

SAFEGUARDING TWO GIRLS' FUTURE WITH SOCIAL PROTECTION

Rajani Das, a 26-year-old woman from Majhigaon village, found herself facing immense challenges after the untimely demise of her husband, Sarat Das, at the age of 33 during the Covid-19 pandemic on July 7, 2021. The couple had two young daughters, Bishnupriya, 5 years old, and Gitanjali, 2 years old, who were suddenly left orphaned by their father's passing. At the time of his death, Gitanjali was just 5 months old, and Bishnupriya was only 3 years old.

Sarat had been the sole breadwinner of the family, earning a living through daily wages, while Rajani took care of their children at home. Tragically, Sarat's passing not only left Rajani grieving but also in a dire situation, with no home to stay in and no land to cultivate. She had never worked outside her home before and felt lost as to how she would provide for her young daughters. Rajani's plight led her to be included in the National Food Security Act, and she received a ration card from local ward members, which provided some relief in terms of essential food supplies. Realizing the urgent need to support her family, she decided to seek employment under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) and obtained a job card. However, her responsibilities as a mother made it challenging for her to work a full 8-hour day.



She struggled to meet the basic needs of her children, including food, medicine, and other necessities. Rajani took a positive step by enrolling Bishnupriya in the Anganwadi center, where her daughter could receive food and access pre-schooling. Despite her own lack of formal education, Rajani did her best to provide primary education to her daughters. Unfortunately, due to her limited awareness and illiteracy, she remained unaware of various government schemes and programs that could provide crucial assistance to her family.

As a member of the Dalit community, Rajani also faced discrimination and exclusion from many benefits and social security schemes. Sadly, no one in her village informed her about the available resources and support for orphaned children and widowed parents. Her deprivation only deepened as her family's needs grew. Rajani's life took a positive turn when she crossed paths with one of our field workers from the Padmapur gram panchayat. During this encounter, the field worker discussed child rights, social protection, and child-friendly indicators with Rajani, informing her about the Ashrivad scheme, its entitlements, and the application process. Rajani recognized the potential benefits of this program for her daughters and decided to pursue it. However, even after two years since her husband's passing, she had not applied for a death certificate for him, and she lacked income proof. With the help of our team and the local Sarpanch, Rajani obtained both these documents.

In December 2022, with the assistance of our field team, Rajani applied for the Ashrivad scheme for her daughters and also applied for a widow's pension for herself with guidance from the Community Resource Persons (CRP) in her gram panchayat. Unfortunately, her struggles persisted as her daughters did not receive the entitlements even after six months of application.

Rajani was unaware of whom to contact and where to seek updates on her application or address grievances. Our team intervened and followed up with the supervisor at the block level and the District Child Protection Unit (DCPU), discovering that a typographical error in the bank account number had prevented both girls from receiving their entitled benefits. The correct bank account number was promptly collected and submitted to the DCPU.

Finally, in July 2023, the issues were resolved, and both Bishnupriya and Gitanjali, now single-parent orphans, began receiving rupees 1500 each month. Rajani was also included in the Madhubabu Pension Yojana, securing her widow's pension. This support provided the family with social protection under various schemes, significantly reducing their vulnerability.

Rajani expressed her heartfelt gratitude to the local Sarpanch and our field team for their invaluable support. This modest yet crucial assistance in the form of social security not only alleviated their immediate vulnerability but also provided the moral support they needed to move forward, ensuring the education, development, and protection of her children.