

**Dear All,**

**Greetings on World Water Day!**

Women around the world collectively spend approximately 200 million hours every day fetching water, according to UNICEF. The situation in rural India is even more grim where they make up to six trips a day to fetch water. Not only is the opportunity cost high leaving women with little time for income-generating activities or better delivery of their caregiving responsibilities, it is also impacting their health. This was the story of Akli Tudu's life.

**Akli says “I watched my female friends, mother and sister walking long distances every day in oppressive heat to fetch water for daily sustenance. It might sound like a story of the yesteryears for many who have access to tap water 24\*7.”**

Akli Tudu, a tribal woman, spent her childhood in one of the remotest village of the East Singhbhum region of Jharkhand. Located between a river and a stream, Akli's village had a good harvest bringing them food every year; as agriculture was largely dependent on these water sources. But as she grew up, urban waste turned these streams into sewers. The changing climate led to the rivers drying up, pushing families like that of Akli Tudu on the margins. Akli's father could no longer grow crops in both the seasons pushing him to engage in

stone quarrying, a back-breaking job. Akli helplessly watched her father's deteriorating health and her brothers being forced by circumstances to quit school. An image of a struggling, frail father trying to keep up with the daily expenses got etched in Akli's mind.

Eagerly awaiting opportunities, Akli found refuge in her SHG, from where she derived the motivation to change the way things were around her. It dawned upon her that her community, with no other source of livelihood but agriculture, was heavily dependent on water sources which had dried up. Akli decided that farmers like her father had the bandwidth to contribute to the labour required for digging ponds, which would be a source of the now missing water. She mobilized the community and created awareness on digging artificial ponds. For her initiative, she faced a backlash from the Naxals and received death threats from the local political goons, but the community stood strong with Akli. After a few initial rejections from technical organizations, Akli's relentless efforts helped her bag projects on digging ponds in every village, providing a major source of water and irrigation, creating alternative livelihood opportunities for the people. This newfound confidence and leadership enabled Akli to break away from her abusive marriage as well.

Akli today has facilitated the construction of 53 farm ponds in 15 villages, tripling the annual incomes of over 500 families – all of whom are extremely poor tribals. The ponds are enabling sustained agricultural activities, fisheries, and duck-raising, increasing the income of tribal families: a story of seamless innovation.

If you want to reach out to such women from the region and support them, please contact:

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