
EMPOWERING SOURA WIDOWS

Baptist Women is the exclusive fundraiser for this project which is part of our strategic giving program for 2020.

We hope you've had a chance to review all the projects in the January-February 2020 issue and read Audrey Morikawa's reflections on her years as a missionary in India working with Oriya women and girls in the March-April issue.

There are more Soura widows like Simothy, Ebita and Anjalita who want to provide for their family and build better lives for themselves.

Thank you for your support of these projects.

PROJECT COSTS

Fundraising Target: \$13,000

Coverage: This project provides income generation for 120 widows.

\$56 provides a widow the opportunity to participate in two business training workshops

\$215 gives a widow a small business loan

by Kristine Gonzalez, CBM

Beginnings in India

A CENTURY AND A HALF AGO, God led Canadian Baptists to India. Canadian Baptist field staff, then called "missionaries," embarked on a journey to embrace India through word and deed. The work started with the building of a hospital, the provision of health programs, Bible translation into local languages, leadership training and education. Today, the partnership between Canadian Baptist Ministries (CBM) and local churches in India continues to flourish, helping to empower communities who live on the margins. Communities like the Soura widows.

Who are the Souras?

The Souras live in the state of Odisha. They are one of the oldest tribal groups in India and the largest. They were considered to be lower in social class than "untouchables," so much so that people washed down the streets after Soura people walked on it.

About five per cent of the Soura people live in the plains while others, like those with whom CBM works, live in the hills and mountains of Odisha in northeastern India. Their villages are hidden in thick forests, mostly inaccessible except by foot. The hills are susceptible to erosion, and transportation is unviable. This presents challenges for the Souras, who depend on two sources of income—agriculture and labour.

With much of the land unproductive or unsuitable for a single annual crop, the Souras rely heavily on seasonal cultivation during five months of the rainy season. Whatever income comes from the cultivation is not enough to support the family for the whole year. Labour work only averages eight days per month and this is irregular at best. Wages are also less compared to labour work available in the city. Nearly 70 per cent of the Soura community is illiterate, which limits options for income.

Soura Widows

Poverty, illiteracy, food insecurity, under-employment, low wages and systemic social discrimination. Within this context, Soura women risk potential exploitation when their husbands die.

Empowerment of Soura Widows program

CBM, in partnership with Soura Baptist Christian Mandali Sommilani churches (SBCMS), offers a solution to this community through a program called *Empowerment of Soura Widows*.

INDIA 



Photos courtesy CBM



Ebita with one of her goats



Ajalita and one of her children



Simothy with her sons

CONNECT TO MISSION

Through sustainable micro-enterprises, widows earn income by selling cashew nuts, tamarind, turmeric, bananas, apples and vegetables. Others sell brooms made out of local grass, or rear and sell goats and chickens. Widows will have the opportunity to learn business and marketing skills through two workshops, and receive financial assistance to help them start their own businesses.

The *Empowerment of Soura Widows* program is already changing lives for women like Ajalita, Ebita and Simothy.

Ajalita

Ajalita Gomango's husband died two years ago. He had been walking home from work when he started bleeding from the nose and ears. By the time he was brought to the community health centre, he was declared dead. Despite unbearable grief, and with two young children to care for, Ajalita had to continue the work of growing crops on their family land right up until her brothers-in-law forcibly took away the land. "Even before we could come to terms with the death of my spouse . . . we literally had to fend for ourselves through whatever I earned as a daily wage labourer," she says.

Ajalita found out about CBM, SBCMS and the program for widows. She was able to receive assistance in setting up a small grocery store in her community. She also sells onions, vegetables and other items every week at a nearby

market. Today, she is able to support her family, including having school expenses for her children. "With CBM's support I now stand on my own and earn a decent income. I can take care of my children in a better way."

Ebita

Ebita Roito lives in a village that has a high mortality rate caused by malaria. Not only had it taken her husband, it had also wiped away chances of a better future for her two children, who had had to drop out of school when they were little because they couldn't afford to continue. Grown now, they work at their daily wage jobs for meager earnings.

Through her hardships, she always turned to God for support, knowing that He would provide for her and answer her prayers in His time. Today, she is the president of the women's group in her local church. Her church recommended her for the Empowerment for Soura Widows programs.

"The small help received from CBM has made me happy. A goat was provided and it has given birth to three baby goats over the past year and half. I look forward to selling them at an opportune time and making use of the proceeds for the benefit of my family."

She also has a piece of land on which she has planted cashew nut trees, the fruits of which she can sell in the market. Ebita wants to save money to help give her children a better future.

Simothy

Simothy Saboro became widowed when her husband Obadiah died in a tragic road accident. With two children, she faces the burden of raising her family alone.

Thankfully, Simothy has always been able to rely on her church family. This is where she sought solace while grieving for Obadiah and now, this spiritual family is where she is able to find additional income. "When I was provided with a tailoring machine through a project that is being implemented by our church in partnership with CBM, my joy knew no bounds," she says. "At last, I could make a road map for my family's future and take up tailoring on a full-time basis as an alternate livelihood."

Through the program, Simothy enrolled in a tailoring class where her teacher was also able to provide her with work. With additional income brought in by her newly-acquired skill, Simothy can now do more for herself and her children. She loves that she can earn more money while doing what she loves: "In my time of difficulty, you have shown me a way of making a livelihood." ■