was not only land; it was their life source, their livelihood, everything. It was their dignity as well as their honour. They did not celebrate her happiness; rather, there were tears in her eyes.

But in her personal life, Dhanmati was a bit sad as she did not have a child, which her young co-sister (her husband's younger brother's wife) understood. She told her not to worry and gave her a child to adopt. Many people told Lalita (her co-sister) not to give the child to her as she would not be able to take proper care of the child. But Lalita, who had seen her elder sister's selfless service and understood the sorrow, did not listen to anybody. Both the co-sisters discussed it, and, having faith in God, Lalita gave her child to Dhanmati, who, with utmost care and love, started raising the baby, whom they named Jaydev.

But Dhanmati continued to work in community development, engaging with issues in the villages in all the possible ways she could. She has been instrumental in enhancing access to education for children and health services. She also started looking after the work of the livelihood mission and recently started a farmer-producer organisation.



## Dishanti Api :Nurturing the Earth

Khaliyamunda is a small tribal village in Uraldani Panchayat in Kalahandi district. Uraldani is historically renowned as the birth place of tribal martyr and freedom fighter Rindo Majhi who died fighting against the British in 1855. The village situated within the embrace of trees and foliage, paints a picture of ancient wisdom. The dwellers in the village are simple and harmonious with the natural surroundings. The forest setting is not just the backdrop of Khaliyamunda village it is an integral part of the village's identity, shaping community's existence and contributing to their secluded home.

Dishanti Majhi, ( fondly called as Dishanti Api- daughter in law , by elders in village) around 45 years old, a woman of Panga Kondh Community stays in Khaliyamunda village and her indigenous community called the forest, their home for generations. Dishanti's life is deeply rooted in the traditions and customs of her people, but she developed a burning desire to bring positive change to her community .Despite the simplicity of life in the forested village, there are constant challenges and struggles which Dishanti observed her community faced—limited access to healthcare, the need for better educational opportunities, limited livelihood option. She understood with her inherent wisdom that forest-dwelling communities face threats like deforestation, and resource exploitation. Climate change worsens challenges, disrupting traditional livelihoods and biodiversity. Limited access to education and healthcare perpetuates poverty in their community.

With a want to resolve, Dishanti gathered a group of like-minded women from her community and formed a Self-Help Group (SHG). The SHG became a platform for these indigenous women to share their experiences, skills, and ideas. Dishanti believed that education was the key to empowerment, so the group decided to prioritize it. There was a child labour school opened in their village where children who had never seen the inside of a classroom began to learn the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic and Dishanti herself took on the role of a motivator, using her limited motivation capacity to mobilise parents to send their children to school.

Realizing the need of good health was essential for a thriving community, Dishanti and the SHG members motivated community to go for immunisation for pregnant and lactating women, for institutional delivery, and educate the villagers about hygiene and nutrition.

Dishanti's vision extended to transforming agriculture practices as well through attending different training and meetings. Their indigenous community had long relied on traditional farming methods. Dishanti learned organic and eco-friendly approaches. With the support of the SHG, the villagers started experimenting with crop diversification and sustainable farming practices, leading to increased productivity and improved livelihoods. They learned biochar making and other sustainable methods of organic agriculture.

Through education, health, and agriculture initiatives, Dishanti and her SHG not only improved the lives of their community members but also set an example for other indigenous groups facing similar challenges.

The journey of Dishanti was not without its challenges. However, her perseverance and the positive impact of the initiatives gradually won over skeptics, and the community began to see the tangible benefits of the transformations taking place. Dishanti's story became a beacon of hope, illustrating how the dedication of humble indigenous woman could spark a transformation that rippled through the generations, leaving a lasting impact on her people and their way of life.



Struggle to success



## Soul of Forest



Surrounded by a sea of green, Pipadi village in M.Rampur Block of Kalahandi is home to the resilient community of Kondh people, intimately connected and deeply rooted in its traditions to the land and forest. Drupati, an indomitable woman was born into an indigenous Kondh family that had known the ways of the forest and agriculture for generations. Her parents taught her the ancient art of cultivating the land and extracting resources from the forest sustainably. Life in Pipadi village is simple but harmonious, as the people lived in sync with nature, relying on it for their food, shelter, and livelihood. Drupati, despite the hardships that came with a life in poverty, got comfort in the vast expanse of the forest. She learned the knowledge for wild fruits, tubers, and medicinal plants, mastering the art of survival in the heart of nature.

Drupati was born in Jakabahali village and got married in Pipadi at the age of fifteen. Drupati remembers how life was hard that time. They used rely heavily on the resources provided by the forest for sustenance. However, the availability of these resources was not always predictable, leading to periods of scarcity. They depended on the forest for not only food but also for medicinal plants, and tools. Drupati remembers how food was different at that time. Rice was not plentifully available. While comparing present food scenario, she remembers they were eating mahua, tamarind seeds, khajur seeds with ragi, boiled sal seeds, maize, mango kernel, nettle seeds. She even reminds how they were eating gruel of cooked rice repeatedly after drying the cooked rice and cooking it again and again. Living in close proximity to wildlife had both its opportunities and dangers. While they hunted for food, they also faced the constant threat of predatory animals. Protecting livestock and crops from wildlife posed ongoing challenges. Life though simple was hard. In the absence of modern medical facilities, they were relying on traditional healing practices. Knowledge of medicinal plants and the skills of tribal healers were crucial for maintaining the health and well-being of the community. Any imbalance in the ecosystem or environmental changes could have a direct impact on their way of life as the environment is not just a source of resources but an integral part of their cultural, social, and economic identity.

