

India: Widow Sponsorship Programme

Background - India is a country of many natural resources with a diverse economy from traditional farming to modern industries. However, it suffers many economic and social problems intensified by its huge population of approximately 1100 million people; 9% of the population is unemployed and a quarter of the population live beneath the poverty line. Our ROPEholder is based in the incredibly poor areas of Palakonda, a north-east town in the east coast state of Orissa. The most common means of livelihood is agriculture; where many are landless labourers. Floods regularly affect Orissa causing catastrophic damage to land and housing. Tuberculosis and AIDS are killer diseases here and alcoholism is another major problem for the destitute and poverty stricken.

Our ROPEholder has highlighted the plight of a number of widows in these areas that fall into the category of being below the poverty line. They are so poor they cannot afford to eat and many are ill, so cannot work to feed themselves or pay for medical bills.



The scheme is one of ROPE's most long standing, since 1991, and has been able to help many widows survive over the years; bringing them health, dignity and hope for the future. At present 39 widows are helped, but many more are in great need of assistance.

Through his network of churches our ROPEholder Victor has contact with large numbers of destitute widows. Each year hundreds of widows over and above those who are sponsored are given a new sari, blanket and a special Christmas meal as part of ROPE's Christmas Lifeline gifts appeal. The photos show the widows being given their new blankets (top right) and their meal (below). Whilst this will be continued in the future, Victor says these widows need to be shown compassion throughout the year, not only at Christmas.



The Scheme – £15 a month grants a desperately poor widow their fundamental needs from food to clothing and medical treatment. For those able to work, support is given to enable them to start a small business to earn a bit extra as in the case of Thripura Palaka who now sells dried fish. ROPE will allocate you a specific widow and will send a photo and information about the widow and an annual update of her progress.

*Right-hand Photo:
A Widow and her children*

A typical example of one of the widows needing help is Medisi Narasayamma. Medisi is 47, her husband died 12 years ago of a heart problem. He was bedridden for one and half years. At that time they spent all their savings to pay for the medical bills and hence ran into debt. Medisi is struggling with 4 children who are still dependent.

