



Photo courtesy CBM

STRATEGIC GIVING 2021

Fulfilling God's promises and empowering Soura widows*

CBM'S EMPOWERMENT of Soura Widows project equips widows like Jukebul Gomango to find ways to break the cycle of poverty and better care for their children while earning an income. By using locally available resources, widows receive the tools and training to begin small business enterprises such as purchasing and selling local goods. Microenterprise, savings support and training are provided for up to 40 widows a year, many women often under the age of 40.

Jukebul is a 38-year-old widow who lives in Gajapati, a district in Odisha in eastern India. She is a Soura woman. The Soura people are one of the oldest tribes in India. They live in remote, mountainous regions that means they rely on hard labour and agriculture to make a living. In the early 1900s in Odisha, the Souras were viewed as lower even than the lowest caste, the "untouchables." They were rejected from society and treated as unclean, facing poverty, malnutrition and illiteracy.

Jukebul has two children, Mohipal and Nepolita. The family owns a half acre of land to run a cashew plantation, which only brings in the

Photo: Jukebul (centre) with her children, Nepolita and Mohipal

*by Alicia Jung,
Canadian Baptist Ministries*

**CBWOQ has committed to fund this entire project for \$13,000.*

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equivalent of CAD \$200 a month. In one year, they would earn the equivalent of \$2,400 CAD—not enough to live on.

In 2016, Jukebul's husband became sick, so she took him to a nearby private health centre. Though he needed urgent care, the resident doctor there refused to admit him. Jukebul quickly took her husband to a state-run hospital in the same town, which readily admitted him as a patient. However, after treatment, his condition worsened. Doctors then advised Jukebul to transfer him to yet another state-run hospital, farther along the eastern coast.

Unfortunately, the family could not afford to take him for further treatment. The current treatments had already cost them all that they could manage. Jukebul and her family decided to bring her husband back to their village, where he died from malaria the next day.

Jukebul's family went into mourning. Left with two children on her own and limited resources, she did not know how to manage her new circumstances. As is the plight of many widows, it became an even greater struggle for Jukebul to support her family through subsistence farming.

The local church enrolled Jukebul in a program called the Empowerment of Soura Widows, funded by CBWOQ and Canadian Baptist Ministries (CBM) in partnership with Soura Baptist Christian Mandali Sommilani churches (SBCMS).

Immediately, Jukebul began receiving financial assistance. In 2017, she was able to purchase her first goat. Goats are an excellent source of income for mountainous communities, as they adapt well to the environment and find grass to eat without any issue. "My goat gave birth to three baby goats. I am hoping to sell them later. I thank CBM for coming to my rescue and placing a sense of security in my life," Jukebul shares. She continues to work for daily wages to support her family.

The program also supports the children of widows, who often don't pursue an education as they must work to support the family. Mohipal had to drop out of school, moving to Mumbai to find work as an unskilled labourer so Napolita could continue

her studies. However, with the program's support, Jukebul hopes to enrol Mohipal in a driving course. This will allow him to pursue a vocation if a skills training course becomes a possibility one day.

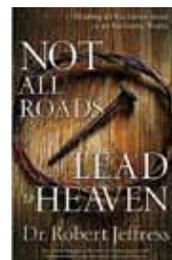
In 2020, the program had to pivot in response to COVID-19 as many activities were put on hold. For example, the SBCMS church with CBM-assisted relief, including \$2,500 CAD from CBWOQ, provided soap for personal hygiene as well as laundry soap for over 2,000 families in Odisha. Additional aid was included in this crisis response as well, ensuring that widows like Jukebul and their families are being provided for.

Please pray for widows in India who face marginalization and stigma within their communities. As they seek to improve their living conditions and better care for their children, pray that communities embrace and support their efforts to rebuild their lives. ■

Bernice's Picks . . .

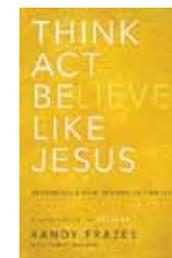
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