Drupati, with her weathered hands and a heart full of resilience, faced the challenges of poverty with unwavering determination and from a young woman she became a mother and mature. Drupati was not just known for her struggle against poverty; she had also earned respect for her compassionate nature. The village, with limited access to healthcare, often turned to Drupati in times of need. Her innate knowledge of medicinal plants and traditional healing methods made her a trusted figure in Pipadi

Once a woman in labor needed assistance, and as the nearest medical facility was miles away, Drupati, with her understanding of childbirth, and with the knowledge she earned through little support she did to her sister in laws at home during their delivery time, rushed and assisted the woman in delivering her child. Word of Drupati's skills in assisting childbirth spread, and she found herself in demand within the village. In the midst of her daily struggles, Drupati discovered another calling—assisting women in childbirth. With the nearest medical facility miles away and roads a luxury the village couldn't afford, Drupati became the de facto midwife of Pipadi. Her hands, weathered by toil, cradled new borns, and her calming presence eased the anxieties of expectant mothers.

Hardship to hope





## Hiran Nani: Cultivating empowerment among women

Hiran Dalapati, popularly known as Hirannani (the way to address elder sister), of Harlanga village in Urladani Panchayat is a woman deeply rooted in tradition yet reaching for the future, is cultivating the process of empowerment among women in her community. She depicts a symbiotic relationship with the land and forest which provides sustenance.

As Hiran Nani reminisces about her childhood, her voice carries the weight of nostalgia and a deep connection to the roots that starts from Jagadapur area. Her childhood memories scratched with poverty bear the imprint of struggle, losing father at a young age, mother's second marriage and a very young age her marriage to Nabaghana in Harlanga village. There's a gentle quiver in her tone, an emotional resonance that transcends the words. She remembers how from a town area after her marriage at a very young age she came to Harlanga village surrounded by forest, without electricity. Her pattern of work changed from a concrete urban setting to land and forest based activities. Young Hiran with interest continued her new role and slowly started liking her new assignment. With passing time Hiran became mother of four children.

The experience of the hardships of limited resources and financial struggle, born from the difficulties made Hiran empathetic which became a powerful force for positive change. The life inside the forest was based on mutual help. The shared experience of poverty and struggle created a sense of solidarity among the women. Apart from supporting each other in an informal manner they started a Self Help Group and Hiran became a leader and the saving started from a palmful rice from every day that they take to cook and 1 rupee as they could only save that much. Initially their saving was given only to families who are in food scarcity but slowly with increased saving they supported other activities and also got involved in different activities in support of Govt.

But their self help activities did not stop in saving and credit. Hiran as well many others members understood that one of the major problem women face is due to lack of education. So they started sensitising the villagers to send the children to school especially the girl children. Hiran Nani remembers how she along with other team members were going to different villages walking 5 to 10 kms to conduct meeting with women and telling them to send the children to school. They were also discussing about different kind of violence women face. Soon they formed an association of women SHGs. So that together they can fight against injustice women face.

Today, Hiran Nani reaching at the age 60 is standing between memories and possibility, navigating the crossroads of reflection and anticipation. She cherishes the mosaic of achievements, and earned laughter lines as well the struggles, hurdles. Regularly still she goes to forest for her livelihood, and tells the younger generation to stand for themselves. The women's cooperative, now a busy hub of activity, stands as a testament to Hiran's and her co-travellers unwavering commitment. The world needs strong women like Hiran Nani, who will lift and build others, both tender and fierce, women of indomitable will.



Despite her own struggles, she took this role with a sense of duty, recognizing the importance of supporting one another in their shared journey through life. Slowly she got recognised by Government as a traditional birth attendant. Drupati is not able to count properly how many deliveries she has assisted but remembers vaguely it must be two hundred.

In her personal life Drupati had lost her 3 daughters and survived with only son. Her personal grief and emotional expression were suppressed due to the immediate need to continue working and supporting the remaining family members. Unfortunately, there were many mothers around her who have faced the tragedy of losing their children. The shared understanding of grief and the importance of compassion in the face of loss contributed to build more empathetic and supportive communities and societal support systems.

With time passing she learned about MahilaMandal , which was a new idea . It was not only saving but for her it is to foster collective support, economic empowerment, and social cohesion. They formed a group and women with shared interests or needs come together to, share knowledge, and support each other. In a remote forest area, where external support was limited, the social support network provided by a self-help group was particularly valuable.

The situation was changing in their village. The lights of development came to their village, accessibility and connectivity improved, education, health facilities developed. There were new avenues of livelihood. There was no starvation in village. Drupati too changed with passing time. She led the community in sending the children school, advised people to go to hospital. But her connection to forest and land did not change. She knew it is their mother. She sensitised the young people for protection of forest.

Today at the age of sixty Drupati is active, says young girls to be strong, to recognize the importance of preserving cultural diversity and the environment. She knows real strength is in unity, compassion, and the intimate connection between humanity and nature.



