

# Q & A

## **Interview with Bela Behera, fishworker and board member of Samudram, a federation of women's self-help groups in Odisha, India**

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### **Please tell us about yourself and what you do.**

My name is Bela Behera. I am from Balidia village of Astrang Block in Odisha, India. I am a board member of the Puri district-level federation of Samudram. My husband along with three other villagers owns a fibre fishing boat. I take care of his food and gear for the fishing trip, and I also sell fish, at the landing centre or door to door. Then, I look after the house work, our home kitchen garden and also the milk cows we keep to help support our children's education.

### **Please tell us about Samudram.**

Samudram is a federation of self-help groups of women in five districts of Odisha. It organises skill development programmes in record keeping, and awareness programmes on issues like gender equality, HIV, right to education and right to information. When I joined Samudram in 2008, it was to save money for household expenses. Samudram helped me free myself from the clutches of the local moneylenders. I also became aware of the importance of educating the girls in my family.

### **What are the activities of your self-help group?**

Traditionally, ordinary villagers of our village never attended the *gramsabha* (local governing body) meetings, and *gramsabha* decisions were taken without their participation. But recently, thanks to Samudram's awareness raising programmes, 200 women and six men turned up at the *gramsabha* meeting. We raised our voices in protest against liquor. We said unless liquor sales are banned, we will protest publicly. We demanded reasonable interest rates as well as a road for our village. We also demanded the right to form co-operatives, and to access government schemes for health and education.

### **What are your hopes for the future?**

I hope for a better future for my children with good and decent jobs. I hope my village will get good roads, proper sanitation and potable drinking water. I hope that through Samudram, the village and district will be able to set up good marketing facilities for fish. I also hope that Samudram will become a self-reliant organisation, not only in my district but in all the five districts where we work. ❏