*Rising stronger*



# Rewriting own destiny

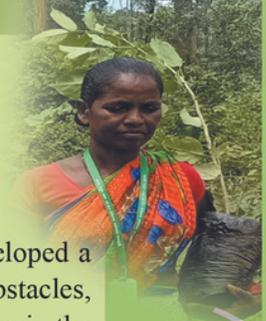
extended beyond the boundaries of individual households. This collective effort allowed them to pool resources, share experiences and offer emotional support to one another. Together, they formed a network of strength and resilience, demonstrating that the collective power of determined individuals can bring about positive change. They organized community initiatives to address shared challenges. They established support groups, where they could openly discuss their experiences and share advice. Together, they explored opportunities for skill development and financial independence, empowering each other to break free from the chains of adversity.

.As there was a water problem in the village, they got together and dug a well. They advocated for education, health, women's land right, Individual forest Right, Community Forest Right. Even Mathura became a member in a Farmer Producer organisation. Through their combined efforts, they not only supported each other but also contributed to the broader societal shift towards empowerment and equality

Mathura's fearlessness not only transformed her own life but also had a positive effect on the community around her. She became a source of inspiration, encouraging others to confront their own challenges with courage. She highlighted the strength that can be found within, even in the face of frightening burdens, and how the choice can lead to a brighter, more empowered future beyond the boundaries of her forest home. Her journey from a victim of circumstance to a community leader exemplifies the strength that lies within individuals and communities when they unite for a common purpose.



## Wings of Self - Confidence



Exemplifying resilience

Mathura faced hardships and challenges from the very beginning of her life which developed a strong sense of resilience within her and to be adaptive to difficult circumstances, overcome obstacles, and to be strong in the face of adversity. Mathura was born in a Dalit family in Gadadi village in the heart of a dense forest. Born in an agriculture family from the childhood she was expected to contribute to various chores on the farm, such as planting, harvesting, and taking care to livestock without access to education and inadequate access to nutritious food,

Mathura's journey began in hardship. At a tender age, soon after her menstruation she was married off to a much older, already married man, a consequence of her father's decision. Before she could dream of a future, her future, dreams were overshadowed by the responsibilities of an early marriage.

Life with her husband was far from what she had imagined. The age gap and cultural differences led to a relationship marked by cruelty and abuse. The abuse strained her emotional and mental well-being and she tolerated the suffering in the hope that things will change. Within the period she became mother of two children. She had a hope that the children will change their father's behaviour. But the situation remained same. Feeling trapped and desperate for a way out, Mathura made the difficult decision to leave her abusive marriage and sought refuge in the safety of her mother's house. She gathered the courage to escape the clutches of her oppressive marriage and surprisingly her mother in law supported her. She remembers her mother in law gave her 40 rupees which was her total saving saying to get out the house and lead a better life in her mother's place. The decision to leave behind the familiar yet toxic environment was not an easy one, but she knew it was crucial for her well-being and the safety of her two young children and herself.

Despite the relief of escaping the toxic relationship, Mathura faced a new set of challenges upon returning home. Her mother, a resilient woman who had weathered many storms in life, welcomed her daughter but couldn't shield her from the harsh realities that awaited who was struggling with financial burdens of her own. During that time her brother left his wife for another lady and sister in law left leaving her daughters. And Mathura had to take care of everything.

Mathura was not afraid of the burden. She took on multiple works, working long hours to ensure that her family's needs were met. She worked as wage labour, collected forest produces, did agricultural work and managed the family. Her courage to shoulder the burden of responsibility demonstrated a strength that went beyond the physical capacity. For years she did everything. Her mother witnessing her daughter's struggle, was a pillar of strength. Together, they formed a resilient team, facing the hardships with courage. As Mathura was rebuilding her life, her bravery became an example of hope. Mathura's journey became a testament to the strength that emerges from adversity, the power of familial bonds, and the indomitable spirit within her determined to break free from the chains of abuse.

Her elder son started supporting the family at a very early age as he saw his mother's struggle. Mathura was sad she was not able to educate her son properly. But she is able to make her daughter pursue her studies. Slowly she took part in all community level programmes. As Mathura worked tirelessly to overcome the burdens in her life, she discovered a supportive community of women in who shared similar struggles. Mathura connected with other women who had faced adversity, abuse, or financial hardship. They realized that by joining forces, they could create a support system that





## Phula: Swimming against the Tide

Jurakhaman is a tribal village in Urladani Panchayat of M.Rampur Block of Kalahandi district in Odisha State. The village is situated 3 kms from Panchayat headquarters Urladani and 12 kms from Block headquarters M. Rampur. It is a hilly village resided by kondhtribals along with few Dalit families having a total population of 467 having 125 household. The main occupation of the villagers are agriculture. The other income sources are collection of non timber forest produces, wage labour. The village is having 118 job card holders. Jurakhaman literally meaning dense forest village was settled in 1955 by Forest Department to protect the forest. Through Forest Rights Act 54 families in Jurakhaman received 324.23 acres of land among whom 3 were women headed.

PhulaMajhi, aged around 40, lives in Jurakhaman village. Phula became a widow around 15 years ago while her husband went to collect honey. Her husband died, leaving five children—three girls and two boys—behind, the eldest being around 7 years old and the youngest less than 3 months old. This sudden accidental death left her in such a dilemma that she did not know whether to mourn her husband's death or think of her and her children's future. She was scared to think of her future because she did not understand how to manage the present. She was not able to understand that she would cry herself or feed her crying children. To feed her breastfed child, she also needed to eat. Looking at her children's faces, Phula gathered courage.

Born into a Kondh tribal family, Phula had seen her parents and relatives working in the agricultural field, but she did not work much as she married at a young age and also to take care of her five children. Her parents also named her Phula, which means flower. While Phula was going out to work, her elder children were taking care of her younger children. The neighbours and relatives were also helping her. She got acquainted with the hard work. But life had other plans for her. In the event of a disease, her elder son passed away; perhaps she could not take proper care. She felt that life had no meaning and wished to be released from the pain or to join her child. But she was also the mother of four other children. And with the passing days, she started taking care of her shattered family.

She did agriculture, worked as a wage labourer, and collected NTFP to run her family. Phula applied for land through FRA along with others in the village and also got a patta FRA for 3 acres of land, though it took around three years to get the patta, and in the convergence process she got other facilities. With the passing of time, her children grew up.

But all these sorrows could not reduce the indomitable enthusiasm of her heart. She became a member of the village self-help group. Now Phula has started a farmer-producer organisation. At times Phula cries, remembering her son and her husband, and in the next moment she starts working. With a pale smile on her face, Phula is always active, be it household work or community engagement work.

In spite of her personal grief, sorrow, struggles Phula has proved as an example for others



## Rebuilding the Future



Nuadei Patra of Rashipujupadar in Urladani Panchayat seems to be an inspiration even for younger generation. At the age of around 70 her smile is adorable the people around her with joy and love. Born in a Gond family in Belghar of Kondhamal district her childhood was no way different from others in her village marked with deprivation, hard work and poverty. Nuadei is not able to count her age but she remembers white people coming to their village. She remembers fondly how after her menstruation there was her marriage plan and she came to Nagjhari village for three months before her marriage to support her in laws (a tradition that existed that time).

Nuadei's life took a different turn after her marriage. Though initially she did not know much about their landed property but with time she understood most of their land is mortgaged due to a police case about which she didn't know.

Young Nuadei understood her primary duty is to bring back the land because that was the only way to feed the entire family. Though the amount of mortgage was within 50 rupees but that was also difficult on her part to earn. She remembers how she used to go to Urladani to work, to sell puffed rice, milk for a small amount of money.

A major problem was there was a perennial river to get out of the village to reach Urladani and in the rainy season it was really tough for the villagers to get out of village. Sometimes it happens villagers has to stay out of village days together till water reduces and it was more difficult for pregnant women, sick people. She remembers how in big cooking utensils they used to make sick people cross the flooded river.

As time passed by young Nuadei who was now a middle aged woman and also head of house felt there is not enough space for people in her extended family with her brother and sister in laws. So they planned to move to another area and planned to move to the other side of river. It was mostly to give more space to new families and also if they can have some families in the other side people can stay there when there is more water in the river.

A new struggle started Initially three family decided to come there. As they were cultivating rasi (Til) there, the area got an automatic name Rashipujupadar. But the new place was no easy to stay. Inside dense forest with small children three families started to stay. They had to clean the area, prepare cooking place along with agriculture work. Nuadei reminds how the ox and other domestic animals in a circle were sleeping around them and guarding

Surykanti a young woman remembers I was only 7 years old and once I had to stay alone as all the family members went out and could not come back. The number of families gradually increased. But struggle continued with the obstacle put by forest department on one side and internally to manage the household. In rainy season there used to be water inside the chula (cooking place), even in wet land the small cots go down.. But Nuadei and others did not lose the heart. With the historical Forest Right Act they applied for land and in 2011, twenty three families of Rashipujupadar got 32 acres of land . Their struggle continued with many successes.

Nuadei while praising good old days also praises the modern days where they are not afraid of any one as they know the law, they own the land. She advocates girls to study. She is not against new technology of mobile phone, vehicle, and mixer grinder rather thanks it made there work easier While talking to Nuadei one can feel the positive vibes she has. She talks her struggle with a smile, the best make up one can have

Redefining possibilities





## Inspirational Journey from a humble beginning

Today, Sudanti's name is synonymous with hope, resilience, and the power of one person's commitment to making a difference. She stands as a testament to the idea that even in the face of adversity, the seeds of change can be sown, nourished, and ultimately blossom into a brighter future for all.

Sudanti was among 10 brothers and sisters from a sculpture family. Her father had many skills which included making statue of God and Goddess during different festival, making gold and silver ornament, paintings and pictures, even he knew little bit of astrology. But the only thing he did not know was how to earn money. On top of that, his alcoholic habit was making the situation worse. In the poor economic condition they were forced sell the land and were shifted to another area. But her mother was taking care of the large family and in this adverse situation she could study till 5th standard.

In a young age Sudanti got married in Kurupadar village. Marriage brought new responsibilities for young Sudanti. Apart from the household chores she had to take care of cattle in the house, agricultural work. Her first child died at infant stage another child at 7 years of age. She also feels she could not take proper care neither could take to hospital to her ill child. At one side Sudanti was sad for her two children and also was thankful that two of her children survived. But God had another plan. Her husband died when her younger child was only 3 years old. It was as if the sky fell on her head. Sudanti was helpless as family's livelihood being tied to the land and forest. She was emotionally, socially and financially challenged, a woman stood single with two children facing the harsh reality of raising two children on her own in her late 20s without her husband. But he did not break down. Instead of succumbing to despair she opt to live for her children .Seeing the faces of the two of her own little children, she was determined. Her unwavering faith in God gave her courage. With little more than a small plot of land and a determination to make a difference, Sudanti turned to agriculture, rearing domestic animals, collecting forest products to earn a livelihood. She says I never kept my children starved, I worked hard.

Slowly she learned about the concept of Self Help Group. Initially she was indifferent as her burden was more than enough. Slowly she developed to like the concept and idea and she understood that it is a right platform for women like her to share ideas, discuss problems and support each other. Sudanti took the leadership and formed Laxminarayani Self Help Group. Through the self Help Group they started saving. Initially the saving amount was very low and slowly they started increasing the amount. They started giving loan during emergency to members and their dependence on money lender reduced. When the saving money becomes more they a distribute a certain percentage among members. This helps them to buy new things .Sudanti through her struggle understood the importance of education for women and girls and she discussed with mothers to send the children to school. She also learnt different forms of violence women face, health needs of women, which she explained to others. Slowly Sudanti became a leader . Through thoughtful and humble leadership she became a symbol of resilience and determination, inspiring those around her to believe in the possibility of a better future. Today not only the women but also the male folk also come for her advice both in community and personal matter.

Sudanti's journey from a humble beginning to become a community leader showcases the transformative power of determination, turning sad realities into an opportunity for growth. She stands as a testament to the idea that even in the face of adversity, the seeds of change can be sown, nourished, and ultimately blossom into a brighter future for all



## She turns challenges into success



Stories of Success

Sitting in front of a laptop, mobile phone in hand near ear, eyes on newspaper, talking to a person sitting in front, sometimes one may not be able to understand what she is doing exactly, but that Sunita is, a multi-tasking person to whom no power in the world can resist to reach the goal. Working in a grassroots voluntary organization like Seba Jagat she has made the mission of Seba Jagat her mission. Of course service, kindness, love: the words were not new for Sunita. Going to religious places, attending Sunday prayers she learnt to be kind and to love others.

Ms Kaushalya and Mr Simon though were never rich but they knew the value of education, good upbringing of children. So in spite of poverty they gave good education to all their five children. Born and brought up in Muding village in Kalahandi it was difficult for Sunita to come to M. Rampur everyday to attend college which is around 15 kms from her home and without a proper communication facility and agricultural parents with very little income were not able to give her enough money. She had to come college half way walking, and other half way on irregular transport service, sometimes even depending on lift. At many times early in the morning has to leave home and while getting back it becomes evening but without a single pie to buy some food. With a broad smile on face she remembers how as young adolescents they were going for paddy transplantation in groups and the little money she gets she saves for her studies. But all these difficulties could not stop her. Her parents taught her amid all the difficulties she has to study more.

During her college days Sunita used to see Seba Jagat office, used to hear little bit about Seba Jagat work which she started liking but was not directly involved. While after completing her graduation while she was offered a job by Seba Jagat her happiness knew no bounds. There were two reasons for this, first she has a likingness for Seba Jagat work and she needed some income.

After joining Seba Jagat she felt she is able to do the same things what she has learnt during prayers. Staying in remote Uraladani Panchayat working among poor forest dwelling families for developing their life and livelihood gave her inner peace and happiness. The trainings, orientations and exposure given by Seba Jagat strengthened herself, developed her leadership capacity and she slowly started taking more responsibilities in the organization and managed different projects successfully. Her commitment to cause of poor and her capacity, honesty has given her the important position of being the treasurer of the organization.

At personal level she got married and had daughter. Everything was going well and smoothly but the sudden death of her two young brothers and sisters in short time span casted a shadow of grief on the family. As if that was not enough she lost her sister in law who was a moral strength to her. Along with taking care of her mother who lost two children she has to take care of her old mother in law who lost her eldest daughter. All these she was doing along with upbringing her own small daughter.

The sudden deaths in family frightened her to the core. But she did not sit back for a day also. While bringing her brother's body from Surat on the way she was calling and telling her colleagues about the work and assignment. She knew she has to be strong and she has to take the lead. She felt Seba Jagat is her extended family. With a deep faith on God and taking everything as God's wish she became stronger.

Now Sunita's work is not limited to Kalahandi. She also looks after Koraput and Balangir programmes. Her mission is to help the not so privileged community. Be it a agriculture development project, health project or a cycle rally or an awareness programme for adolescents she is there leading the programme.

Sunita has learnt there will be challenges in life but she also learned to turn these challenges to success.





## Seeds of Empowerment

Surendri Majhi, belongs to Kondh community lives in a remote village, Udegiri in M.Rampur Block. Her village is surrounded by lush forests and fertile land, but the community struggled with poverty and lacked access to modern resources.

In her village, agriculture was the primary source of livelihood, but traditional farming methods led to low yields and dependency on external resources. The community faced challenges like erratic weather patterns and a lack of knowledge about sustainable farming practices. Surendri saw the need for change .

Surendri started by educating herself about organic farming and sustainable agriculture practices. She attended workshops and training sessions, gathered information that could transform the way her community approached farming. Armed with newfound knowledge, she began to experiment with organic farming on a small piece of land she has. As her crops yielded better results, Surendri gathered the women of her village and formed a women's group. The group, named "MaaDukriSHG," aimed to empower women through sustainable farming practices and financial independence. Surendri and the members of the group started learning techniques such as composting, natural pest control, seed selection, priming, and crop rotation. The women also learned about the benefits of cultivating indigenous crops that were better suited to the local climate and soil conditions. Not to limit themselves only to livelihood Surendri and the group took lead in sending the children to school, developed the understanding of health and nutritional services and started accessing them. They not only contributed to the economic well-being of their families but also gained respect and recognition in the community. In personal life Surendri has sent all her children to school and gave them good education

Surendri has not only transformed her own life but had become an example of change, proving that sustainable agriculture and community empowerment could go hand in hand. She has been an inspiration for others to build a better, more sustainable future for their communities.



## Rajani : Eyes on the stars and feet on Earth



A look at Rajani`s face gives an impression that some kind of sadness is hidden within in spite of a smile. Rajani was born in Terchapala village of Kalahandi district in a Kondh tribal family. She studied up to 10th standard, and according to family tradition, she got married in Ainlapali village at the age of 16. As she was the eldest among 5 children her parents also wanted her to get married, thinking they had the duty of raising the other four children also. Life moved on smoothly for Rajani. She also had two daughters.

But everything changed suddenly when her husband, Bishnu, died from a snake bite. Rajani did not know what to do. On one side is the loss of her husband, and on the other is her and her daughter's future.

In the family, there was her mother-in-law, who was also crying, and Bishnu's elder brother, for whom the loss is also big as Bishnu was the main breadwinner. There was nobody in the family who would console her. Her parents were her main strength at the time. They wanted to take Rajani to her maternal home. But Rajni denied thinking of her mother-in-law and daughters.

Even though she was mourning—feeling grief and sorrow at the loss. She gathered courage, and all the family members started managing the entire family. Through cultivation, wage labour, and other ways, all of them were contributing to the common pool of family. In between, Rajani joined the SHG in the village as well as a volunteer in Seba Jagat. She had dreams for her daughters. She found that if she passed matriculation, she could get a job, so she joined SIOS, and with study and hard work, she passed matriculation.

When there was a selection for CRP in OLM, Rajani also applied and appeared for an interview. She remembers how, among five candidates, she stood out in the selection. Rajani became a CRP. Now she had new assignments, which she performed happily. In the meantime, both of her daughters qualified for Odisha Adarsha Vidyalaya. Now Rajani is busy with her work. Due to her helping nature, she helps people in her way in hospitals and other places where it is possible. She dreams of her elder daughter doing the GNM course so that she will be independent, earn money, and also help others.

Though Rajani does not get much time to think about herself during illness or a shortage of money, when there is a need, she feels sad and lonely. She remembers Bishnu, as he never let her do anything.

Life has taught Rajani many lessons. She has learned to deal with problems and struggles by finding a way to get out of them.



Harvesting Dreams





## The moon that illuminates the path of many women

Purnabasi lives in the heart of rural Kalahandi in a small village named Salepali, where fields stretch endlessly under the open sky. Amidst the vast expanse of green, Purnabasi is as remarkable as the crops she tends to. Purnabasi is a resilient and compassionate soul who has transformed not just her own life but also the lives of many in her community.

Purnabasi was born into a farm family in Saplalara village and was the last among the seven children. Like any agrarian family the rhythm of life followed the seasons and every dawn brought with it the promise of a new day of hard work and dedication to the land. Purnabasi's family like many agrarian communities, faced its fair share of challenges – erratic weather, fluctuating market prices, and limited access to resources. However, it was these challenges that fuelled Purnabasi's determination to bring about positive change and made her compassionate. Along with household work Purnabasi studied up to 12th standard and following her family tradition she got married in Salepali to Duryodhan who was also a kind hearted person like her. Both Purnabasi and Duryodhan were loved by their community due to their loving, kind and helping nature.

As Purnabasi completed her 12th standard she became a part time teacher in Model Cluster School. Till the position remained for she did her duty responsibly and along with teaching in school she was motivating parents to send their children to school.

In 2018 through Odisha Livelihood Mission she was selected as a Community Resource Person, among 12 other candidates where she stood first in interview. It was during the time she learned properly the concept of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) – a community-based initiative designed to empower individuals, especially women, by providing them with financial and social support. Purnabasi saw an opportunity to not only uplift herself but also to be a catalyst for change in Salepali. She gathered a group of like-minded women from the village, and together they formed the Women's Self-Help Group.

The SHG became a hub for knowledge exchange, skill development, and collective problem-solving and Purnabasi, with her background in farming, introduced sustainable agricultural practices, group farming, vegetable cultivation which she learnt from Govt and NGO training.

However, Purnabasi's vision extended beyond economic prosperity. She recognized that true empowerment comes from addressing social issues as well. The SHG actively engaged in community development, such as addressing health need of women and children through attending VHND, regular immunisation of children, promoting environmental awareness. They also took active part during Covid 19 for awareness in community. She helps the community in whatever small way she can, supporting the patients to go to hospital, linking with bank or other institutions and she is selected as gender co-ordinator among CRPs.

However her efforts were not without challenges. Scepticism and resistance initially met her initiatives, but she persevered. Through sheer dedication and the tangible impact of the work Purnabasi earned the trust and support of the community.

Purnabasi who had a humble beginning of a housewife and with her unwavering commitment and compassion has become a beacon of hope and inspiration.



## Some Learning from the community during our one - year work

Seba Jagat has been working in a participatory research action programme in 15 villages of M.Rampur, Block in Kalahandi district. The following are some learnings perceived by the team : **Perception of well being**

One of the most dominant characteristic that appeared from our study across women of all ages was that they perceive well-being as having enough food to eat. Dishanti Majhi aged around 45 says, “*khaibake paile mankale samaste dhani, khaibake neipaile, mankale dhani bi garib heisi*” which means if we have enough food to eat we can feel we are rich and if you don't have enough, even the rich will become poor. For Dishanti, the availability of food was the major concern. During the discussion she commented that in a case of unavailability of sufficient food, money loses its value. But many others were of the opinion that one should have some money in hand. They argued that having money would allow them the freedom to buy what they need or be useful in times of medical emergencies. But they also agreed on food as the primary condition. Interestingly a young girl in Jurakhman was of the opinion that illiteracy is poverty. (Murukhekagarib.)

The men and women differed slightly in their perception of well-being. While the men mainly focused on agriculture, housing, literacy and income as indicators the women went beyond this. They included utensils, credit worthiness, gold, young and dependent, vulnerable families into the category.

The major source of income in these areas is agriculture, which is supported by collection of NTFP and wage work through MGNREGA. Collection from non timber forest produces has reduced considerably during last 5 years. Agriculture continues to be the mainstay of the economy which provides around 5-6 months work. Even those who are landless and marginal landholders also they work for three to four months as wage labour in agricultural farms. And because agriculture is completely dependent on factors of climate change, any slight disorder can result in considerable change in production and inevitably, livelihood. During recent years flash flood has been a major cause for crop declining which is added with erratic and untimely rain. There was an opinion that the traditional varieties of paddy or millets have better resistance to drought which the modern variety lacks.

### Forest and Biodiversity

Forest is another major source of life and livelihood for the people. Mostly women and children are engaged in collection of forest produce. Forest has a cultural value in the life of people. The festivals are also related to forest i. e. Aam Nua, mahulnuachaarnua. Although the people are highly dependent on forests, deforestation has led to non-availability of forest produce – making people believe that forests can no longer fulfil their needs. Consequently, the youth no longer takes pride to identify themselves with forest. This was clear when a high school going student said sharply, how long we can live like monkeys in the forest. We need to earn money. We need to have education. We need facilities. The skills required to live with forests and utilise forest produce is also no longer available with the young generation. They do not know to bind broom or use siali fiber for charpoy.

- *MFP contributes a lot in Women forest dwellers life and livelihood. In our last 1 year of finding we have found that maximum earnings is coming from ( Sal seed, Mahua, siali leaves)*
- *One woman collected minimum 3 quintals of Sal Seed and sold it in Rs.2000/- per quintal . Based on this rate One village minimum earning exceeded more than Rs.4,00,000/- .It can be much more than this amount also if we will calculate maximum earning*
- *In these 15 villages total job card holders are 1211 and 181 families have received land through Forest Rights act*
- *Total number of new Claims under FRA is 206 from whom 75 Single women claimed IFR*

### Problem and vulnerability of single women:

Single women constitute one of the most vulnerable segments in the community. Women in general have limited access to rights to land and property across. But single women are more deprived and vulnerable. Most of the times, despite having rights, single women have limited access and lack control over lands as they rarely are in possession of legal documents. For women, especially single women, right over land is prohibited. As per customary practices women can get user rights, like share of the produce as a member of the family, but cannot get legal right or share of landed property with a title in their names. 72 single women were identified during the FGD. It was decided to focus on their FRA land, homestead land and employment rights

Learnings



# Learnings

Name of Plant	Type of Use	Available period	Consumption	Sale at Market
Sal	Seed	April-May		All
Leaves	July to march	All		
Mango	Fruit	April to June	All	
Mahua	Flower	March & April		All
Fruits	Jun		All	
Chaar	Sheds	April(chae)	All	All
Bahada	Fruits	April	All	All
Amla		January	All	All
Siali	Leaf	Jan to Dec		All
Fibre			All	
Kendu	Fruits	April/May		All
Sunari	Flower	Feb	All	
Haldu	Patta			All
Hadan	Patta			All
Ankel	Root & Branches		All	
Made	Fair wood		All	
Shale	Gam	Nov/Dec		All
Bamboo		12 month	All	
Neem	Fruits	June	Oil making	
Flower	April	All		
Simli	Flower	March	Used during Chitra	All
Dumer	Fruits	April to June	All	
Pippal	Fruits	Nov	All	
leaf	April	All		
Kurei	leaf	July	All	
Palsa	Flower	April	Worship/ cololurs Making	
Dhatu	Fruits	Feb	All	
Bhelua	Fruits	April/May	All	
Khajur				
Sing Khajur	Fruits	May	All	
leaf	12 month	Use in the house for shed		
Gurbheli	Fruits	Oct	All	
Kurlu	fruits	Nov	All	
Kathokuali	Fruits	Nov	All	
Bansula	Fruits	Nov	All	
Thelok				
Kermela	Fruits	Nov	All	
Ashadhenphal	Fruits	July	All	
Bamboo shoots	Shoots	August/Sept	All	
Bihiden		Sept	All	
Majhrdima		Jun/july	All	
Haldiya		Jun/July	All	
Sargibutu		Jun/July	All	
Badanga		Jun/July	All	
Rani Kandha	tuber	Nov/Dec	All	
ChipaniKandha	tuber	Nov/Dec	All	
Bhatkandha	tuber	Jun/July	All	
Putikanda	tuber	Jun/July	All	
Kasakada	tuber	Jun/July	All	
Pita Kandha	tuber	Jun/July	All	
Barda	leaves	July	All	
Kunjaer	leaves	July	All	
Kunde		July	All	
Charegudi		July	All	
Majhurchuli		July	All	



## Forest produces used for cultural celebration & to protect traditions

Name of the Festival	When it is celebrated	Things required/used	From where they get	
			Earlier (20 years back)	Now
Gurasruka	Asad	Milk, AruaChaula, BelaPatra, Jhuna, dapkhar, mahualiqure, country chicken	close to jungle	Have to go to deep in the jungle.
GurujiNua	Sraban	Nuagurujichaula, aruachaula, chhetakadhan, BelaPatra, mahualiqure, country chicken	available from the field	same as above
Nuakhai	Bhodua	Nuadhana, aruachaula, kureipatra, BelaPatra, Jhuna, Nuachuda, mahualiqure, country chicken, flower	KureiPatra from forest, others from village	KureiPatra from forest, others from village
Semi Jatra(semi nua)	Margasira	Nua semi, aruchaula, kurei leaf, ankhatuma (lambalau), mahualiquir, country chicken	KureiPatra from forest, semi from own homestead land and others from village	KureiPatra from forest, semi from own homestead land and others from village
kandulbhaja	falguna	nuakandul (minor millet), bela leaf, aruachaula, mahualiquir, country chicken	Kandul (minor millet) was available in the village	they are bringing it from other village
chaitraparab	Chaitra	mandar flower, falsa flower, bela leaf, kurei flower, simel flower, mahualiquir, country chicken, piegion, goat	close to jungle	Have to go to deep into the jungle.
fagunjatra (huilipuda)	Fagunapunei	fire wood, chakelpitha	available in the village	available in the village
podajatra (poda puja)	Baisakha (once in ten year)	sahatkena, kusulakatul (rice required to prepare liquire), sial leaf, sialrasi, bamboo, falsa flower, mandar flower, simel flower	available in the village	available in the village
puajintua		kakudi, bela leaf, baramasi flower	was observed	not observed
bhaijintua	Ashwina	janhi flower, kakudi, bara leaf, bela leaf, amla leaf, panikakharu, panikakharu flower, sugar cane	available in the village	available in the village
Pathakhanda puja	Ashwina	bela leaf, mandara flower, duba, dapkhar, rngal leaf, goat, mahualiquir, country chicken	available in the village and forest	available in the village and forest
kartikapuran	kartika	banana, chuda, baramasi flower,	available	available
Pusajatra (dangar puja)	pousa	sahaj leaf, dap khar, baranga rope, luhan,	close to forest	close to forest

# Learnings





# Seba Jagat

Burat, M.Rampur, Kalahandi, Odisha

## ABOUT SEBA JAGAT

Seba Jagat is a Non-Governmental, Non-political, Non-profit making Voluntary Organisation, has been working since 1992 in Gandhian Philosophy and ideology. Seba Jagat visualises establishing a just, participatory and sustainable society where each individual will live with dignity and self-respect leading a harmonious life with having equitable sharing of overall natural resources & development.

### The main activities of the organization include :

- Supporting community for proper implementation of Govt. Program like FRA, NREGA and other entitlements
- Secure sustainable Livelihood through Utilization of local available human potential & natural resource and development of sustainable agriculture, horticulture
- Promotion of aquaculture in rural area for livelihood and nutrition
- Education and Child Rights with Child Centric Development
- Women Empowerment through SHG, & Enterprising activities
- Water and sanitation Improvement
- Employable Skill training for youth and women
- Facilitating Adolescent Health Programme and training on adolescent health and development issue Strengthening community action for better health & Nutrition (with priority on Infant, young child feeding and maternal health & nutrition)
- Strengthening organizations of Differently Able People (Disable) and support service for them
- Fostering women and community participation to reduce environmental degradation and depletion of natural resources, diversity, and secure sustainable livelihoods through Community Property Rights and Customary Right
- Providing better Primary Health services in remote area
- Ensure better livelihood of vulnerable people through Community infrastructure development and check migration through ICRG (Infrastructure for Climate Resilient Growth)
- Developing grievance redressal mechanism using mobile technology in convergence with District Administration
- Reducing climate change effect and developing of Eco-village, Community forest Governance through FoGGO Network in 9 districts of Odisha state
- Effective implementation of Integrated Farming System (IFS, Crop Diversified Program (CDP), Millet Mission and Migration Program
- Promotion of Clean Energy as cross cutting intervention to reduce climate vulnerability and livelihood promotion
- Emergency response during flash flood, drought and in pandemic situation including Covid-19 Response (relief and rehabilitation) etc
- Documentation and dissemination of knowledge



# Seba Jagat

Burat, M.Rampur, Kalahandi, Odisha